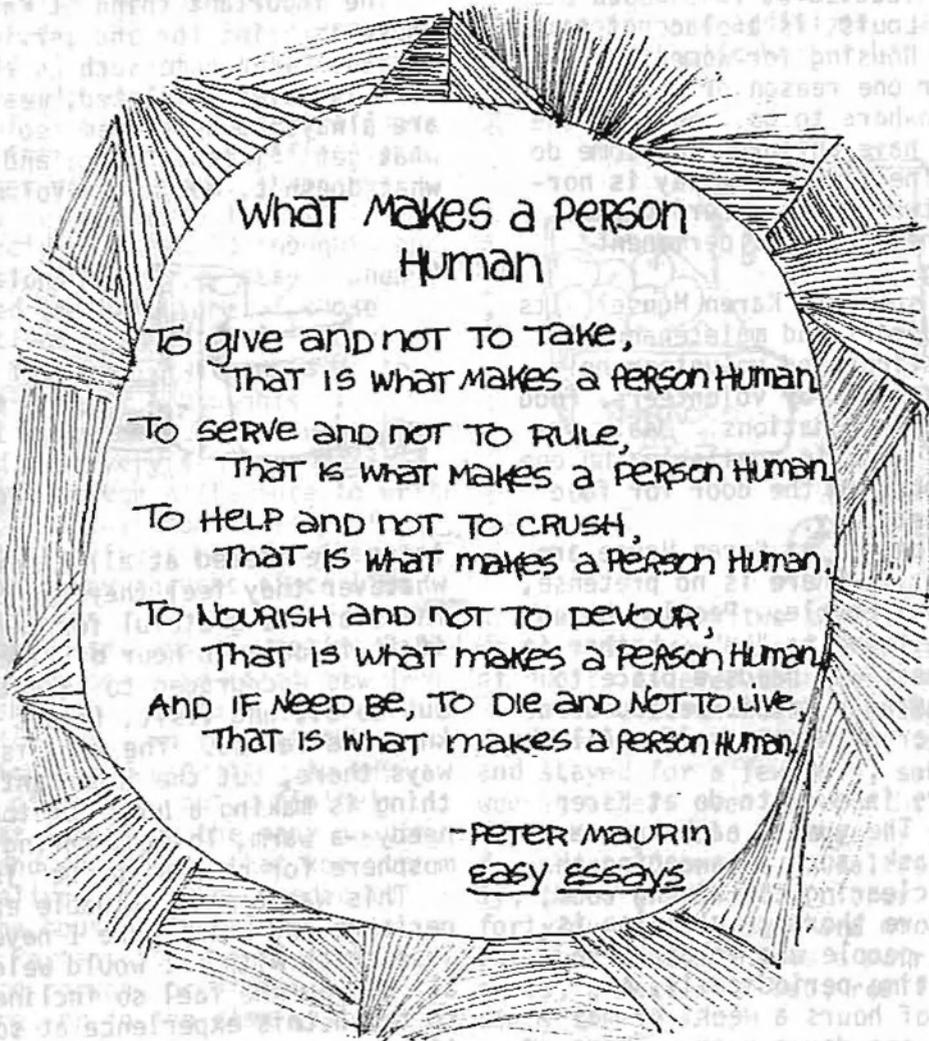


# The Round Table

ST. LOUIS CATHOLIC WORKER NEWS  
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## SIMPLE LIVING

by SR. SERENA DOWNS

Simplicity of life has a variety of connotations, about as many as there are people. I do believe, however, that the experience of living at Karen House was an experience of simple living.

Karen House, a Catholic Worker house, located at 1840 Hogan St. in St. Louis, is a place of temporary housing for women and girls who for one reason or another have nowhere to go. Some of the guests have children and some do not. The length of stay is normally two months. During this time they look for permanent housing.

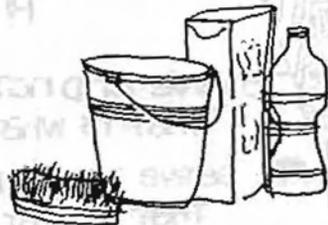
Who supports Karen House? Its sole support and maintenance is by donations and volunteer help. It is staffed by volunteers. Food comes from donations. Meals are made of what is available; no one who knocks on the door for food is turned away.

The people at Karen House are beautiful. There is no pretense, just real people. People who enter are there to "be", whether it is a guest who needs a place to stay during a crisis period or a volunteer such as myself. All are welcome.

There is much to do at Karen House. The guests each have a small task, such as sweeping the floor, clearing the dining room, etc. More thorough cleaning is done by people who volunteer a bit of time periodically, a couple of hours a week, or maybe just one day a year. There

is no time slot. Meals are cooked and served by volunteers. The children are around and grateful for attention as children always are. And, of course, the guests are always grateful for a listening ear.

The important thing at Karen House is being for and serving others. In a home such as this, work is never completed, meals are always to be cooked, so what gets finished does; and what doesn't, doesn't. Volun-



teers are needed at all times for whatever they feel they can do. The staff is grateful for any help, if it is only an hour of time.

I was encouraged to take time out to sit and visit, to get to know the ladies. The work is always there, but the important thing is making a home for the needy--a warm, loving, caring atmosphere for people to "be" in.

