

THE Round Table

Spring/
Summer 1986

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



HUMOR

WHY THIS ISSUE?



We've all heard the saying so many times before that it flirts with banality. Still, I will repeat it: It takes fewer facial muscles to laugh than to frown. A smile does indeed feel more natural and intrinsically human than a frown. It is also more invitational, suggesting sharing and bondedness. Upon hearing or seeing something humorous, who among us can wait to relay the incident to a friend? Think how often you've walked into a room, only to blurt out the question: "What's so funny?", anxious to be brought into the circle of celebration, to be let in on the joke. Jokes, after all, are meant to be shared.

We wish to share some humor with you, in this our combined spring/summer number. This issue was longer in gestation than most, throwing us off our quarterly schedule. In addition, our coffers are abnormally low just now. Not without some reluctance, we thought it best to combine issues this time around, saving both time and money.

In a book entitled, Laughter and the Sense of Humor, Edmund Bergler maintains that there are eighty different theories about the nature and origin of humor. (Even without having met him, I've already ungraciously determined that Mr. Bergler must be a decidedly humorless man himself, what to have researched and catalogued over eighty such theories!)

The nature and origin of much of the humor in these pages, however, lies in the interplay between the human spirit continuing to groan for freedom and justice in the face of what seem to be insurmountable odds. This is the humor of paradox, a type of humor both Belden Lane and Ellen Rehg comment on in their respective articles. Belden also offers us a theology of laughter, while Ellen brings us behind the scenes, relating our struggles in pulling this issue together.

That same interplay is why we have poked fun at ourselves in parts of what follow. Indeed, one of the motivations for this issue was to insure we don't take ourselves too seriously, as we suspect most of our readers wouldn't if you got to know our communities intimately! And so we laugh at ourselves, at our feeble, halting, and sin-ridden attempts to slay Goliath - the system which keeps our guests mired in poverty and powerlessness.

The original cartoons of Chuck Trapkus of the Rock Island, IL Catholic Worker, and Emmett McAuliffe's satire of the simple lifestyle ethic all strike close to home. We have cast our satirical net a bit more broadly though, even managing to ensnare Ronald Reagan and his Central American policies in it, a not too difficult feat actually. After having been fed a steady diet of state falsehoods regarding Central America by the mainline media for so long now, satire is one way to keep our wits and blunt the human tragedy of U.S. policy.

Though I know of no instance where our co-founder, Peter Maurin, wrote about humor, a cursory reading of his Easy Essays reveals a deep understanding of humor's role in our lives, and its rich pedagogical properties. We reprint two of them as our center spread. Finally, Tommy Askew closes with a moving personal sharing in "Round Table Talk." The "little way" of St. Therese of Lisieux which Dorothy Day prized so highly is echoed in Tommy's musings on the meaning of his life and work at the Catholic Worker.

Our humble prayer is that we will occasionally strike your funny bone, and perhaps move your heart as well. Enjoy. †

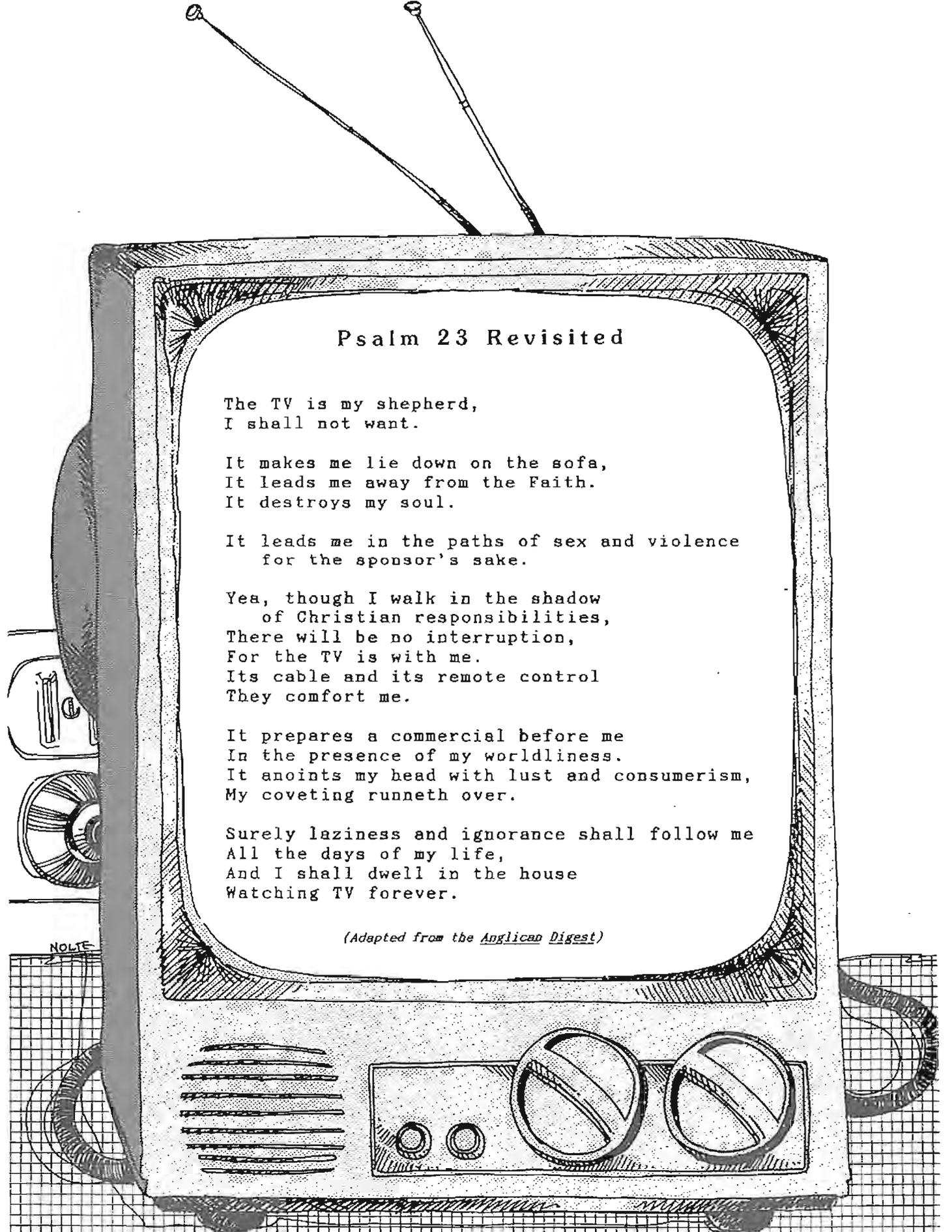
Patrick G. Coy

*Original cover drawing for
The Round Table by Larry Nolte.*

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Psalm 23 Revisited

The TV is my shepherd,
I shall not want.

