

THE Round Table

Winter
1992

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



WHY THIS ISSUE?

There are feminists who claim that sexism is the root human oppression; that slavery and all class and race oppressions are replications in society of this first, homebound hierarchy. I have found this idea interesting and revealing — but not entirely convincing. Instead, I have come to believe that childhood is the root oppression; that it is this necessary and universal experience of powerlessness under apparently absolute and arbitrary adult power that often shapes our lifelong relationship to the use or abuse of power.

Ellen Rehg says childhood is important for humanity because it is one of the few things we have in common. Ellen has also said that the infant is like God because the only power it has is to provoke love. Any parent knows the unimaginable strength of this love. Statistics on child abuse reveal its volatility.

Jesus says children are important because they reveal the reign of God. We do well, then, to strain to know the child as our equal and to know the world as the child knows it. What would our world be like, I wonder, if it were shaped by children's values and perceptions? I expect it would be a funnier and safer place for us all. At any rate, Jesus suggests both that we are called to a radical conversion in our relationship to the child, and that the child prefigures our restored relationship with God.

These are the questions and realities we try to explore in this issue. We are fortunate that children were willing to collaborate with us in this process. Their poetry, reflections and drawings are throughout these pages. The staff of Project RESPOND provide a sociological review of children's realities in St. Louis and globally. Ellen Rehg reflects richly on the role of the child in the Gospel. Sharon McMullen-Orlet helps us explore the psychological impact of domestic violence on children's minds and hearts.

The decision to focus this issue of The Round Table on the child in our world was made before our friend Coco Terry was murdered this fall. Mary Dutcher rejoins us in these pages to remember this gentle young man, and to serve as a very singular and personal reminder of the vital importance of the crisis facing children today.



-Virginia Druhe

*Cover photograph
by Merv Puleo*

the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community

*Karen House
1840 Hogan
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-621-4052*



*Ella Dixon House
1540 N. 17th St.
St. Louis, MO. 63106
314-231-2039*

THE CHILD'S NAME IS "TODAY"

by Project Respond

Robert, Age 4, St. Louis, U.S.A.

Meet Robert. He is only 4 years old, but already he carries burdens heavy enough to stoop the shoulders and dash the dreams of a grown man.

Robert lives in a tiny apartment over a bar on St. Louis' Near South Side. His family is headed by his 20-year old mother who dropped out of school when Robert was born. He also has a two-year-old brother and an eight-month-old sister.

The family rarely ventures out of the apartment, which is dark and cluttered with empty soda bottles and soiled clothing. They have no central heat. Because Robert's mother feels the neighborhood is unsafe, he spends much of his day inside staring at television.

While his favorite cartoons trigger laughter, the sound of footsteps on the apartment stairs make Robert cringe. His mother's boyfriend drinks too much. Twice in the last week he has hit Robert, shouting that the boy was dumb and worthless.

Robert's mother wants a better life for her children. She knows Robert, who was treated for lead poisoning as an infant, and his brother and sister are behind on their immunizations. Unfortunately, the children have not seen a doctor since the neighborhood clinic closed. Yesterday,

Robert's mother called the WIC program (a special supplemental food program for women, infants, and children) and was told that current funding had run out. She could receive no service. "Check back in six months," a voice told her.

"But what about today," she thinks. It is always difficult to secure the resources to keep the family together and operating, sometimes it is impossible. Ever since she lost her job at a nearby laundry, she often finds herself depressed, thinking, "What is the use?"

Robert does not use those exact words, but even at his tender age he is beginning to develop a sense of hopelessness. His dreams extend only to the hope his mother one day will buy him one of the toys he sees advertised on television.

Robert is typical of a large and growing number of this society's children who are at risk because their most basic and essential needs are not met. Such risk arises in the context of an otherwise prosperous society. Included among the risks such children face are insufficient nurturing, poor health care, poverty, and often dangerous and dysfunctional community environments. Robert's fate, and those of children like him, is all too common.

The above was written by the staff of Project RESPOND. The description of Robert was written by Kim Plummer, a free lance writer who assisted with the Respond Report, and that of Adri by Eugen Lynch, of St. Teresa of Avila Church. The work was coordinated by Maureen Filter.



Demonstrators marching through the Bensonhurst section of Brooklyn last year to protest the killing of Yusuf Hawkins.

Nationally, more children now face more serious risks than at any time in recent memory: 1 child in 5 lives in poverty, 3 out of 10 children never graduate from high school, and more than 1 child in each 1000 is currently imprisoned.

Closer to home, statistics paint an equally bleak portrait of the problems facing children. In metropolitan St. Louis it is estimated that more than 100,000 children are at profound sociological risk or in acute danger of such risk. The following statistics illustrate just some of the risks posed to local children, and the costs risk treatment that must be borne by the community.

Parenting: There are an estimated 6,000 births to teenage mothers each year in metropolitan St. Louis. More than 40% are to girls 15-17 years old. One-fifth of total teen births are second, third, or fourth children. Approximately \$20 million in medical care costs will be incurred annually related to these pregnancies. More than \$80 million in welfare payments will go to these children before they reach age 18.

Maternal/Child Health Care: Locally, nearly 30% of teenage mothers do not receive adequate prenatal care. No care is received in the first trimester by 40% of black teenage mothers. Nationally, 20% of all children have no health insurance.