This was a most valuable experience and one I hope I never lose touch with. I would welcome all of you who feel so inclined to touch this experience at some time.

## FROM KAREN HOUSE

by BARB PROSSER

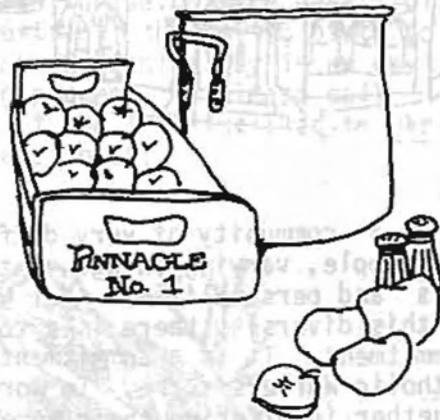
As I sit down to write some reflections on Karen House, I'm not sure what I will end up writing in the next few paragraphs. There is so much that goes through my mind - for I have come into contact with many new people and many new experiences this summer.

I had stayed with the Karen House people once before. For the month of January I had kept a journal of impressions and reflections of my new environment. Upon returning to the house in July I again decided to record thoughts and impressions during my stay. When I agreed to share some of those reflections I immediately thought of how interesting it would be to compare January's thoughts with those I have now. To my surprise I found them very similar - definitely not enough difference to write about. Yet this consistency of thoughts intrigues me, for there have been many changes since I've returned.

Karen House, and the entire Catholic Worker, seem to exist and even flourish with a certain amount of inconsistency - an inconsistency that might be frustrating to any number of people, but definitely one that works for the many guests, staff and supporters that keep the house alive. The work needed to keep the house going always gets done. Perhaps it is not done by the same person, or at its regular time, or in the same style... but it gets done.

Personalism never follows a consistent pattern. The interaction of people is constant, and it is this interaction, these daily contacts that give the house its personality.

This summer has been one full of expansion and additions. The St. Louis Catholic Worker has ex-

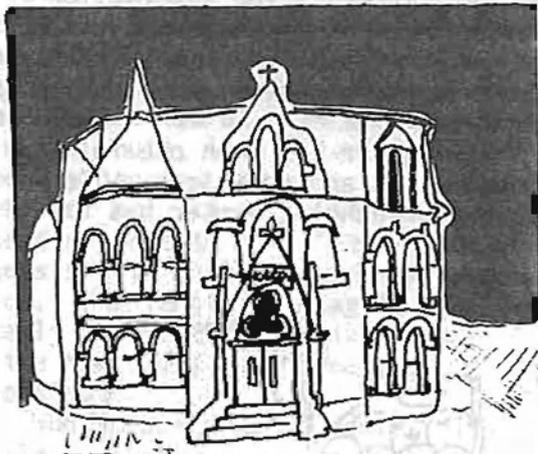


panded to occupy two houses, Cass House and Karen House. Our family of guests is ever changing.

Indeed, Karen House has seen hundreds of guests. Some have come and stayed for a few days, some for weeks, others even for months. Karen House would be ideally suited for about 30 people. Realistically, there are usually closer to forty guests. Ideals are nice, but when someone needs a pair of shoes, a meal or a bed, reality seems to win out.

There have been other additions

to the house. Staff was once five people, we are now a community of twelve. The original five were all women, there now 3 men and 9 women.



It is a community of very different people, varying in age, interests and personalities. Yet within this diversity there is a common commitment. It is a commitment all Catholic Workers share. To work together in offering their home and hospitality to those who need it. It is with the many different smiles, the variety of solutions to a problem and the many different forms of support that this commitment is carried out.

*"...personalism never follows a consistent pattern..."*

There have been picnics and outings away from the house. It is always entertaining to see and share in others' enthusiasm. There is such a delight in seeing the children's eyes sparkle as they show Karen House Catholic Worker [www.KarenHouseCW.org](http://www.KarenHouseCW.org)

me a crawdad or tadpole they've just caught- by themselves! Or to share in their joy as they finally swim across the width of the pool - all alone!

There is also satisfaction in smiling and laughing with the women at the end of the day. They, too, enjoy the picnics and occasional outings. The enthusiasm of an adult can often match that of a child!

One of the most unique experiences was the one I was part of this past Labor Day. Karen House had its Fourth Semi-Annual All Day Work Blitz. The house was subjected to even greater noise and chaos, but of a different form. A common bond of fellowship prevailed as many supporters and friends came to spend the day working. They spent the day cleaning, hauling trash, plastering, painting and tackling almost any other task needed to keep the house functioning. It was marvelous to see a month's work done in just one day! These kind of people with their time, energy, smiles, and hard work keep the house going.

With the summer behind us, I see the fall as a time for new beginnings. For just as the seasons change, and fall is beginning, so is Karen House experiencing a new beginning. The house takes on new sounds as the children (and some staff) return to school.

Our expanded community of twelve at Karen House will continue to grow and learn with each other as the house and her guests keep moving with the usual rapid pace.

## FROM CASS HOUSE

by MARY McCLELLAN

"Seven-come-eleven" permanent volunteers--Phyllis having four children--moved into Cass Catholic Worker on September 10. In addition to Phyllis and her children Danny, Teri, Tina and Charlie, there are Kathey, Sue, Luanne, Carol, Maureen and Mary.