It makes me lie down on the sofa,
It leads me away from the Faith.
It destroys my soul.

It leads me in the paths of sex and violence
for the sponsor's sake.

Yea, though I walk in the shadow
of Christian responsibilities,
There will be no interruption,
For the TV is with me.
Its cable and its remote control
They comfort me.

It prepares a commercial before me
In the presence of my worldliness.
It anoints my head with lust and consumerism,
My coveting runneth over.

Surely laziness and ignorance shall follow me
All the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in the house
Watching TV forever.

(Adapted from the Anglican Digest)

LAUGHTER AND FAITH

by

Belden C. Lane

In the older Navajo tradition, a child's "Laugh Day" assumed even more prominence than her birthday, because it was on her "Laugh Day" that she had first been seen to respond to life with uncontained joy. The parents had been awaiting the event with anticipation and the person who caused the baby first to laugh had become a godparent, assuming a special relation to the child. It was from this point in time that her development in faith would later be traced. Laughter was thus conceived as that which brought into being the spiritual life.

Surely this has been the case with Dorothy Day and much of the Catholic Worker Movement at its best. Most telling in the story of Dorothy's own conversion was its deep-rootedness in joy rather than sorrow. Her socialist years had made her wary of Christianity as an opiate of the people, something to which one turns only in desperation. She had expected a morose and abstruse Christianity, dulling her senses. "But," she reasoned with herself, as she walked the beaches of Staten Island, studying sunsets in the fall of 1925, "I am praying because I am happy, not because I am unhappy. I did not turn to God in unhappiness, in grief - to get consolation, to get something from Him." (*From Union Square To Rome*, p. 122). She was brought to faith exulting in its simple and bewitching gaiety, affirming unconditionally George MacDonald's conviction that "it is the heart that is not yet sure of its God that is afraid to laugh in God's presence".

Laughter is integral to Catholic Worker spirituality as it has found expression in the thought of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. Indeed, one can discern two kinds of laughter that grow out of this personalist perception of the Gospel. The one is a laughter of naivete - the soul's purest and most original response to beauty and simplicity. It is a primeval laughter, delighting in creation itself. Dorothy repeatedly spoke of the "duty of delight" which is the Christian's first communion with God. The pained and glorious mystery of childbirth, the rays of the sun rising over the East River, pigeons flying from the roofs at dusk - all these evoked in her deep laughter. "We would be contributing to the misery of the world," she wrote, "if we failed to rejoice in the sun, the moon, and the stars, in the rivers which surround this island on which we live." (Robert Ellsberg, ed., *By Little and By Little: The Selected Writings of Dorothy Day*, p. xl). Who else could take such joy in New York City, knowing full well the squalor and ugliness it also contained? She echoed Irenaeus' ancient cry that the glory of God is man and woman fully alive, laughing at all that has been made.

Yet there is a second kind of laughter which emerges out of a seasoned faith such as this. It is the laughter of paradox - one that stubbornly insists on laughing in spite of all the reasons to despair and weep. It is a courageous, almost absurd merriment - arising out of the deepest contradictions between what is now and

Belden Lane, Presbyterian minister and associate professor of Theology at St. Louis University, knows the value of humor: he is a pantomimist and a storyteller. His book on sacred space in American spirituality will be published next year. It contains an insightful chapter on the role of urban/rural space in the spirituality of the Worker.

what yet might be. If the first laughter is a spontaneous reply to wholeness, this second laughter reaches through the brokenness of the world to a unity not yet gained. It is echoed in the strange delight some people find in entering Catholic Worker Houses of Hospitality or

“Laughter was conceived as
that which brought into being
the spiritual life.”

communal farms, discovering there such a piebald assembly of street people, students, labor activists, and utopian socialists. The whole reign of God embraced in a ship of fools. Yet Dorothy Day could revel in the very incongruity of it all, knowing the Church herself to be preeminently “a sign of contradiction” in the world. She once wrote, “There are always fools and conventionals among us in our various Catholic Worker Houses across the country, and while I sympathize with the conventionals and know that they are the backbone of the movement who keep things going, still I rejoice that we have an abundance of fools.” (Mel Piehl, Breaking Bread, p. 90)

The fools evoke a laughter able to break the people of God out of constricting patterns to which the Gospel might be bound. This was, of course, the peculiar grace of Peter Maurin. Preaching the dignity of agriculture, his shirt pockets stuffed with Kropotkin’s revolutionary pamphlets, wearing clothes he hadn’t changed in three days, he was a holy fool in the tradition of Francis of Assisi or Benedict Joseph Labre. His was a laughter that provoked criticism and change, one which entertained new possibilities in the midst of old and tired certainties. It was the laughter of Sarah, provocative and questioning, yet giving birth at last to Isaac, the smiling son of promise.

Both laughters are essentially grounded in faith - the one as genesis and the other as product of that which is believed. The journey from the one to the

other (and back again) is the circle of meaning by which joy is attached to life. Naivete leads through a broken world to paradox and paradox returns, by hope, to renewed naivete. God herself finally laughs, with angels and Bowery bums and the whole Church of Christ, at a world still yearning to be born.

According to an old Apache creation myth, Hactein, the High God, first created all sorts of animals and laughed uproariously at their odd shapes and funny behavior. Then he made a man and spoke to him saying, “Laugh.” The man laughed and his laughter caused the dog to jump and wag his tail. His laughter caused the birds to break into singing. His laughter helped to complete all that the god had initially brought into being at creation. Finally the man was caused to fall asleep and he dreamed a creature like himself, a woman. When he awoke and found her more than a dream, he began to laugh and she laughed, too. They laughed and laughed together. And that was the beginning of the world.