Food and Shelter: Nationally some 100,000 children are homeless. Missouri has approximately 10,000 homeless children – 3,000 of whom are under 3 years of age. The fastest growing segment of the homeless population (some 36%) is comprised of families with children.

Basic Education: In 6 of the 16 zip code areas in the City of St. Louis with significant residential population, more than 50% of the children scored below the 30th percentile on kindergarten readiness test. In the St. Louis Public School dropout rates are approaching 50%. Only 30% of the students entering school in the mid-1980s have received their degrees. The unemployment rate for students who dropped out of school in the mid-1980s is 70%.

Poverty and Unemployment: Child poverty rates are now at the highest levels since the early 1960s. Not only has the number of children in poverty increased in the past decade, but the poor have become poorer while the rich have become richer. An estimated 46,000 children in St. Louis City – more than 40% of all children – live in poverty. Poverty rates for young, female-headed households exceed 66%.

Adri, Age 11, Calcutta, India

Meet Adri. He tries to keep an eye on the baby; after all, his mother has given him strict instructions. She is down by the canal washing the laundry. It was a stroke of good fortune that



Illustration by Caroline Binch from "Amazing Grace."



Queens, New York, 1979.

ARTHUR TRESENAUGHAN ON "CHILDHOOD"

her friend had put in a word for her with her employers so that she could earn something to supplement their income. His dad's earnings working as a coolie just about keeps them in food each day; it is literally a hand-to-mouth existence.

Adri is small for his 11 years, especially in comparison to the children of the house where his mother is working. The 8- year old there is taller and heavier than Adri. Adri envied those children who went to school every day. They didn't have to mind the baby of the house who was taken care of by the Amah. They can play when they get back from school; at least they share with him the fruits and biscuits they snacked on.

He remembers going to school; he enjoyed it, making words of the letters, doing the sums on the slate his mother had bought for him. But that was when he was little; now he is old enough to help his mother, at least to watch the baby or to run errands when she asks. He loves

his mother and wants to do whatever he can. She has seemed so sad ever since his little sister died 2 years ago. She had been about the same size as the one he was now watching.

She had been fine, laughing and playing but then she got hot all over and spots broke out on her body and face; she was feverish and cried all the time until finally she stopped breathing after a couple of days. His mother had wailed and cried for a long time and chanted a song of lament about the baby as the friends carried the small body, wrapped in a cloth, to the cemetery where they had buried her.

He didn't remember his little brother, who had died before the other one was even born. His mother had told him that he would have had a brother and two sisters if they all had lived.

Two principal facts dominated the World Summit for children. The first was the fact of the quiet catastrophe – the 40,000 child deaths each

day from ordinary malnutrition and disease, the 150 million children who live on with ill health and poor growth, the 100 million 6 to 11 year-olds who are not in school. The second was the fact that the means of ending this quiet catastrophe are now both available and affordable.

At present, an estimated 80 million children are exploited in the workplace and 30 million are left to fend for themselves on city streets. Millions more are victims of war, their development disrupted by the interruption of food supplies, the closing of schools and clinics, and the destruction of homes, roads and crops. For many, addressing these horrors tomorrow is simply a day too late. The children grow all too quickly!

Maternal and Child Health Care: At present, approximately 14 million children under 5 years of age are dying each year in the developing world. The immediate causes of more than 60% of those deaths can be numbered on one hand – diarrheal disease, measles, tetanus, whooping cough and pneumonia. All of these can now be prevented or treated at low cost. Approximately 500,000 women are dying each year because something has gone wrong in pregnancy or childbirth. Many of these women leave behind motherless children. At least half of all maternal deaths could be prevented by elementary, low-cost means.

Food and Shelter: At present, 1 child in 3 in the developing world is prevented from growing to his or her mental and physical potential by persistent malnutrition. Many parents are unable to feed their children because of war or famine or because they do not have the land to grow food or jobs and the income to buy it. But the majority of child malnutrition occurs in households where there is sufficient food. The cause is the frequency of illness and a lack of knowledge about the special feeding needs of the young child ... the problem of mass child malnutrition can be overcome at an average annual cost of approximately \$10 per child. At present, more than one third of the families in the rural areas

of the developing world do not have access to clean water and one half do not have safe sanitation.

Basic Education: Only 55% of children in the developing world complete 4 years of primary education. At present, there are over 900 million adults in the world who cannot read or write. Two thirds of them are women.

Many of the things we need can wait.

The child cannot.

Right now is the time
bones are being formed,
blood is being made, and
senses are being developed.

To children
we cannot answer "Tomorrow."

The child's name is
"Today."

Gabriela Mistral
Chilean poet

+



WISHES, HOPES AND DREAMS

by the Peaceful Cave People

If we were in charge of the world

We would—

Make it cleaner!

Stop pollution!

Recycle more!

Get rid of the bad guys so

our world would be quiet, more
peaceful, and kinder!

If we were in charge of the world—

Everyone would be treated equally!

Anyone could be president—

women or men, black or white,
rich or poor!

If we were in charge of the world—

People would not need money,

So there would be less killing...

No one would have to worry about
bills...

No one would be hungry or homeless...
or suffer from AIDS, cancer or other
disease.

If we were in charge of the world

We would—

Be dancers, doctors, singers,
presidents and priests!

Own every candy factory in the
world!