Plastering and painting, as well as the myriad of other activities that characterize Catholic Worker existence (such as picking up furniture and coaxing cars to run), have been the order of the day since July. Various members of the support group have contrib-

uted generously of their time and materials. One major event was the installation of a telephone. The number is 621-3085, for those readers who have been trying to keep up with the quasi-vagabond behavior of the wandering workers over the summer.

As the poet Rilke says, "Beginnings in themselves are beautiful." And certainly the giving birth to a house of hospitality is an exciting process. . . please call Carol if you feel inclined to participate in it.



Ada Bethune

## REFLECTIONS ON India

by MARY ANN GLEASON, S.L.

Mary Ann Gleason, S.L., is a resident volunteer at Karen House, and is currently attending the St. Louis University physician's assistant program. Two years ago she went to India as part of the Third World Experience program of the Sisters of Loretto. The following article is her reflection on that experience as she wrote it for her sisters. We found it a very moving challenge to all of us who may consider ourselves poor, or who have any hopes of being poor in spirit. We hope it will be for you, also, a challenge and a deepening of a response of faith to the needs of the human family.

As the plane left New York, the beginning of my journey to India, I remember long musings and distant stares into the night sky searching for the path out of the past that brought me to this moment. I wanted to understand who I was as I sat there, what motivated me to create this reality, what hopes and fears stirred within me.

I had first begun to think about going to India a number of years ago, when I was working as a psychologist with a consulting firm. I believed in what I was doing, but felt a certain restlessness in me. The world's inequities, the reality of the poor in a world that is very rich, just didn't make sense; neither did my physical and interactional distance from the poor. Jesus calls us in his gospel to serve with a free heart and will those with whom little is shared, the least among us. I didn't know myself doing that and I couldn't feel good about why I wasn't. I wanted to be with the poor, I wanted to be more simple, to live closer

to what really matters to me. My internal stirrings were not satisfied by what I was doing. I spent a couple of years working with the elderly poor in a small Southern town. That felt closer to what I wanted, but thoughts of India still loomed large.



As I left for India, some of my motivations for going seemed more external (part of me because of my social self). I wanted to understand something of the human spirit that can live under the pressure of the struggle for daily survival. I assumed there was a depth to that human spirit that puts us in touch with the real, fertile earth of life and I wanted to be penetrated by that spirit.

I wanted to be influenced by a people whose communal personality is associated with non-violence, even though their country's more recent history has had intervals of both cruel internal warfare and political repression. I wanted to go to India because I knew that I was culturally inbred and that most of my global awareness was the product of opinion, prejudice or impersonal input through the written or visual word. I wanted now to be touched personally by the human beings who are the final truth and the pumping heartbeat behind the phrase, "third world." I wanted to understand more about those of us in the human community who build houses of justification to shelter ourselves from the truth of human tragedy, who cling to social illusions which convert too easily into sins of greed, power, excessive accumulation, oppression. I wanted some insight into the behavior patterns and choices of both the exploiters and the exploited, patterns which lead to culture-induced forms of habituation, if not addiction, patterns not easily unlearned. I wanted to attempt to learn more about the relationship between the first and third world countries because that relationship defines a subtle and important determinant of the identity of each as first or third.

But there were other more internal motivations that got me on the plane that early January night

(motivations that are part of myself as an individual, such that tugging

at them always arouses a faster heartbeat). Awakening from a car accident in 1975 that almost cost me my life, I asked myself what I would have wanted of myself that had not happened. The answer, both quick and spontaneous, was: "Not having lived in India." Living in India was as much the symbol of changes I desired in myself as it was the reality I had chosen to be the environmental stimulus for those changes. I am, as we all are, formed by my own life experience. So I needed to make a clear choice for life experience that would urge me to greater faithfulness to Gospel calls.

A truth I knew inside myself was that I could no longer be aware of people starving, dying prematurely because they are poor, without changing my own life of comfort, even excess, without trying to respond to the reality of their deprivation and my excess. The two realities of deprivation and excess are too contradictory to ever be made whole except by the redemptive Christ and the grace offered us to create the Kingdom now and here for all. But that grace is offered and it is we who accept or reject it.

I knew myself wrenched in prayer that longed to celebrate the gift of life and sunshine, of love and singing hearts, of the splendor of creation and the spirit of God, but felt gagged to silence by flashbacks of people too starved even to beg, too weak even to cry, too oppressed even to believe. What is celebration for them? Yes, the Spirit is available to all of us, rich and poor, fully satisfied and starved (and that across many di-

mensions), but that spirit seems far away when we believers don't care to behave as Jesus taught us: . . . care as did the Samaritan, don't walk away in apathy or fear... surrender what you have to those who have not, and do it because to believe means to love and if you share, who will need to beg?... come to the altar of God to proclaim that in memory of Me you did respond to the pain of your sisters and brothers and to be offered the grace to do so again... whatever you do for those who are the least of the earth is what brings joy to my Father... do all you can to believe, but the greatest of these is when you love those who are not so easily loved - the needy, the ugly, the poor, the weak, the beggar, those who use you, embarrass you, hurt you.