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Ronnie Reagan's

HOT WARS TO GO

WE DELIVER WHETHER YOU ORDER OR NOT

APPETIZERS

COST TO TAXPAYERS

Crushed Granada	\$59.5 Million
<i>A Caribbean delicacy made in the U.S.A. A great way to test your stomach and whet your appetite for bigger things.</i>	
Honduran "Big Pine" I, II and III	\$39 Million
<i>While you're not looking, thousands of troops, scores of ships and tons of war materiel will be set in place for the main course to come.</i>	
Media Mind Mixers	FREE
<i>A sampler of mental junk food, scare wards, slanted stories, and choice U.S. Government-Approved propaganda. If you can swallow this, you'll swallow anything.</i>	
	courtesy of the corporate media

MAIN DISHES

El Salvador Stew	\$1.7 Billion
<i>Warmed-over version of an old Southeast Asian recipe. A full-scale counterinsurgency war with U.S. advisers, weapons and war supplies. Comes with a complete air war including C-47 gunships, A-37 fighter planes, Huey helicopters, napalm and white phosphorous bombs. Served with death squads and human rights atrocities.</i>	
Steamed Nicaragua	\$80 Million
<i>An old favorite from the CIA Cookbook. Just put a popular revolution in a pressure cooker and turn up the heat. Includes a proxy army organized from the ex-dictator's goons, mined harbor, internal subversion, plus lots of Red scare seasoning and colossal lies.</i>	
	known costs of covert funding

SIDE ORDERS

Guatemalan Squash	\$87.5 Million
<i>A little-known favorite from the countryside, prepared with ingredients imported from the North. Warning: Deadly to native Indian populations.</i>	
Stixling Costa Rica	\$9.2 Million
<i>A rare treat. We take the only nation in Central America without an army and add guns, armored vehicles and supplies imported from the U.S. for a strong taste of militarism.</i>	
Half-Baked Opposition	Seasonally
<i>An offering from the Democratic side of the menu. Lukewarm mush on a bed of soggy mitquetoast. Hardly fills you up at all.</i>	
	available a few days a year

NO SUBSTITUTIONS FOR SOCIAL PROGRAMS OR HUMAN NEEDS.

MARRYING POOR IS FAST, FUN AND EXCITING...

by

Emmett McAuliffe

Reprinted by permission from July '85
Catholic Worker Vogue

At first Catholic Worker women were afraid of being thought "uncool" by their peers. The idea was whispered at soup lines, confided behind closed doors. However quiet it is kept it cannot be denied that more and more women want to marry poor again. And some are quite unabashed at saying so.

Girls learn at their mothers' knee to cherish voluntary poverty and marry a poor man. But, due in large part to the influence of the 60's and 70's, Catholic Worker women have been ignoring this traditional advice and marrying totally without regard to the man's ability to be a low-wage earner. "What care I if a man drives a flashy foreign sports car and has a charge account at Brooks Brothers, it's inner poverty that counts," was the attitude of this period. From all signs, this trend is reversing. Women are returning to more traditional Catholic Worker values. Yet many of these pioneering women are finding the road to be difficult.

Lisa McF., twenty-eight, is a poor, unkempt, dreary looking young woman with perpetually torn jeans and matching dirty undershirt. She has every disadvantage that an aspiring young Catholic Worker could want. We found her taking the 3 p.m. to 7 a.m. house shift at the Dallas Catholic Worker. But, as Lisa tells her story, her life is not all blissful poverty.

"My life is not as happy as it may look," she says with a sigh, "my marriage is on the rocks. I first met Roger at a resistance dance. He was the typical wallflower. He was wearing bell-bottoms and a dusty army jacket. From the other side of the room his radiant blue eyes seared me. He was well groomed: long matted unwashed hair and shaggy, untrimmed beard. When I saw that he was incapable of speaking a word in a social situation, I just knew I had to have him. We married and spent two happy years living, working



and reveling in our misery at the Iowa City house. I started a cottage industry called 'Hand-Made Things That People Have No Use For, Inc.' Roger got a job selling the daily newspaper on the street corner, relishing the indignity of doing a job normally done by an eight-year old. But, these happy times were only an illusion."

Emmett McAuliffe, lawyer turned Catholic Worker, was recently discovered in a back room of the fourth floor of Cass House furtively pouring over the latest issue of Gentleman's Quarterly.

"It started one morning while Roger was taking a shower. He had been in there for twenty minutes, which is nineteen minutes longer than his usual. 'Roger, are you all right', I said, banging on the door but receiving no reply. 'Roger, what are you doing in there?' I asked as I heard a rustle of magazine pages from within. When I opened the door I found Roger standing outside the shower dry as a bone and hiding something behind his back. 'Let me see that' I demanded. Roger reluctantly pulled his arm from behind his back and presented a copy of Fortune magazine. 'Roger, how could you!' I exclaimed in the heat of passion. 'Oh, it's nothing dear, I am just trying to keep up on my disinvestments. You know, you have got to watch these greedy capitalists like a hawk,' he said nervously. 'If so, then why did you

"I'm just trying to keep up
on my disinvestments,"

he said nervously.

have to hide it?', I retorted. 'I just didn't want you to misunderstand,' was his only answer."

"I made up my mind to dismiss this incident as quickly as possible. But the magazine was only the beginning. You just wouldn't believe the filth Roger surreptitiously brought into the house in the ensuing months. The Fortune I could have dealt with. Then came cassette tapes on career development. Next were obscene gadgets such as calculators and personal portable stereos. He started coming home late from work with no excuse and I found out that he had joined a health spa. He started drinking gin and tonic instead of his usual Schaeffer's Light beer. I was shocked when I discovered he was having his clothes dry-cleaned. Now, I am no fool and I could see the writing on the wall. I was not even surprised when he came home one night and blurted out that he was quitting the newspaper to join the marketing department of USA TODAY. When he started eating Campbell's soup and table grapes I knew it was time for us to split up. It took me a long time before I was able to look myself in the mirror and say: 'Lisa, you married a closet yuppie.'"

Lisa's story is not unique. Today's young woman does not have the savvy for marrying poor that her mother or grandmother possessed. But fortunately for the

young woman seeking to marry into voluntary poverty, there are a few simple tell-tale signs that will clearly say "Hands off, this guy's a jerk."

1) Academic background. Order a copy of his college transcript, secretly if you must. Are there any courses in accounting, business, marketing or physical education? A mere knowledge of these subjects is a danger to you and your marriage.

2) Bill paying habits. Snoop through his desk drawers. Are there any bills paid before the creditor has stopped saying "Thank you" at the end of the payment notice? If there are a lot of registered letter receipts laying around, this is a good sign. Proper neglect of financial responsibilities is a must, sisters.

3) Use of time-saving gadgets. The mood of your loved-one's room or apartment should be similar to that struck by chapter one of your ancient civilizations textbook in high school. Thus, forbidden are electric shavers, tupperware, digital watches, lazy susans, shoe trees, newspaper racks, calculators. Your man should, on the other hand, boast about doing things the old-fashioned way.