Make all our dreams come true—
except the scary ones!

Demand better schools!

Teach everyone to swim!

NO ONE WOULD NEED TO CRY

NO ONE WOULD EVER DIE,

ALL PEOPLE WOULD

LIVE IN PEACE...

IF WE WERE IN CHARGE OF THE WORLD!



The Peaceful Cave People are a group of young poets who meet at Midtown Catholic Charities in south St. Louis

JESUS IN THE RYE

by Ellen Rehg

One of my favorite books, when I was in high school, was the perennial adolescent favorite, Catcher in the Rye. I read this book several times over a period of years, trying to understand exactly what J.D. Salinger meant. What was the story's adolescent hero, Holden Caulfield's problem? He was a smart alecky, cynical kind of guy, but very perceptive and self-reliant. The story takes place during the few days between his expulsion from school and his expected return home for the holidays. As he hangs out in various haunts in New York City, one thing becomes clear. The only two people in the world that he trusts are children, his siblings; one dead and one alive. His brother Allie who died as a young child is never far from Caulfield's thoughts. Neither is his primary school aged sister, whom he both confides in and seeks to protect. On a visit to her school he becomes enraged to find a dirty word scrawled across the wall. He attempts to efface the word because he cannot bear the thought of his sister and the other kids reading the word and thinking about it. You get the feeling that for Caulfield the word represents a threat to the innocence of the children. But their loss of innocence does not come through learning the meaning of an objectionable word, but through learning the adult concept of obscenity itself.

Holden Caulfield has a profound respect for children, which may be why I kept thinking of him as I reflected on Jesus' words about children. Jesus also had a lot of respect for children, and this theme, like in Catcher in the Rye, is a constant yet muted undercurrent in the gospels. For example, a child is the first person to share his food with the apostles when the crowd is sitting there hungry. The miracle of the loaves and fishes is often interpreted as occurring through the example set by Jesus as he shares what little he had with others, inspiring others to share their food. What is overlooked is that the miracle begins when the child offers to share, even though his effort is pooh-poohed by the apostles. It would not surprise me if Jesus encouraged the miraculous appearance of enough food for everyone to occur solely in order to vindicate the child's gesture. After all, he didn't make it a habit to feed the throngs who followed him.

There are only two passages in the gospel where children are explicitly mentioned. In one, Jesus is telling us something about God; in the other, he is telling us something about ourselves. In Mark 9: 33-37 Jesus likens himself and "the One who sent me" to a child. Since this comparison follows the argument which the apostles were having about who was the greatest, it

Ellen Rehg, a mother and a philosophy student, will probably find some way to work this article into her dissertation.



Super Man
Dione Agell

seems likely that Jesus is linking himself with the child in order to subvert their worldly notions of importance and power. "If anyone wants to be first, they must make themselves last of all and servant of all," he proclaims and then stands a child in their midst, puts his arm around her and declares that anyone who welcomes a child welcomes him and the One who sent him.

Children, both then and now, are clearly the least powerful members of society, yet God's greatness is revealed in them. God's power is like the power of a child who wants only to evoke our love, not judge us for our faults. God's love can turn hearts of stone to hearts of flesh - this is the miraculous power of God, the power of conversion through love. Many parents and other adults who love children know this converting kind of love. Loving a child, like loving God, is a dangerous thing; it can transform one's entire life.

To be vulnerable to others, rather than to dominate them; to desire love, not command obedience - is this what Jesus means when he tells us we must be like little children if we wish to enter the reign of God? It is "to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs", he indignantly tells the disciples when they attempt to prevent children from coming to see him. "Anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it", he continues. (Mark 10: 13-16)

But is Jesus' notion of children too romantic? Maybe in the context of adult society children are powerless and vulnerable, but in their own company they can be as domineering and heartless as any tyrant. It is not without reason that Freud uses the adjective "child-like" as a synonym for unbridled egoism. There is a deeply ingrained ambiguity in the symbol of the child which has its basis in reality. On the one hand, children represent the unfettered, self-centered drives for pleasure and power; on the other hand, they represent purity and vulnerability. I believe it is important to acknowledge both meanings in order to fully understand the gospel symbol of the child. These days there is a lot of talk about the "inner child" which one is supposed to rediscover and empower. However, one may end up empowering the narcissistic urges we go to so much trouble to outgrow, if we're not careful about what the child within us represents.

It would not surprise me if Jesus encouraged the miraculous appearance of enough food for everyone to occur solely in order to vindicate the child's gesture. After all, he didn't make it a habit to feed the throngs who followed him.

The key to understanding the symbol of the child lies in the act of welcoming God. It can be no accident that each time Jesus mentions children, the idea of welcoming comes up. In a way, the entire gospel is a series of scenes in which people are invited to welcome the incarnate God. But according to Jesus, the very thing for which we pray, the coming of the kingdom, hinges upon whether we can welcome it like a child. How does the symbol of the child help us



Mev Puleo

to understand what it means to welcome the reign of God?

According to Luke, a fetus was the first human being to welcome the incarnate Christ. The unborn John leapt in his mother's womb, whereupon Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit and recognized Mary as the mother of the Messiah. This scene is called the Visitation, which focuses on the interaction between Mary and Elizabeth. It is an important affirmation of Mary, not because she was a vessel 'containing' Jesus, but because she was and is the first human being to welcome God in her life so fully that she enabled God to become flesh. But if we include

the interaction between the unborn John and Elizabeth in our understanding of this passage, it becomes, in effect, a second annunciation with radical differences from the first one.