It is hard to love these people because we are afraid of them. We are afraid of what they will ask us to give up that we have attached ourselves to. We are afraid that if we get too near the poor, listen too hard and too seriously to them, come to know their names, their hurts, what their years of living have brought them, then we cannot escape changing our lives. If we truly become open to the sufferings of others, we cannot refuse to be different, we cannot refuse to change what is important to us, what we spend our time doing, what we use our money for, when we get up and go to bed, what and where we eat, who we spend time with and how, where we buy and why we buy. If we freely open our hearts to the needy, and seriously listen to the Word, then we will feel the urge to change our

lives, an urge too strong to resist. And that is why we are afraid. We have spent years building our lives and are not yet finished. We don't want to be distracted from that building up. We need the security we have built, so we can say who we are and what we have accomplished. Don't ask us to become simple, insecure, awkward, only loving to those least loved. And so we stay away from the poor because their threat to our lives is too real. Beggars remind us so vividly of what we have done to them and to ourselves. No wonder then that we reproach the beggars for our own troubled consciences. No wonder then that we run from the needy, avoid them, seek refuge from the cruel reality of their lives. We create our own safe reality, a world where we do not have to face our sin: the suffering poor oppressed by our economic and military power.

Listening to the Word of Jesus, I wanted to go to India to be with those who suffer, who are utterly simple, earth-bound, to care for them and be called by them to uncluttered faithfulness to Jesus' word and life. I wanted to offer my hands and heart to the "victims" of the world's skewed values. I wasn't sure what I wanted my hands and heart to say, or how I would say it, but I was sure I wanted to try. (I feel both humbled and relieved as I write that... the person on the plane that night would be very humbled by the obvious insignificance of any response she made; the person now writing has learned that it is the humble ordi-

nary human encounter that provides an important healing.) I wanted to go to India to share the life of those oppressed by injustice and to help them search for ways to get what is theirs by birthright and to believe the truth of that.

I also wanted to go to India to help me face the contradictions in myself, in my own attitudes and way of life that distort truth and reality, that too often turn from the grace of Jesus to my own self-reliance. I cherish as both clearly desirable and possible the invitation to life and wholeness, to a conversion which sets straight the distortions, that comes from the Gospel of Jesus. I wanted to internalize that Gospel: the process of a lifetime, but perhaps India would help bring me a little closer.

That night on the plane, my desires were also the source of my fears. Yes, I wanted to be more consistent, more faithful to the Gospel call, and to my ideal self that had been shaped by the call. But then it also seemed inevitable that I would have to neutralize the delicate yearnings of some of my personal sensibilities. I remember thinking on the plane that night that I was afraid I was coming ten or twelve years too late. I could remember the Mary Ann of 22 or 23--she was less vulnerable, had fewer attachments, was more like a wild flower who could be planted anywhere and grow according to the physical and emotional climate she was put in. But since that time, I had been cultivated, cross-bred with more clearly de-

efined elements of happiness, satisfaction, stimulation, challenge, growth. My fears were related to how many of those would have to change. My patterns of behavior, reflection, modification had been refined over my 35 years and as a whole, the system worked pretty well. But I was also sure that system had never before met the challenge it was about to meet. I faced that challenge purposely, but with some trepidation, fearful of the changes which would inevitably come if I really invested myself fully and freely with as little clinging to the secure and familiar as possible. In many ways, one of the blessings of being 35 was that I was more settled, had a stronger sense of direction. The Mary Ann of 22 had never thought of going to India.

What was hardest for me to leave, of course, was loved ones. Perhaps that was the only hard part. I looked forward to being part of a new culture, a different set of values. I wanted to strip myself of much of the American culture that felt more manufactured than real. But I knew it was very hard to do that while living in this culture. So I looked with anticipation to being in a far simpler environment, to being influenced by people who cherished their simplicity, many of whom didn't even know where the United States is.

But it was a different story when it came to the people I was leaving, relationships that I cherished and that were an important part of my identity, what made me happy, what stimulated my

growth. I knew Jesus said that it may be necessary to leave loved ones in order to respond to the Gospel call as it is heard by any one of us. But, because my loved ones were such an important part of my life, in some ways, that didn't make sense. Aware of how alone I was on the plane that night, I hoped that in the midst of overwhelming



human suffering, depression, anger, loneliness, sickness, disbelief, those relationships that filled me with love, life, hope belief, would be there to sustain me, both while I was gone and when I returned. I knew I had a lot of internal strength but there's a difference between that and the tenderness of love that heals in its own unique way. I somehow wanted to make sure that those relationships that meant so much to me would remain just as I was leaving them. There was no such surety to be had, of course, and by design. We cannot be the way we were ever, because that's what future does to past, and even less so when we enter a period of our lives intending and desiring transformation. Longing for changes in myself carries with it a risk that they might begin to happen. And the consequent risk was that I wouldn't be at peace with the old me, and those I shared relationships with wouldn't be at peace with what I newly wanted of myself.