4) The department store test. Take him to a large urban department store. If he stops to browse anywhere besides books and records and the jelly bean counter you have caught him in a moment of yuppie desire. This guy could be chairman of the board of May Co. some day. Don't hesitate, play it safe and drop him fast.

Marrying poor is fast, fun and exciting. If you follow these few common sense rules, and bear in mind the tragic example of Lisa McF., you can be well on your way to a life of blessed poverty.



*he terrain is
more rugged than
I imagined, but
it is certainly
a lovely piece
of real estate.*

*Secretary of State
George Shultz
visiting Grenada after the
United States invasion*

OF CHASING DOGS AND TOSSING HOT DOGS

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

I had an animal adventure. I was driving south on Jefferson at Delmar and I saw this huge Great Dane, loping along right in the traffic, leash dragging from his neck. It was a Friday night. Rush hour was over, but there was still a lot of traffic and it was dark.

I had B.J.'s truck to go to a party and I thought that if I could catch him it wasn't that far out of my way to take him to the Humane Society. It just did something to me to see him lost like that. So I pulled over and got out and called to him. He came near and then loped off. He was enormous and I thought I'd be afraid to have him ride in the cab with me but maybe he'd stay in the truck bed if I could get him in. So I got back in the truck and went after him again. By the speedometer he hit fifteen, twenty miles an hour at some points during the chase.

I got ahead of him at Olive and stopped again. He danced around, avoiding me, and this man who was waiting for a bus said "I got some hot dogs and would they help you to catch your dog?" I explained it wasn't my dog but if I could get him into the truck bed I'd take him to the Humane Society. The man was a bit afraid too so he tossed a hot dog and the dog came forward and sniffed and snatched it and trotted on south on Jefferson. The man started to run after him but I said get in the cab and we'd catch up. So there I was with a strange black man in the truck and he was tossing hot dogs out the window at the Great Dane.

We stopped to try to catch him again just before the entrance to Highway 40. A car pulled up behind us and a couple said, "Lady, we'll help you catch your dog." So I said again it wasn't my dog but I was willing to take him to the Humane Society if I could get him in the truck bed and actually I was afraid because he was so big.

He was the size of a small pony, waist high and I guess 120 pounds - not full grown yet. The driver offered to get ahead

of the dog and we could pull up behind. He put on his flashers which I thought was a good idea so I put mine on too. When we pulled over on the bridge that crosses the railroad tracks, all three of us converged on the dog.

By now I was trying names: Duke, King, Dapple, Speckle, Prince; and the second man kept tossing hot dogs. He must have fed half a pound of wieners to that animal. But the dog pranced around us and crossed to the other side of Jefferson. I was scared not just that he'd get hit but that there would be a bad accident. When we pulled out again I looked in the rear view mirror and saw a car behind me with flashers on too, joining in the chase. We were a caravan.



The first car turned left at Chouteau to head the dog off and we, me and my passenger and the car behind us, got in the left lane. We stopped for a red light - ten cars facing us, ready to run the dog over. But nobody was coming at us right then, so I just put the truck in park and got out, calling Bunny, Big Boy, Big Mac, and Muffin, and he trotted over to me, just like that - when the light changed, there in the middle of the oncoming traffic at Jefferson and Chouteau.

The man in the lead car came running up with an enormous dog biscuit and said he didn't think Pumpkin or whoever he was would ride in the bed of my truck, so if I was afraid he'd take him to the Humane Society. I ran back to my truck before we had too bad a traffic jam and said good-bye and thank you to the frankfurter thrower and shouted out to all of them bless their hearts and that God has a special place in heaven for folks who take care of dumb animals. The man with the dog biscuit looked at me real funny and said, "You too." I don't know. Maybe he planned to keep the dog or sell him, or else was willing to chase a dog but not to shout whimsy about God in the streets.

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Profession Of Faith

We believe in one God,
the Pentagon, the Almighty,
destroyer of heaven and earth,
of all that is seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, the Bomb
the only son of the Pentagon,
continually begotten of the Pentagon
Bomb from Bomb, Flash from Flash,
true War from True War,
profitable, not sane, one in being with the Pentagon.
For us and for our cremation
the Bomb came down from heaven:
by the power of the multi-nationals
the Bomb was born of fear and became death.

For our sake the Bomb was exploded over Hiroshima
where people still suffer, die and are buried.
On the third day it was exploded again
in fulfillment of a war game;
its mushroom cloud ascended into heaven
and its fallout is seated
at the right hand of all people.

The Bomb will come again in gore
to vaporize the living and the dead
and its devastation will have no end.

We believe in the threat of the Bomb,
the taker of life,
which proceeds from the Pentagon and its contractors.
With the Pentagon and its generals the Bomb
is worshiped and glorified.
It has spoken through the Joint Chiefs.

We believe in one Holy anti-communist and
apocalyptic foreign policy.
We acknowledge multiple pre-emptive strikes
for the forgiveness of socialism.
We look for the resurrection of the Right,
and the death of the world as we know it.
Boom.

by John LaForge

From the News Wire . . .



U.S. SURRENDERS TO NICARAGUA: OCCUPATION BEGINS FRIDAY

WASHINGTON—The United States formally surrendered to Nicaragua last Tuesday, thus concluding last week's lightning six-day war, which caught U.S. military leaders off guard and stunned observers across the globe.

"To my fellow Americans, I say that the time for fighting is past," a sorrowful President Reagan announced in a nationwide address. "Now it is time to end the bloodshed, lay down our arms, and cooperate with our conquerors."

Nicaragua's ruling five-man junta said its military occupation of American soil would not begin before Friday because logistical details of the occupation still needed to be worked out. "It is no easy thing for a country with six thousand soldiers to occupy a nation of 230 million people," said a spokesman for the junta.

Reagan blamed the defeat on Congress's failure to approve military measures against Nicaragua and on the public's refusal to support his proposed Star Wars defense. "We have been saying all along that Nicaragua posed a serious threat to our security," he told a press conference. "No one would believe us."

But U.S. military authorities privately expressed grudging admiration for Nicaragua's tactics and fighting spirit. "They caught us flat-footed," one senior Pentagon official said. "We had always assumed that a Nicaraguan invasion would come from the south. By striking through Canada, the junta was able to disarm our Distant Early Warning system and hit us where our defenses were weakest—along the Great Lakes. And by crossing the Great Lakes in rowboats, they completely eluded detection by radar. The Star Wars defense wouldn't have made a bit of difference."