Instead of an angel breaking the news to Mary, a fetus conveys the news to Elizabeth. The fetus proves to be a more reliable source of information to Elizabeth than the angel was to Mary. Elizabeth did not hesitate to believe the significance of John's leap, whereas Mary doubted the angel at first. "How can this be?" she asked. Mary's acceptance of her pregnancy is terse. Her reply is to the point but lacking in enthusiasm. "I am the handmaid of the Lord, let it be done to me", she says. In contrast, the second annunciation is filled with joy. John leaps for joy, Elizabeth "gave a loud cry" of joy and Mary is inspired to sing one of the most moving and joy-filled prayers in the gospel. Her soul magnifies the Lord and her spirit rejoices in God her savior.

Perhaps this annunciation is different because of the presence of children. Mary, who in welcoming her child welcomed God, is in turn welcomed by an unborn child and his spirit-filled mother. I believe this scene teaches us what it means to welcome the coming of God like a child: with faith in the least of all, with great joy, and in relationship to others.

It is not so much a child's faith that we are to cultivate, but faith in the child, in so far as children symbolize "the least" in our culture. Because Elizabeth trusted the experience of her unborn child, she was filled with the Holy Spirit and recognized Mary as the mother of God. Elizabeth's instincts were correct, as it was often the least, the marginalized, who first recognized Jesus as the Messiah, and it is hard to think of anyone less powerful than an unborn child. To have faith in the poor and the powerless means to trust their decisions and choices, rather than to attempt to reform them. Many of us are willing to give to the poor, and pity them, but how many of us respect the poor?

Mary had faith in God's promise to her,

a "lowly handmaid" whom God had exalted. Her song of joy and thanksgiving implies that unless we can see the face of God in the least of all, the poor and the outcast, we cannot enter the reign of God. This is not because God will stop us from entering but because we will simply miss what is right before our eyes.

The wonderful thing about using children as the symbol of the powerless is that it unites the idea of poverty with the idea of joy, which is represented in a child's unflagging ability to play. Children excel in their ability to play. Unlike adults, they play games that require no special skill, training or equipment. Joy is not exactly the same thing as playfulness, but a child who cannot play is a child robbed of the joys of childhood. However, to be like a child does not mean that we need to duplicate a child's activity, but it may mean that unless we welcome the reign of God with absolute delight, we're not there yet.

The symbol of the child also represents our need to be in relationship with God and with each other. The people who welcomed God and God in each other in the second annunciation were intimately related to each other through ties of blood, faith and shared experiences. A child in the womb is in the physically closest form of relationship that there is, but all children who are not in relationship will die, either emotionally or physically. Of course, adults also need to be in fellowship with others, but with children

what stands out is the kind of relationship which exists: a relationship of absolute dependence. It is here that the ambiguity of the symbol is resolved, for a child who is not properly cared for will not learn to balance the pursuit of pleasure with the needs of others. In the absence of good adult guidance and love, children will grow up without respect for others or for themselves. In the same way, adults go astray without the constant guidance and love of God. To be like a child is to recognize our dependence upon one another and on God for our lives and our faith. We cannot enter the kingdom alone.

This, of course, was Holden Caulfield's problem, as he struggled with his own evolution from childhood to maturity. He knew there was something important about children that separated them from the phony adult world, but he had no one to help him figure out what it was, least of all the adults in his life. This special quality which he valued in children and didn't want to lose in himself, mattered so much to him that he wanted to devote his life to being a "catcher in the rye". He envisioned a big field of rye grass on a hillside where children would play. If they strayed too far from safety, he would gently guide them back to their friends. Nowadays we need not only a few catchers in the rye, but also a few rye fields, where children and the lilies of the field can play and grow, and Solomon in all his splendor will not be like any of these. +



Hope Weaver
Grade 4

I plan to
be a doctor, live in house, have
a car and have a son.

I fear a leopard
will climb a tree and fall.

It is not
very nice at night time some
times we hear shoot outs, that
makes me sad.

My life is O.K.
but I have to always
mop the floor.

These reflections are provided by the fourth and fifth grade classes at Hempstead Branch School in north St. Louis. Their contribution was coordinated by their teachers, Mary Lipic, Peggy Beard and Annette Wade. The students were asked about their hopes for the future, their greatest fears, and what it is like to grow up in their neighborhood.

Dimitrios Jackson
Grade 4

My hopes in
the future are to get a education from
Colleges

My
neighborhood is very bad.
Old people are killed. They do drugs
and other kinds of mean things.
I do not want to get involved
with drugs or guns.

Nekeisha Guest
Grade 4

The
to get shot in
a drug dealer.

in my neighbor
have place and
one brother is
what to do
love my nei

I love m
my mother to
that very much



most I fear is
the head by

Its nice
hood because we
quiet there. No
or tellers
hats why I
hood.

y life and the way
to me. I like



Mev Pulco



Mev Pulco

Katrina White
Grade 4

What I fear the
most is when my mom and dad argue
and fight.

I think my life
is kind of good because I always
help them when they need help.

Shontal
Grade 5

I fear that my
brothers is going to get into a
gang and get killed.