As I flew to the other side of the world, I was aware of how potentially disappointed I might be with myself. I purposely had chosen to go to India without many of my usual and customary support systems--people, skills, position of recognition, etc. Those had been pretty reliable in confirming both real and ideal self-images and in injecting boosters when I needed them. But I wondered now how I would be without them, particularly in a situation whose harsh reality was clearly capable of stripping me bare of all images of myself. Somehow, it seemed like going to India would demand a raw encounter with the naked truth of myself and the human condition and its impact would not be cushioned. India would more clearly expose my inconsistencies, self-illusions, self-contradictions, that part of my real self that I allowed to smother my ideal. The disappointment would come when India had fulfilled its part of the investment by making the Gospel choice too obvious for misinterpretation, but then I would find in myself the lack of courage, commitment, self-surrender to be more faithful to that choice. Potentially facing such weakness and/or using that weakness as a way of not committing myself, was frightening. But my most predominant feeling as I touched ground in India was how blessed I felt to be walking into a period of my life that seemed full of promise, and a clear choice.

October 18, 1977 journal entry: Calcutta: Home for Destitutes: Young, innocent Durga died today. She was 12. She was brought in a dying beggar. A 12 year old dying beggar--

no, God, it cannot be! It must not be! But, yes, it is the horrid truth. I held her frail bones so close to me, to love, to mourn, to grieve, to scream with anguish, to cry out in despair. Are there no doors to lead us out of this evil? Can we find no escape from being either sinner or sinned against? I need both of us to be held tightly in your womb, my God. I have been part of the death of so many who died as senselessly as Durga did - malnourished babies whose every bare bone protrudes the message of their suffering, bodies of young men shattered with scraps of a bomb sent to tell them they could not protest their own oppression, women in their early twenties whose final begging was not to die only because they wanted to help their children beg on the street for the remnant of life left to them.

These dying moments have been repeated so often as I live my days and months here that it is almost hard to even remember why I ever knew peace, or joy. I feel like an earthquake has erupted at the root of all I believe and I am scattered across a giant chasm, only to be blown away by the hollow winds. And it doesn't even matter. The world and all of us in it seem so absurd to me now. What else but absurd is the 22 year old man that I found on the street and could hold in my arms like a grocery bag when he put his bony legs against a chest that was only ribs and flesh? He couldn't have weighed more than 40 pounds, even though his bone structure was bigger than mine. What else but absurd is the amount of

suffering it took for him to starve to death? What else but absurd that on the other side of the world people "need" a good set and an everyday set of silverware to eat the food whose scraps may well have kept that man living? What else but absurd that we Americans have been so manipulated into valuing the unimportant, working very hard for that which is only status and thus rootless, wearing ourselves out to get ahead, so we don't have any energy or inspiration left to develop our souls. How absurd that we can't distinguish the absurd from the reasonable, that we so easily confuse the meaningless and meaningful, that we can't see the relationship between multinationals that increase our economic growth and the smothered economy of the third world countries. How absurd it is that we can't see the connection between the second set of silverware and the starving man, can't see that both need to be cried over. Too many, my God, have been brought to death by violence, by hatred, by greed, by us who are this violence, this hatred, this greed. When will you bring to naught our intrigue? As I reach for hope and belief in the Kingdom possible here and now, I find myself again and again meeting Jesus in Gethsemane who cried out to have the darkness pass, who sweated blood to know the depths of that darkness that spanned the years from Jerusalem to Calcutta, from His Calvary to Durga's Calvary. "Weep not for me, but for those who will come after me." He asked His Father to spare both himself and Durga. But Jesus' ulti-

mate plea to His Father was that His will and that of His Father be one. That union of the wills of human and God is a more final truth and hope than that suffering be removed, or that death not occur, or that denial by his apostles not happen, or that future of people refusing redemptive grace be obliterated. Something more redemptive than our conversion, more relieving than the cessation of suffering occurs when the will of God and humans merge as one, indistinguishable one from the other. Jesus most lived the splendor of his humanness when he wanted no longer to cling to it, when he could enjoin it irrevocably into the love act that is God. Let that prayer of Jesus be mine, my God. It is not important that I understand, or answer why; it is only important that I be a pilgrim on your path.

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*"... I have now seen  
 the inferno our freedom  
 can cause for the  
 innocent..."*  
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November 24, 1977 entry: I find myself regretting life more than death, rejecting life's imprisonment and pain, calling for death's freedom for the suffering innocents. I have rarely known, especially at a feeling level, anything but a regard for life, hope and belief in it. Yes, death in its own time, but not as a replacement for life. I have always been optimistic, hope-

ful. I easily believe in the self we can be tomorrow. Goodness seems so reasonable, besides so desirable. And beyond it all, there is a God who has already redeemed us, made us whole. And the joy of it all is that we can choose to love because our Creator made us free. No greater gift than freely chosen love and it is ours to give. But instead we seem hell-bent on taking. And so I cry to you, my God, to strip us of our freedom. I know it is the pinnacle of our humanness, but I have now seen the inferno it can create for the innocent and thus know freedom to be a wretched tool of damnation.