The invasion was coordinated with infiltration of the Pentagon by Nicaraguan soldiers disguised as cooks and dishwashers. By shutting off the Pentagon's master fuse box, they disarmed the Defense Department's sophisticated system of electronic communications, leaving U.S. forces in the field disorganized and demoralized.

The junta announced that a Marxist form of government and Marxist indoctrination programs would be imposed on the U.S. population as soon as they could be put into effect. As a first step, a spokesperson said, all U.S. residents would be required to watch daily showings of *A Night at the Opera*, *A Day at the Races*, *Monkey Business*, *Horse Feathers*, and old episodes of "You Bet Your Life" . . .

(Originally appeared in The Welcomat)

Big Shots Little Shots

America is all shot to pieces
since the little shots
are no longer able
to become big shots.
When the little shots
are not satisfied
to remain little shots
and try to become
big shots,
then the big shots
are not satisfied
to remain big shots
and try to become
bigger shots.
And when the big shots
become bigger shots
then the little shots
become littler shots.
And when the little shots
become littler shots
because the big shots
become bigger shots
then the little shots
get mad at the big shots.
And when the little shots
get mad at the big shots
because the big shots
by becoming bigger shots
make the little shots
littler shots
they shoot the big shots
full of little shots.
But by shooting the big shots
full of little shots
the little shots
do not become big shots;
they make everything all shot.
And I don't like to see the little shots
shoot the big shots
full of little shots;
that is why
I am trying to shoot
both the big shots
and the little shots
full of hot shots.



Fritz Eichenberg

y Essays

Maurin

Pie In The Sky

Bourgeois capitalists
don't want their pie
in the sky
when they die.
They want their pie
here and now.
To get their pie
here and now
bourgeois capitalists
give us
better and bigger
commercial wars
for the sake of markets
and raw materials.
But as Sherman says,
"War is hell."
So we get hell
here and now
because bourgeois capitalists
don't want their pie
in the sky
when they die,
but want their pie
here and now.

Bolshevist Socialists,
like bourgeois capitalists,
don't want their pie
in the sky
when they die.
They want their pie
here and now.
To get their pie
here and now,
Bolshevist Socialists
give us
better and bigger
class wars
for the sake
of capturing the control
of the means of production
and distribution.

But war is hell
whether it is
a commercial war
or a class war.
So we get hell
here and now
because Bolshevist Socialists
don't want their pie
in the sky
when they die,
but want their pie
here and now.

Bolshevist Socialists
as well as
bourgeois capitalists
give us hell
here and now
without
leaving us the hope
of getting our pie
in the sky
when we die.
We just
get hell.
Catholic Communionism
leaves us the hope
of getting our pie
in the sky
when we die
without
giving us hell
here and now.

WE WERE JUST SITTING THERE LAUGHING...

by Ellen Rehg



It is perhaps instructive that, as a community, in struggling with the creation of this issue on humor, we've had a very hard time being funny. Typically, we greeted the idea of this issue with guffaws, garrulous laughter, and bright, witty remarks. As Mark described the idea of putting out a "lampoon" of The Round Table, we all contributed clever one-liners and related our favorite funny stories about life at the Worker. Joe, much to our surprise, drew from a vast storehouse of personal experience and came up with innumerable ideas satirizing the National Enquirer. "I know!", he'd exclaim gleefully, "how about an article entitled 'Catholic Worker taken over by giant roaches. Guests amazed.'" Or, along those lines, we thought of printing a picture of Clare exhibiting an oversized turnip with the caption, "Fifty Pound Turnip Grown in Catholic Worker Garden. Miracle Compost Cited."

However, National Enquirer aside, a funny thing happened on the way to the typewriter. Lines that were hilarious in the telling as we lounged around the community room suddenly became on paper... "er, well, I guess you had to be there." Person after person (myself included) who had optimistically promised to "work these ideas into a short piece" had to later shamefacedly confess before the editorial tribunal to a regrettable lack of comedic talent. In the dour face of this humorlessness, the editorial board quickly

decided that perhaps a few reflective essays in this issue wouldn't be a bad idea. In short, we admitted that we were either not funny enough or not skilled enough to pull off a thoroughgoing lampoon.

Among the reflective pieces is this one on humor in the community, which I, a serious individual, the kind of person who never remembers jokes, was commissioned to write. This possibly says the most about the state of affairs regarding humor in the community. In writing this article I tried to recall funny things (in good taste) that people had said about humorous situations at Karen and Cass Houses. I read Mark Twain in order to discover what he did that made his writing so funny. I tried to develop Garrison Keillor-like monologues about the adventures of guests and workers. I struggled to remember past guests that we had laughed about so much, but besides worrying that our humor might sound a little heartless, I discovered that the jokes evaporate as soon as the crises which generate them disappear.

Alas, our humor is very much the "you have to be there" variety. What is so funny, after all, about verbally abusive guests? And yet Clare and I fell over laughing after she related an incident in which a guest had taken her to task with a hostility entirely disproportionate to the alleged offense Clare had given her. And why did Ann, Pat, Clare and I laugh as heartily when we discussed whether or not to ask a guest to leave the house? We were reluctant to put her out, but felt that her blatant disregard for our rules could not go unaddressed. As we talked it became

Ellen Rehg, recently featured in the River Front Times, is struggling to resist her newly-acquired celebrity status.

increasingly evident that we would probably have to make her leave, and we began to desperately propose alternative "consequences", such as revoking her laundry and TV privileges (we have no TV) and dunking her head under water (I won't say where) for every hour she was out past the curfew. You'd think that we weren't about to cast her out to the "tender mercies" of the ghetto streets, or that her personal safety was not very much at stake. Or you'd think that we had become crass and unfeeling through the years of this work.

I am trying to avoid saying something banal about laughter in the face of tragedy. I know that I feel helpless, and I think that most of us feel helpless to put more than the most minuscule chip in the huge wall of human suffering which we live with daily. I was only at Karen House a few days before I discovered that we live in the tremendous shadow of this wall, and that the darkness can be overwhelming. Although I don't know why laughter is a response to this suffering, I am glad that it is. I do know that the worst periods in the life of our community have been times when we could not laugh with each other, times when we were too afraid to laugh. So I think our brilliant witticisms, which are probably brilliant only to us, really express our love and

acceptance of each other. It is a way to acknowledge our helplessness together, so at least we don't walk in the shadow alone.

We hope that, if not brilliantly funny, at least this issue will convey a taste of what it is like to live here. Perhaps in sharing our humor with you we are sharing this balm for our pain - that neither do you sojourn alone through the dark valley.