La Vonda Brown
Grade 4

What I fear the most
is death, because I think life is
precious and if something happens,
I don't know what I will do.

My life is fair.
I get every thing I want and don't
have to clean up all the time because
it's my mother's job. But one problem
I'm scared at night.



Marquette Williamson
Grade 4

My hopes for
the future are to ~~live a long~~
in a magical land, and have
fun.
It's like
a peaceful place and I
grow up peacefully.

My life is like
a miracle. I get my work
done always. I go to church
and the best thing is I
can go to school.

COCO: OF A

As I write these words in Miami, they are burying Coco thousands of miles away in St. Louis. I am in Miami beginning the process of becoming a nun. Coco is wherever he is, having completed the process, at age 18, of being a young Afro-american male in urban U.S.A.

Coco was a very special person. If I had to name one quality above others in his personality that characterized him, I would say sweetness. I knew him best when he was age 9 — half his lifetime ago — when his family was homeless and came to stay with us at Karen House, an emergency shelter for women and children. His mother could not find housing that would accept five kids, only four.

Coco and I had become good friends, and he was doing well at the school near Karen House. So he stayed on, with me as his guardian, as his family took advantage of the scarce housing opportunity that had come up. We had some lovely months together.

Somehow we ended up going by bus to California...maybe because my parents had taken me there as a child, always emphasizing how educational such traveling is. Even though he was carsick — or would it be bus-sick? — most of the way there, he would smile and say how happy he was to be on the trip. It seemed like a miracle to both of us when an airline special promotion allowed us to fly back to St. Louis for less cost than the bus ticket would have been. Fly! On an airplane! How can mere words

PORTRAIT YOUNG MAN

by Mary Dutcher

convey the excitement we felt? In addition to the wide smile, Coco's eyes were shining brilliantly with excitement.

I remember that we spent a great deal of time harvesting that summer, as well. The Paracletes, a Roman Catholic religious order, had sown a large vegetable garden that they offered to us to harvest. So Coco and I would go two or three times a week and pick beans, cucumbers, carrots, and tomatoes. And then together we canned many of the tomatoes and beans. These are not small quantities that we are talking about here. An average meal at Karen House involved preparing for between forty and fifty people. We both worked hard together and enjoyed it tremendously.

By the time school started the following year, Coco was able to rejoin his family and begin fifth grade in yet another new school. Shortly thereafter, I left to visit Nicaragua with Witness for Peace and ended up staying there for most of six years.

But I stayed in touch with Coco and his family, visiting with them whenever I was in St. Louis. Life did not get any easier for them; and the last time I visited, Coco was living at Echo, a residence for kids who can't be with their families. But Coco was doing very well. He was now taller than I and playing basketball expertly, sought after by two teams. No one called him Coco anymore, he said. He

preferred Cortez. He wanted to study accounting, he told me.

Last year Cortez was named "Most Valuable Person" at Echo. I understood why when I remembered how hard we used to work together and what fun we had doing it.

He was shot to death one Sunday night recently, an innocent bystander caught in the crossfire. Like Mary Ross's daughter who was shot to death that same Sunday night, Coco became a victim of violence. Like two hundred others in the City of St. Louis so far this year. Like 177 of the victims, Coco was black.

One of my friends, when we were discussing Coco's death, reminded me how shocked I had been during the time I was taking care of him, coming across some statistics about the high death rate among young Afro-american males. After that, my friend reminded me, I would periodically state, "The chances of Coco living to adulthood are not great." Boys N the Hood.

Another friend perceptively remarked that I didn't have to travel all that way to the war zones of Nicaragua to witness violence: "We've got it right here."

The Bible says, "Without a vision, the people perish." Without hope, people become desperate. Coco had hope. He had been with his family that afternoon, and his grandmother had invited him to spend the night with her out in the county.

"No, Grandma. I'd like to, but I gotta get back to the city 'cause I'm lookin' for a job; I gotta get out early tomorrow morning. Tomorrow's Monday."

He was killed that night. Tuesday, two days after he was killed, an employer who had interviewed Coco called to offer him a job.

These are stories about Coco. I think it helps to tell stories when someone dies. But these stories are about more than Coco. They are about all the victims, each one of whom has a story and whose life has meaning. Lest we too easily forget and allow them to lapse into impersonal statistics—and ourselves into indifferent observers, lacking both vision and hope. +

Mary Dutcher is using her legal and Spanish skills this year to work on immigration law for Legal Aid in Miami.

SECRET POCKETS OF TERROR

by Sharon McMullen-Orlet

Something disturbing happened a block and a half from my home this past summer. A ten year old boy was playing on his porch. A young man was pursued by another at gunpoint. One of the young men picked up the boy as a shield; the ten year old was shot and died.

The neighborhood and the city were in shock. Two adults took out their violence on a child.

There are many situations in our world of violence to children. Five hundred children a day will die in Iraq due to famine and the sanctions supported by the US. Children in El Salvador are being killed with their parents when government-friendly forces attack whole villages. Children in the United States are living without homes, without heat, along with their mother or father. There is such constant and systemic violence to children.

Yet I would like to focus us on violence of another kind. When violence is thought to be outside, in the streets, in another country, we may think of being safe when we close the doors of our homes. But it is in our homes that the greatest violence occurs to children.