March 12, 1978 journal entry:

Here, in India, I meet tragedy real enough to only despair. Human civilization has been short, but far too long to still allow death because you are too poor to be able to hold on to life. "I am too poor to have milk" a 20 year old man told me today, 3 hours before his starved diseased body died, a mere remnant of what he would have been at that age had he been born you or I. Too poor to have a gift given by God to all. I shall never forget the humility with which he accepted his own death and the manner of it... a greater gift than milk could ever be. He left our earth as the Spirit of God, the suffering servant. I believe the worth of suffering to be only its union with yours, O Lord. I believe your suffering to be the necessity of your own love for us. I now pray to that young man that he can help me accept his suffering as he did, with all the rage and tears it deserves and the belief

and prayer it demands. I feel like the peace and softness that I so consistently meet in the dying as they finally come to death is so clearly a sign of the joy of meeting their God who will only love them and the relief of leaving us who too often, did not. What pain that latter reality brings to me and what joy to commend them to the bosom of the Lord. So much for one heart to contain! I believe in the very real connection between Good Friday and Easter Sunday. I know they define each other. But in the

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*"... I now pray to that  
 young man to help  
 me accept his suffering  
 as he did..."*  
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presence of those victims who seem only to know the Good Fridays, the connection feels too demanding in its mystery and too remote to ease the pain of the present or to feed the hope in the future. On Good Friday, Jesus lifts his head to confirm the union of his will with that of his Father and the love upon his face shuts out the power of darkness and resistance of night. Jesus' death into life is the spring come to warm the chill, infertile winterings of love that should have been, of life that was no more than a prolonged dying. My God, nurture my belief and fill me with the love to respond in the anguish of regret and despair, agony that does not know the peace of

understanding or the vision of a time when it won't be this way.

Friends write to say how good it must feel to be working with the utterly needy and I am struck by how little that ever occurs to me, how deeply buried grace seems in the face of barren horror. Most of the time, I can't feel anything but how wretched the circumstances that made them so needy. Today a woman died whose name we never knew. The intensity of her pain had caused her madness and so she could tell us nothing of herself. She could only scream, bulge out her eyes, extend her tongue to its limits, as well as her limbs. She frightened us whose innocence had not prepared us for the fright of evil, pain, death. She lives so much inside of me today. She was one of the street people- the poor whose only home is the open earth. I wondered who she ever loved, or who loved her. There was no one who had come to visit her, or to regret her death, and in the 10 days, the fear of so many who worked at the Home for the Dying distanced us from her. Thus, even in her last days of life, she was so alone. I cried so deeply as I sat by her body, now stilled by the silence of death; I felt so stunned by her presence to me. I cried for all the tragedy she personified, for all the wrong committed against her. One of the Sisters said to me: "But you were very kind to her." I tried to be, but that isn't enough - moments less powerful than the wickedness. Darkness shadows light. A weary self reads Wisdom tonight:

"But the just one, though they die early, shall be at rest. For the age that is honorable comes not with the passing of time. Nor can it be measured in terms of years... Having become perfect in a short while, they reached the fullness of a long career. For their soul was pleasing to the Lord. Therefore, God sped them out of the midst of wickedness. But the people saw and did not understand, nor did they take this into account."

*"... God said: 'I will flesh pure love in humanness, in your own weakness because of my love for you...'"*

I do not understand, Lord, and I am too frail of faith to take this into account. It is so hard to rely on belief and trust as suffering and pain wring my heart of all but anguish. It is only that of me which is bigger than I am that can now be stirred by a belief deeper than feeling, a belief that says that our weakness, inability to love frailty are somehow invested in the heart of God as that from which goodness springs. "Lord have mercy" can only be truly felt by the sinner. "Into your hands, I commend myself" is only uttered by those aware of the futility of their own self-reliance, those bold enough to want to cling to their God and not only themselves. It is from the ashes of death that true life springs, from barren trees

that fullness is born. It is only in the divine becoming human that the human can share in the divine. God said to us: I will flesh pure Love in humanness, in your own weakness, because of my love for you. I will separate the divine from myself because my desire for your redemption from the weakness of your freedom, is without bounds.

March 30, 1978: My tormented soul meets such quiet splendor. The leper couple who beg on the street I walk every day on my way home from the Home for the Dying seem to me to be love and peace come alive. They are so uncluttered. Such lovers they are to all they meet. He plays with their granddaughter with such joy, tosses her in the air and catches her with hands that are only palms, his fingers having been eaten away. She is not afraid and neither is he. They are such an important part of "who I come home to" after spending the day with the dying being so present to me. They help me get in touch with what is really important to have - a strong sense of life that is loving, even in the face of rejection, that can see beyond the surface and relish the interior as that which makes us whole, much more so than the fingers, parts of their faces, limbs, they are missing. How much they heal me, and inspire me to their own wholeness.