Community Prayer:

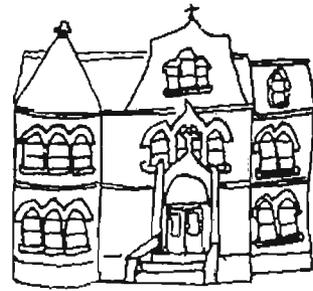
Liturgy every Tuesday at

9:00pm at Karen House.

Come pray with us.



FROM K A R E N HOUSE



by Lee Carter

Summer is here and most people are making plans for their holidays and vacations. Sister Mary Ann McGivern of the Little House is having a barbecue for Cass and Karen Houses to celebrate fifty-three years of the Catholic Worker movement. Fifty-three years ago the Catholic Worker was started by Dorothy Day in a small house in the slums of New York. Now there are about seventy-five Catholic Worker houses. I'm sure if Dorothy was alive today she would be very happy - I'm sure that she is smiling down on us from her place in Heaven.

Clare is going to school while Joe is teaching photography at Forest Park Community College. They are going to Pennsylvania to visit Joe's parents, then going to Memphis to visit Clare's mother. Teka's mother has been very ill and I'm sorry to say just died as I write this column. Our hearts go out to Teka and our prayers for her mother.

Things never change much here at Karen House, just the people. Some you can get attached to. And others - oh, well, never mind. Soon it will be house cleaning time. Time to get rid of things no one can use and make room for more! It seems the food storage room is a catchall for everything that comes into the house.

Kane, Sharon's dog that lost a leg, came through his operation just fine. He's back greeting everyone that comes in the back yard.

I've made my plans for vacation. I'm just going to be plain lazy. Just sit out in the back yard and watch the birds eat

and play in their bird bath. We have some very pretty birds. I believe that I've turned into a bird watcher. Of course I still like flowers.

If you just look around you see trees, flowers, birds, and animals. Why do people want to make bombs to destroy all this beauty and cause so much heartache? Why can't we just have peace? It would be so much nicer - and think how much happier people would be. Will we ever know a world of love and peace?

Maybe we should all pray real hard. You know sometimes miracles do happen. Or so I have been told. Shall we? -

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RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRDS

Lee Carter, member of the Karen House community, has indeed become a bird watcher of sorts, much supported and encouraged by her fellow member, Pat.

A Harsh and Dreadful Comic



HELLO! I'M FROM THE ALTAR AND ROSARY SOCIETY WITH SOME FOOD FOR SUPPER...

RING!
OH, YES, COME IN — I HAVE TO GET THE PHONE...



HEY LADY — YOU WORK HERE?
WELL, I---
—WE NEED TOILET PAPER UPSTAIRS

WHERE'S A BUCKET?



KITCHEN'S THAT WAY, I THINK... WATCH OUT FOR BUSTER, THOUGH, AND YA HAFTA PLAY WITH THE LIGHT SWITCH A BIT...

HEY! D'VA HEAR THE ONE ABOUT DOROTHY AND THE ELEPHANTS?



IS THIS WHERE I —

SOME GUY ON THE PHONE WANTS TO KNOW IF WE'LL TAKE THREE HUNDRED POUNDS OF RADISHES ...

IS YOUR ARTICLE DONE YET, LES?

THE FUSES! THE FUSES!

WHO'S GOT A LIGHT?

WILL YOU GUYS STOP YELLING? I'M TRYING TO READ!



MORT! THE COPS ARE AT THE DOOR!

MERCY SAKES!

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO REMAIN SILENT...

SOMEBODY REMEMBER TO WATER MY PLANTS!



SO — WHICH ONE OF YOU IS IN CHARGE HERE?



YOU MEAN, IT'S NOT YOU?

by Chuck Trapkus

FROM CASS HOUSE



by Barb Prosser

Ah...time for another Cass House article to share news of the whirlwind world of Cass Catholic Workers and happenings at the house. So I venture to pump Cass Community for activities to share since January. "Is there anything new?", I'm asked.

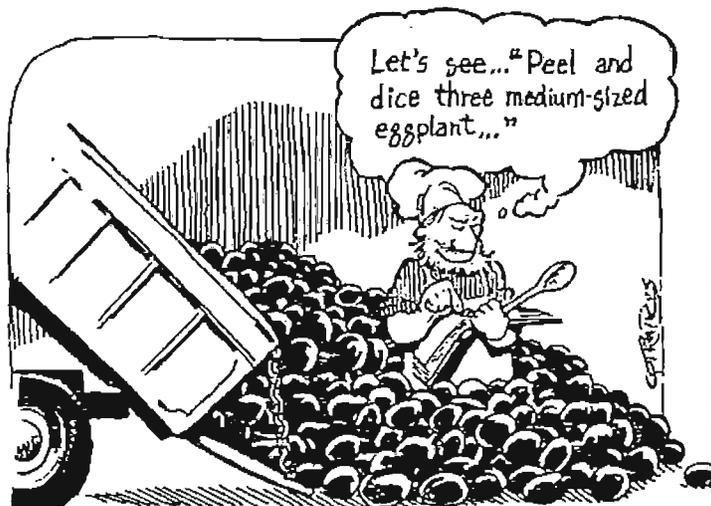
Perhaps not. House shifts, thirty-day stays, food donations...the same type of ordinary living we've seen for seven years. Oh, but it is ordinary living among a large group that makes it all so interesting.

I still marvel at some of our famous cooking creations that have premiered in the soupline - creativity at work. With a motto, at one time, of "cook it 'til it's gone" to a new motto of "if it can't be identified after three guesses...it goes!" Some remarkable favorites were: 1)Kathy's Brickhouse Banana Bread. Yes folks, it took two men to lift this one and escort it to the dumpster. We've taken Kathy off cooking duty and put her in charge of mortaring and tuck pointing the brick and stone wall in back; 2)Garbanzo Casserole. Try and explain that one to soupline guests. We reminded them that anything left over gets served the next day. Still no luck; 3)Tim and Carol's Floating Pea Delight (though Tim prefers "Suspended Pea Casserole"). Never mind explaining this to soupline guests...try selling them on the idea that they really were hungry for supper when they came. We've begun a collection of "2001 Ways to Serve Noodles," and will keep everyone posted of its publishing date, but we keep adding to the book!

Of course there is always the question of "what am I going to do with three hefty bags of broccoli stalks?" Or there is the polite interaction at the back door with a donor of a truck load of radishes. "Well, sure, we could use two cases, but maybe Karen House would use the other twenty-two." It's the Catholic Worker Shuffle in action!