Many children suffer physical or emotional abuse by their parents. More children than I would like to be aware of are sexually abused by someone in the family. (Some claim that in our society perhaps 25% of girls and 15% of boys experience sexual abuse before the age of eighteen.) Freud's first insight was that hysteria in adults was caused by being seduced as a child by a relative. He later disclaimed that, saying that sexual abuse would have to have been too prevalent, since so many of

his patients talked of infantile sexual happenings. He concluded it must be their wish, their interior drives finding expression in story.

It has taken us seventy years to gain back Freud's initial insight — that, in fact, many girls and boys are sexually abused. As Alice Miller says in her book *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, it is not that these children are seduced, as Freud termed it. That would imply the child wanted to have sex with someone. The child is abused in a context where they have no power to refuse.

After working in an alcoholic treatment center for five years, I came to expect that a woman alcoholic had been sexually abused as a child. After a time in recovery, the memories often crop up. Many women in therapy are sexual abuse victims. What has this to say about our society? To me it says that we have no place to take our pain.

Children are so vulnerable. When an adult can't yell at their boss, they can take it out on a child who can't defend herself. A kid just takes it. It seems not to affect them. Lots of sexual abuse occurs to children before they can talk. Children can go for years, whole lives, without understanding what happened. These children can become sexual abusers themselves. I never understood how a parent could hurt a child that way, until I realized that the parents in most cases have been sexually abused themselves.

What does physical or emotional abuse do to the child? It gives them a surreal feeling. They have to let others use them to keep in relationship with them. If children are told they are rebellious, they will obediently be that way. They must forget their

Sharon McMullen-Orlet has been a pastoral counselor at Care and Counseling for the past ten years and is married to Danny Orlet.



credit: Eleanor Mills

own desires and become the bad or good little girl that the parents need them to be. They try to get by with what's there, and reassure themselves that it's enough. Ordinary life is not an easy fabric for them, but has secret pockets of terror and anger. They learn to tolerate the pain because they need their parents' love.

In healthy development, at some point a child splits "good" and "bad." She will hold the "good" to describe herself and project the "bad" outward for another to hold until a time in her development when the self is strong enough to hold both "good" and "bad" images of the self. That's how the bogeyman comes about.

Children want to think of their parents as good. A child will go to great expense to blame herself rather than her parent. In Alice Miller's theory when the parent requires admiration from the child, the child claims the "bad" part so that parent and child can see the parent as good. An abused child sometimes has to hold the "bad" in order to continue to see the parent as good.

Another theory talks about parents who keep letting their child down, so the child has no one to look up to. Again, the child will take the blame so the parent can look good. These unnatural splits are much more difficult to resolve, and all this distracts

the child from what she should be about — exploring her own self and her world, her likes and dislikes.

In some families the parents criticize all the children. Another set of families divides their children into the ones that are honored and identified with, and the others that are the "problem" children. The parent's need to have someone to blame may keep him from working out solutions.

There is a hollowness in these children's lives. They want to be different — either by being better if they think they are "bad", or by having their own thoughts but don't quite know how to find them. These children as adults often find partners who will treat them the same way. They often raise children who then feel the same. All this happens without our intention, and mostly without our knowing it. We often think we are doing good mothering (and good fathering) and slip in —secretly —these powerful messages. It is much like the story I began with. Children are used as a human shield; we hold them up to deal with our past experiences rather than resolving them ourselves.

The process continues from one generation to the next unless people are willing to face the emptiness and pain within their souls with another person who will witness with them what they have experienced, and help them to name it. It is difficult because the "trouble" often seems vague and one can't justify taking time out of a busy life to explore one's self. There can also be a sense of guilt and betrayal for telling family secrets.

In the meantime, we are a world welling up with violence on all fronts. Maybe the reason we have such a high tolerance for TV violence is because it is one outlet for our unresolved childhood anger. Others avoid facing all violence because it stirs the pot inside. Maybe the reason we continue not to pay attention to the suffering we cause around the world and in our own cities is because we cannot face our own pain, and so must block out others' as well.

In this new year I pray for the children living in our neighborhood, that they may be safe. On the anniversary of our attack on Iraq, I pray for the children dying and living there. I pray for the well-being of all our children, and for past children who are now adults. May we come to discover our inner turmoil and stop the cycle of violence toward children. +

FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



My friend and neighbor Lorraine is a recovering crack user. Here is her description of her experience:

"I'm a drug addict. Rocked coke [crack] is my choice of drugs, the most addictive drug on the streets today. Rocked coke has many chemicals combined inside; the drug is so powerful you have no control over it. One rock will have you addicted. The chemicals in rock will have you lying, stealing, cheating, deceiving, anything to continue the five to ten minute highs. It will make you do without, cause low self-esteem, be part of your journey. It will have you neglecting and abusing yourself and everybody around you. It's hard getting off the drug. Will power sometimes never helps.

I'm fighting hard. I'm a mother of eight small children. I myself indulge mainly to take away pain, heartache, memories, and personal problems, as well as knowing all the time it's causing more problems than it's solving. When you're involved with rock cocaine, or any other drugs, nothing good comes out of it, never. I have seen young and old die daily. What a fast life it takes you through.

My children have seen a side of me that drugs have let them see. They are suffering the most. Family members and close friends and supporters have almost given up. I have lost almost everything. The only thing I haven't lost is faith that God will be with me through back to the other side of a natural high life. All I ask is to stay away from people, places, that use.