I remember the people of Lonjo who celebrate the rains and the sunshine, the birth of children and the growing grain of rice. The mother of the family I lived with in that simple village told me:

"We don't need carts to carry the rice on because it is good for us to carry it on our heads." And I am reminded of the way the author speaks of the primitive in Genesis: "And the Lord saw that it was good." And I am inspired once again to what it is that makes life truly full. The people of Lonjo have very little material goods - simple mud huts, a well for water and the earth they till as their source of life. They rely very much on the elements to sustain them and the psalms they chant talk about their times of unsatisfied hunger and thirst. But their regard for their life is undeniable. I felt so healthy of soul, mind, body living in that village, so integrated and so whole. I know how much their openness and lack of privacy freed me; how wholesome working the land felt to me; how good it was to work with them on how to gain land for all in the village. They had begun a cooperative there that was such a unique witness to interdependence and communal life. I also treasured the humanness of their lives. They worked very hard, and very long, but an obvious value to them was finding time to spend with each other, in simple enjoyment of one another, and finding quiet space for themselves. That was one of the places where I learned the beauty and richness of solitude, of quiet, of an unoccupied mind and a peaceful heart. I learned that solitude can take me to that land inside myself, the home of the unspeakable, the home that is



more truly me and where I can once again meet who it is that I long to be. It is the place where I meet my God and myself without pretense. And all else falls away. In the rush of doing and achieving that I know in the U.S., I never knew very experientially what it was like to enter the chambers of that home, quietly, without expectation or demand. In the world of achievement, even prayer has expected results. What harm we do to ourselves and our God, our humanness and our Godliness.

Another gift that the people I knew in India gave to me is that now I am much less frightened of death, my own, as well as others (and much more frightened by the

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horrors that we allow to be endured as life). Death has in a very real way now become a part of life for me. It is not the negative isolate it used to be; rather, it is a part of the process of human experience. Life is not without death. And that feels acceptable enough to me that fighting and



controlling death no longer are my primary responses to it, or at least less so. I can now see death as the process of restoration for us. And that faith statement influences my emotional reaction to death in a way that it didn't before. I had to have a lump removed from my breast while I was in India and the night before the surgery, I wrote in my journal: "I do not feel afraid of my own death. There is some kind of wth "what to do" attitude that I have assumed from the Indians in that reaction - a kind of equanimity; some deep belief in Jesus as Lover who calls us back to him; some recognition that there is nothing I can anticipate, so my cognitive powers draw a blank; but most of all, just a simple peace about it all. I wonder if some of that peace comes from something I think the Indians have taught me: every day is as splendid as anything can be,

and as simple as everything is, and so am I. The only hard part of thinking of my death now is not being able to say good-bye to those I love, to hug them once again, and tell them how I love them and how much their love brings life to me."

Another thing I now think about death is its honesty. It is so clear in its purpose, so singular in its demand that it seems to free us, to bring us peace as we live it. Maybe what I mean is that the call to the honesty of death is so freeing. It doesn't tempt us to any pretense; we can't be anybody but ourselves as it is present to us (not so with life). The past and present of us are as they were and are, undisguised, unexcused, uninterpreted. We are as we are, free of the should be's, could be's, will be's. So, we rest in peace. Another thing I now see is the dying moment as one of the most intimate times of a relationship, once we've learned not to be afraid of it. The language of it is, of course, often non-verbal, but perhaps that is one of the reasons it can be intimate among strangers. I have been priveleged to share some deeply tender moments with dying persons in India. As I held their emaciated bodies; rested their heads in my lap, caressed their faces in my hands, stroked them gently, I knew them passing from the moment of breathing life to the ever-increasing stillness of dying to the silence of death. In one moment they are present to me, and then a moment later fully present to God. In awe do I wit-

ness their resurrection.

It is now many months later. I have left India, but I have not left India. The chasm is not filled and my soul still longs in search. The mystery of suffering innocence and tragic sinfulness bind me to a heaviness that I never knew before. Senseless evil had never been so real to me; extremes of greed, power, self-seeking never so tragic. The tragedy tempted me to anger so often while I was there, as it does now. But anger's futility eventually fatigues me, further wearies an already drained heart:

"Tear yourself to pieces if you will, but the world, for all your rage, will not turn to desert, the rocks will not shift from their places." Job

In India, I passed beyond wanting to scream at anybody, beyond wanting that scream to explode inside myself. I longed instead to plead, to share my torment, to make vivid to all our hearts the tragedy of human waste and suffering, the gangrene such suffering becomes to both its victims and to those of us spared. I am now convinced that the awareness which precedes conversion is nourished more by quiet honesty than by angry rage.

But, it's tempting to shout; because the realities of starvation, nuclear warheads exist, rich and poor people cannot bear the burden of prolonged deafness, delayed conversion, people withdrawing from the truth. We continue to say, in one way or another, no, I don't want to hear about it: let me focus on my own world, my own pur-

suits. Yes, I feel sad, mad, bad about it, but it will go away as soon as I turn the television off. Or I'll learn to live with immoral disparities as well as I have with other things that cause my degeneration as a person, a world citizen, a believer. Oh, God, it was so tempting to run from the beggars. So often did they physically encircle me; I would have twenty or more begging hands, waving in my face, chanting to me to help them feed their children. They wouldn't go away, leave me alone; they wouldn't stop making me feel awkward, out of control. Thank God. They sucked my soul like a tick would my blood. Thank God. They knew where I was vulnerable and headed straight there. They insisted on holding me. Thank God. Because you see it's too easy for me to let go when they let go. Beggars, forgive me and teach me. Lord, have mercy and heal me. Mary Ann, believe and behave in memory of him and in honor of the beggars.

We want so much to withdraw from the stark truth of people who have to beg for the scraps of food to live on, scraps that we throw away. We want to deny that we killed so many thousands with an atomic bomb and are now building the Trident so we can kill more, faster. Self-defense just isn't a good enough reason and it wasn't to Jesus. Love your enemies means they are no longer enemies because of what changes in me, not necessarily in them.