And when the man on the phone at the food bank told me 200 cases of black rum tea would keep forever, how did I know we'd have it forever?

The guests are treated to my culinary dietary skills on Friday mornings. Barbara's Blissful Breakfast is served just twenty to thirty minutes late and generally prepared in the dark. It's make-your-own-toast-and-cereal breakfast.



The selection of breakfast cereal would amaze you: Cabbage Patch Doll cereal, Voltron cereal, Crackerjack Box cereal, Oatmeal Chex with Petrified Raisins and on and on. Donations of every sugared wonder in the USA find their way to us. But eventually the coffee makes it to the dining rooms. Better to wake them up after breakfast, I figure. Coffee being one of the ways community members seem to express their individuality. I'm afraid some of our non-coffee drinkers don't understand the importance of the morning coffee ritual, or the trick of getting the right color!

Barb Prosser, a member of the extended Cass Worker community, struggles to keep up with the pace of the House.

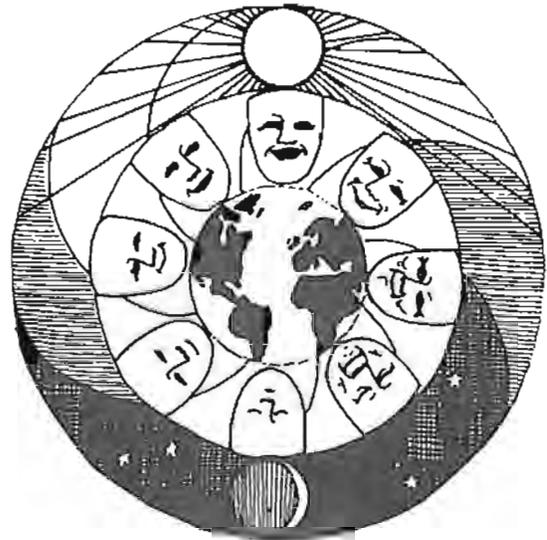
A little known secret about myself is that I have a designing background. Little known because I've long since given up thinking a Worker house can be color coordinated. What does one do with 100 gallons of ghetto green paint but use it? And how do we arrange a pink floral love seat with a red and green plaid chair, a patch work rug, and two lamps (one red crystal, the other yellow and brown pottery), all against that lovely mint green wall? Our rooms have enough activity in them without our guests!

Recently, upon my guiding a tour through Cass House, my visitors questioned why all of the windows were open in the men's section on a rainy day. Half of the furniture had been blown against the far wall by a fresh city breeze. How could I tell them that Stanley was "de-funking" the men's section? He had such a method about him. After all, how does one eliminate the smell of fifteen pairs of dead socks, short of arson? And one can always tell the degree of seriousness when Stanley tells you if it is a one-stick or five-stick incense job! The women's section prefers the smell of artificially scented and colored cherry disinfectant.

Miss Manners would have a field day responding to our sensitivity at weekly meetings or the change of shift transaction. I love the "Oh by the way, I couldn't find a pen to write this down in the log, but...a mother and seven children are arriving on your shift. I forgot to make the beds. We ran out of toilet paper and I can't find the house keys anywhere. Oh, our Lady of Perpetual Motion's first Communion class of twenty-five will be down to look around. I don't think the phone is working. The cook has cancelled for tonight. But I've got to run...have a nice house shift!"

And yet I'll bet Mary Fitzgerald misses it all in Texas. And I'm sure Steve Long, our newest addition, finds it all mildly entertaining. Jeanne Dowdes's presence

every week is a marvelous blessing in disguise. We have had a wonderful success rate in some of our women relocating to apartments these past few months. Jeanne makes sure they are all well furnished, even ready to entertain! Her energy has been so good for everybody in the house. We had to say goodbye to some of our dear friends too. Charles Francis, a neighborhood favorite, died of a heart attack. He'll be remembered for all of the shoes he wore out. Soupline will be less lively without Theresa and Cynthia Sopshire, who



died in a fire while unable to escape from their iron barred apartment. What a shame that the bars meant to keep them safe from outside danger became a trap during a fire.

The routine continues. Virginia's brief stay at the house seemed so natural. Perhaps an indication that things really never change a whole lot. People continue to be generous with all of us at Cass House. Have we thanked you lately? As always, we welcome people to visit and spend time with us at the house (after all, that was the original idea, wasn't it?). And when you come, let me know if you find the house keys, I seem to have misplaced them...



Modern investigators of miraculous history have solemnly admitted that a characteristic of the great saints is their power of "levitation." They might go further; a characteristic of the great saints is their power of levity. Angels can fly because they can take themselves lightly.

- G.K. Chesterson

It is by the goodness of God that in our country we have those three unspeakably precious things: freedom of speech, freedom of conscience, and the prudence never to practice either of them.

- Mark Twain

NEW CATHOLIC WORKER HOUSE TO OPEN

David Stein of Casa Maria Catholic Worker House in Milwaukee came up with an idea for a new house. He puts it this way. "The Milwaukee Catholic Worker announces the opening of Casa Imelda, a house of hospitality for deposed heads of state and their entourage. We are deeply moved by the plight of friendly autocrats who have become dependent on unlimited amounts of U.S. aid and find themselves homeless and forgotten when their ungrateful subjects rudely evict them. The residents of Casa Imelda are traumatized when they find out that their vital, essential strategic importance to the security of the United States is no longer appreciated, and, like a rat deserting a sinking ship, Uncle Sam decides to put his money on someone else. Casa Imelda tries to provide a homelike atmosphere for these, the New Poor. We try to give our residents the comforts and amenities to which they were accustomed when they were the worthy beneficiaries of the American taxpayer's generosity. For instance, wait 'till you see the clothing room!"

Reprinted from Casa Cry, April 1986



Bettmann Archive

FROM LITTLE HOUSE



by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

My toothpaste pump pumped its last squiggle of toothpaste this morning, so I took a paring knife to it and peeled off the bottom. To my surprise, the container was empty. The pump had pumped out all the paste.

I never thought it would work. I fully expected to find two tablespoons or so of toothpaste around the sides and spend the early morning convincing BJ and Eligha to use it up.

I've always been the one in our house to squeeze the old-fashioned tube from the bottom, even using my toothbrush handle to press the tube flat and eke out the last eighth of an inch of paste. It's been a point of pride, my self-appointed maintenance of the old-fashioned virtue of frugality.