Don't fool yourself and say you'll not be the one to use, because you'll be the first. I'm a different person without rock. I'm smart, witty, intelligent, active, happy, one that would succeed at anything. I'm easy to get along with. But coke won't let me. If for any reason you feel you must start or continue to use, get help right away. Don't wait. It will cost you maybe your life."

Lorraine spent three months in a drug rehab unit two years ago. Then she (pregnant with twins) and the children moved to the Little House in September 1990. The children's father moved in too, and everyone settled down to recreate the Huxtable household.

Instead, many problems appeared that had been masked by drugs and alcohol—including the needs of other severely alcoholic relatives and their children. Now that the family was not in a drug crisis or a housing crisis, they were able to see all kinds of weaknesses in themselves and each other. The twins were born and Lorraine stopped going to Narcotics Anonymous meetings. Family made more and more requests of her. She and her partner quarreled more often. She missed two rent payments.

In June, Lorraine and her common law husband separated. That same month, Lorraine's father was diagnosed with lung cancer. In July, Lorraine told me a friend had offered her some drugs. "how many times? I asked. Lorraine said, "Just three." "What kind of drugs?" "Cocaine."

Foolish me. I relaxed. It was cocaine, not crack (I thought, but I was wrong) and I figured Lorraine would never have enough money to support a cocaine habit. Besides, cocaine isn't overpoweringly addictive the way crack is. But even if I'd been smarter, I don't know that there is anything I could have done.

I left for a meeting at the end of July. When I returned on August 4th, Lorraine had spent her entire check and food stamps for the month on crack. Her children were hungry and her house was filthy. She hid from me for weeks and insisted nothing was wrong. Finally, Lorraine wept bitter tears and, more to the point, agreed to make me her payee for her AFDC payment and food stamps. She sought counseling and was admitted to a drug

Mary Ann McGivern, SL, still provides social commentary every Monday morning on KWMU radio at 7:30 AM.

program with her children, but her father died four days later and she either dropped out or was put out of the program. Besides all that, we had crack dealers coming to the door that she owed money to. Two of them hit her out in the street and one took the money saved for a Boy Scout trip for her oldest son. Then, at the beginning of November, Lorraine's check and food stamp certificate were stolen from my mailbox and our washing machine was taken from the basement.

Because of Lorraine's drug history, I have to stay open to the possibility that she used the Boy Scout money for drugs and that she stole the check and food stamps and washing machine herself. If she stole the check and food stamps, Welfare will find her out as they process the request for reissue. Nonetheless, I know from my personal knowledge of her that Lorraine is struggling to stay clean and raise her children—wonderful kids. Even if she slips back two steps for every one she takes forward, I'm doubtful that foster care would be better for the children.

Lorraine needs parenting education. She needs to go to NA meetings and get into a program. She needs to extricate herself from her alcoholic common law in-laws and she needs to grieve her father. She also needs a high school diploma and a better sense of herself. The Catholic Worker cannot solve her problems or meet her needs. All we can do is try to follow Peter Maurin's principles of personal responsibility, imitate Dorothy Day's lifetime of commitment, obey Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and pray. ✦

In late December Lorraine entered a long-term treatment program in Joplin, MO. Please pray for her.



Flower Flower

Seneca MacIntyre

Bound Together

Stumbling

in our own curriculum
we learned the love of
letting go, paid for
the daydream of you
standing up to be
heard. Escaping. Stabbed
in teen-age mirrors of wishing
your face was not. Nametapes
unspooled summer to summer. Over
and over the linens folded
with the nightmares of brothers
murdered and the women
longed for. On vista-
vision screens, the unattainable
dream swung
in traction. Books piled up, on
IQ ladders of past and present
history. You marched from
classroom pictures to streets named
after American presidents, you walked
into towns of blind
obedience. Bruised by the burning
question flung like acid in
the eye. How can you be a student in
a society that refuses to learn?

Ruth Lisa Schechter

The Writing on the Wall:

108 American Poems of Protest

FROM KAREN HOUSE

by Katrina Plato



In the four years I've been a member of the St. Louis Catholic Worker our community had never gone a retreat together. A few years ago we even stopped closing Karen House down for a few weeks respite in the summer. It seemed more work than rest for the community, and a special toll on the guests. So individuals take a week here or there away from the House as others in the community and extended community cover for them.

In the spring some of us shared a need for a community retreat. Much had happened in our community in the last year and a half. Maybe we had not spent enough time, or any time, grieving over these changes so that we could embrace our new community. Then there was the war in Iraq and the war in our city. The stress in our personal and communal lives grew worse. We had begun to lose trust in one another, to grow apart. In the summer we had a very helpful all day meeting where we began to share our burdens. A theme was gathered from that discussion for a fall retreat – the theme of reconciliation in Christ.

Our retreat facilitator, Gen Cassani, opened our time together with these words: "Retreats were important to Dorothy Day. Her hope was one retreat a month all year and several retreats in the summer. The object of the retreats was to learn to appreciate the gifts of the Spirit. She was convinced that leaders of the movement must be fed ... materially and spiritually, but primacy went to the spiritual ... especially Eucharist. The retreat house was a place to develop resources, to think ... a place of action because we believe 'spiritual action is the hardest of all.'"