Feelings I had in India still recur in me with such passion. I

remember a period of several months when I was absolutely stripped of any resources to help me deal with the horrors that have accumulated in the human community, and therefore, of course, in me. In fact, I didn't want relief that would diminish the full reality of those horrors. I didn't want to escape the circle of beggars; I didn't want the feeling of desperateness to be dissipated; I didn't want to diffuse the anguish that slowly eroded the joy, the peace, the ease that had characterized my life. I came frightfully close to removal from the so-called world of the sane. I couldn't hold on. Or maybe there was nothing sane to cling to. For the first time, I understood from inside, the feelings of people who curl up in a corner with their hearts and souls knotted into silent withdrawal. I was afraid of distracting myself from the feelings of anguish; I had too often not really listened to the cry and hurt of the poor. Now it burrowed its way deep into my soul, uncushioned, undistracted. It preoccupied me, saturated me. Harsher feelings I had never known--and I wasn't even the one suffering. I could leave anytime I wanted to; most of them never leave. I remember wanting "compensation" for the victims of our wrongs, but wondering if even that desire is offensive to a loving God who is merciful and compassionate to both the innocent and the guilty.

I am still a mourner and I still search for some understanding of it all. I know we are called to live beyond what we understand. I know

that every new edge may reveal either chasm or solid land. But I cannot stop asking why. The question became so urgent that I sometimes found myself responding to the suffering of people rather than to the people themselves. Their suffering blinded me to who they were. It was people like the leper couple who drew me to look into and beyond the suffering, the evil, to see where goodness and wholeness really lie. Most especially they taught me to not miss the hearts who suffer the evil, the persons who live the tragic, and long for someone to care. It isn't easy for me to see the true grace that is available to the suffering. I too easily attach grace or joy to "having it all together" externally. Or I mistake freedom with the opportunity for self-indulgence. At times I found it hard to trust the joy of the leper couple as I did their suffering. So young I am in understanding life, in believing as I long to believe.

I am not trying to say it's all okay because the poor are happy with what little they've got. I don't believe they are; I don't want us who keep them poor to believe they are. I just know there's a difference between despairing because you are poor or feeling burdened by constant, pervading effort to make it until tomorrow, and being able to live a life much broader and deeper than your poverty. I talked in the beginning of this article about the human spirit that can live under the struggle for daily survival, the depth of that spirit

reaching into the real, fertile  
 th of life. That is what I met,  
 what I was and continue to be deep-  
 ly touched by, in so many of the  
 utterly poor whom I was blessed to  
 know while in India. My spirit,  
 by comparison, is so shallow, so  
 untamed by what really matters.

It's strange to be back in the  
 U.S. It is often here that I find  
 myself a foreigner. The simplicity  
 of the life I led in India, how  
 earth and spirit-bound it felt, how  
 free of that which smothered it--  
 that was what I went for and re-  
 ceived in greater abundance than I  
 even knew to hope for. India de-  
 livered blessings far exceeding ex-  
 pectation. I almost felt that I  
 had lived more than one lifetime in  
 the year and a half I was there. I  
 still fear my capacity to screen out  
 the evil, to become immune to immoral  
 disparities, to contradict Jesus'  
 call. I know how human I am, but  
 walking the well-worn ruts of my own  
 failings does make me impatient. My  
 heart is heavy, weak, frail, dis-  
 believing; my heart is inspired,  
 strengthened by the possible, touched  
 deeply by the loving. The contra-  
 dictions of life and self awe me: I  
 can love and hate, suffer and heal,  
 care and walk away, sin and redeem,  
 and all inside the same soul. I be-  
 lieve these contradictions fuse to-  
 gether and are made whole in the re-  
 demption. I need to trust your way  
 of redemption, Lord, to urge myself  
 into uncovering the Kingdom that is  
 already here.

For now, I still carry a heaviness  
 that will not leave. The light-  
 hearted, easily hope-filled and opti-

mistic me has learned how superficial  
 some that was, how much related to my  
 own life that has been almost suffer-  
 ing-free. My hope had not been tested.  
 It was romantically tied to spring-  
 time, as if there was no such thing  
 as winter. I am much broader now,  
 less light-hearted, perhaps more  
 heart-filled. I am more vulnerable  
 and frail, but perhaps thus less  
 guarded with my loving. I less easily  
 trust those of us who have more, and  
 that's why I plead with us. I want  
 us to respond to the inequities of the  
 world so that it is more possible to  
 believe and trust both we human beings  
 and our God.

The non-answers of Job, the no-  
 exit of Sartre invite me to walk the  
 path of the pilgrim. I desire to re-  
 spond to what is, to care, to be there  
 in the midst of all I don't understand  
 with an utterly open heart. There is  
 new, deeper hope in me, a belief in  
 the Kingdom that I am carried by, a  
 trust in virtue that is stronger than  
 the horror of evil. And I am reminded  
 of Corinthians 13, and of the invita-  
 tion to respond more than understand,  
 to work toward change more than simply  
 be tormented by evil, to see the world  
 infested and then to love. I listen  
 to the Word as that which calls me,  
 urges me on, centers my soul. And  
 that is enough for the pilgrim.