So I was distressed to see BJ bring home the pump - new-fangled packaging, in plastic, no less. And the commercials are dreadful - a major advertising campaign featuring bickering children to sell the same product in a new dispenser. Like I say, I preferred the old package. I feel nostalgic already for the generation that will never squeeze a toothpaste tube. Remember real wax cartons of milk and how we opened them by lifting a tab in the middle of one side? Probably if you are twenty-two and graduating from college, just half my age, you don't remember. I'm not old yet, but here I am, positively clinging to a toothpaste tube.



Sharyl Thatman

The new pump costs a few cents more. Maybe on the average it saves that much toothpaste. For a few months it will give one corporation a few more sales, a few more bucks, and provide us consumers with one more new gadget to divert us from the bad news of crime and terrorism and hunger.

I'm disappointed the pump works so well because I can't really use it to rail against needs created by Madison Avenue. On the other hand, I'm glad the toothpaste pump works. I'm glad it's not one more ripoff. I just wish, from the bottom of my heart, that our gift for high-tech engineering was balanced by a larger vision.

+

Mary Ann McGivern recently hosted a backyard barbecue celebrating the fifty-three year anniversary of the Catholic Worker. Her infectious quick smile made her the perfect hostess.

FROM OUR MAILBAG



Dear Friends,

Enclosed please find my card plus a few bills, sorry it cannot be more.

On war tax resistance - my wife and I withhold half of our federal income tax. We send that half to the Lutheran Peace Fund, 2481 Como Ave West, St. Paul, MN, 55108. This may be a resource or support as you approach Lutherans on this issue.

This year we received some interesting responses when we sent out our letter explaining our action to senators, representatives, church leaders community-wide, and members in our own parish.

"We fought at the front in W.W. II. What if we ran out of bullets - oops, Jon and Cheri didn't pay their taxes, we're just out of luck."

"You teach our children. How do you expect us to tell them to look up to you if you break the law?!"

"Luke 20 - render to Caesar..."

I have noticed that these points are made always in a situation where there is no opportunity for dialogue. It generally is the white, affluent members who raise these points. As Ellen Rehg points out, such people exist in St. Louis also, so you might, and probably are, expecting these questions as you solicit support for tax resistance.

I have always heard this attributed to Dorothy Day - "When you render unto God the things that are God's, there's nothing left for Caesar." The other rejoinder to Luke 20, or its parallels, is pointing out the irony in Jesus' words. The questioners purport to be extremely righteous. Yet they hold in their hand coinage which depicts the Roman emperor as deity, clearly contrary to the first commandment and the second commandment. Jesus merely lets them plunge deeper into their blasphemy.

The second question troubles me the most of the three. We do indeed feel an obligation to approach this in humility, not as flaunting the law. There is of course an appeal to a higher law. Even more telling for me is to begin with the dramatically high incidence of teen suicide and nightmares involving nuclear Holocaust among young people. As Sider writes in Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger, one day the kids are old enough to see what's going on and then they will ask, "Hey, what have you done to stop the craziness?" At least we will have some response.

Blessings on your work,

Jon Breimeier,
Fort Wayne, IN



Round Table Talk

by Tommy Askew

My coming to Cass House is a very important adventure I'll never forget. I have met wonderful people, made new friends, and most importantly, learned patience. Yes, patience is something that had gotten away from me. I was never willing to wait on anything. Always wanting things to happen instantly. Now being around members of Cass House, I've learned to wait. I've learned a great deal from the community that I've never thought about.

My coming to Cass House from the streets has made me a better person than before. My life has been very unpredictable. Coming from a home without a father I learned all the hard things of life. I have a mother who taught me wrong from right, respect for my elders, love for my sister and brother. Above all else, she taught me to "listen." People could learn a lot by listening. By listening I've learned to read and write, and most importantly, to appreciate things.

I have gone to places and slept in places no one would dream of. For instance, I've slept in cars, parks, under bridges, in shelters. I've gone to soup lines throughout this city. Anyone with a job, money, house, or car can't imagine such a life - not realizing that one day it may all be gone, not knowing who to turn to, not knowing who to ask for help. Sure, you say, you've got a lot of friends, but do you? When the job is gone, the money, the house, the car - where are your friends then? Those same friends are not there when you really need them. I am proud to say that going to such places and sleeping in such places has taught me to appreciate things better.

My coming to Cass House was a turning point in my life. I've met wonderful people - community, volunteers, guests - who care about each other. True, all of us have a little different view of things. My

view of offering hospitality to those who are out in the streets as I once was may be different from others. My willingness to help is very important to me - knowing I am helping someone as I was helped once. I have been very close to the guests at our house. Why, I know what it is like to wonder where you are going to sleep, eat, clean yourself, change clothes. It is not something to ignore.



People have grown cold toward one another. Wars are everywhere. Killing, people without homes, children without parents, countries fighting each other. I take nothing for granted any more. Life is too short to take for granted. We the members of the Catholic Worker see hunger, homelessness, countries fearful of each other everywhere we look. We are only a few, but we do what we can. We who believe in what we are doing should always remember that there is little one can do to change the large order of human existence. One could give up in despair, for only a simple person can find peace and enjoyment in the present moment. We must accept our individual limitations, those of human nature. There is peace to be found in the small achievements and failures, in the friendship we offer to those in need and accept ourselves. The cycle of human life goes on and only God knows the way. Trust, then, and be at peace.

My prayer:

Oh Lord, watch over our house and guide it with your unfailing love. Protect us from what could harm us and lead us to what will save us, for without you we are bound to fail. Amen.

Tommy Askew joined the Cass House community a couple of years ago. He has proved invaluable in the giving of hospitality.

AN APPEAL

The St. Louis Catholic Worker is in urgent
need of financial donations.

Like all Catholic Worker houses, we are completely dependent on private donations. Outside of your generosity, we have no source of funding to pay our bills. Thus truly our work is sustained day to day by you.

Dorothy often asked her supporters to give at some personal sacrifice, for this is a hallmark of the Catholic Worker. We are emboldened to make this appeal not for our sake, but for the sake of those who are without shelter, without food, without clothing - without love.

Our account is empty, our need is great, our work is in jeopardy. Please help us to continue in this work.

If you're moving, please save us
time and money by SENDING
US YOUR NEW ADDRESS!!!

SPEAKERS: We Will be glad
to speak to your parish,
community, or school group
about our work with the
poor and homeless.

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Although subscriptions are free, donations are gladly accepted to help us continue in this work. Please write to The Round Table, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO 63106. People working on this issue include: Patrick Coy, Barb Prosser, Ellen Rehg, Mark Scheu, Tom Rick, and Harriette Baggett.

THE ROUND TABLE

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