It was encouraging for a community of givers to hear Dorothy Day stress the importance of time out. It was also helpful to be reminded even Dorothy with her faith of steel grew despondent, depressed and doubted herself. She once wrote: "Low in mood all day, full of tears, feel bitterly oppressed, I feel utterly lacking and ineffective, I have had this completely alone



feeling ... my heart is as heavy as lead .. my mind full and uninspired .. only the will remains, so that I feel hard and rigid, and at the same time ready to sit like a soft fool and weep. Never before have I had such a complete sense of failure, of utter misery ..."

Then Gen shared with us that at these times Dorothy would quote St. John of the Cross who said that when a person felt like that, one should not be grieving, but look upon it as a great good because God was removing the matter from us, taking it out of our hands and all we need to do is let go.

We hope to let go, and come closer. We have decided to spend a time of silent prayer together once a week and to have several retreats through the year. As Dorothy wrote, "Just to lie in the sun and let God work on you is to be sitting in the light of the Sun of Justice, and the growth will be there, and joy will grow and spread from us to others." +

Katrina Plato, Karen House community member, is in the final stretch of completing her thesis in art therapy.

FROM LATIN AMERICA

by Dave Schenk



I was on my way to work the other day, listening to a radio commentary on what great business opportunities exist in Central America these days. I've been back a few months now from Guatemala, and the commentary angered me so much that I almost missed my exit to cross the McKinley Bridge to Granite City. In a way I was surprised to hear the commentary inasmuch as it seems that every possible foreign business has already set up shop somewhere in Guatemala, to rake in the profits that can be made from paying out just \$2 a day in wages. It is estimated that for every dollar invested in Guatemala, \$25 can be taken out because of the low wages. I frequently passed three sweatshops on my morning jaunts (only a gringo could be wasting energy on exercise). The buses were loaded with teenage women who would stream into the factories to sew jeans together or perhaps to pack broccoli, destined for the U.S. and other markets. So they would begin their twelve hour day ... or longer.

My eighteen months with Peace Brigades International has come to a close now. When I last wrote this column, I speculated about how the violent revolutions throughout the region were losing support, given the events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. That trend continued in my last few months there, yet the resistance has continued. With the pretext of fighting communism gone, will the governments in Central America and the U.S. finally have to look at the root causes of the resistance, the extreme poverty and injustice? My guess is that the Bush

Administration has lost a dear scapegoat with the collapse of communism. Justifying the practice of keeping the majority of Central Americans in the impoverished state they find themselves may prove to be more difficult.

Those brave Guatemalans I walked with who resist nonviolently are growing in numbers. The members of these churches, unions and human rights groups continue to be disappeared and tortured. The Mayan people, especially the



Dave Schenk, an otherwise mild-mannered advocate of nonviolence, loves to play hockey.

women, are growing in courage and strength. The widows of those thousands massacred in the late 1970s and early 1980s are coming forth to point out mass grave sites, defying the threats of the army and local officials. I was present in August with several Mayan widows as the remains of twenty-five men were exhumed from a grave in the state of Chichicastenango. The work was carried out by international forensic anthropologists. The black earth under the skeletons of the men indicated that they had been buried alive. This site is only the beginning, of course, as more women find the courage to come forward. The clamor for justice seems to be building in this coming year marking 500 years since the invasion of Columbus.

My greatest fear is that since Central America is no longer a skirmishing ground between East and West it will fall off the map completely. It is up to us as God's people not to let that happen. My sense is that the nonviolent resistance will grow, even if spurred on by nothing else than the fact that violent revolutions are too costly. There are signs of that in Guatemala, as the grassroots movement struggles to re-evaluate the political climate in this post-Cold War era. There are many, of course, who have always rejected the violent alternative to their plight.

With the focus off of Central America (it's hard to imagine less attention than what we have known to this point), who will speak for the ever growing number of the poor and marginalized, the refugees, etc.? Hopefully the churches, who have come together more closely in Guatemala recently to decry the violence and injustice will seize this historic opportunity and provide a louder voice for a people who now more than ever seek an answer to their cries.



Round

I recently read a book that brought to mind an incident in my life from several years ago. The book is entitled The Eucharist and Human Liberation, by Tissa Balasuriya, a theologian from Sri Lanka. The main tenet of the book is that the celebration of the Eucharist, as the focal point of the historic Christian community, has undergone a "social conditioning," especially in the first world church, and consequently has come to serve the interests of the dominant, elite classes within the present-day institution. Balasuriya further describes how, when issues of injustice are exposed (both at the local parish level as well as in the global arena), the tendency is to "sweep these divisive issues under the beautiful carpet of the altar." The result is that we leave Mass without ever questioning ourselves in the vital issues of our time.

My own experience confirms this. A number of years ago I was invited to speak in my former parish in Florida at a Sunday Mass focusing on social concerns. It is a parish with a large military population. I was asked to share what my work as a volunteer meant to me. I began by relating how my work with the homeless in New York City had allowed the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, to come alive for me; that the work had enriched and enlarged my understanding and appreciation of Christ's presence in concrete situations. I ended by saying that just as I was able to say "yes" to God in many new ways, I felt compelled to say "no" to those choices we are presented with that lead to death -- both physical and spiritual.

For me these choices include payment of

Table Talk

by Jim Plato

war taxes, the death penalty, conscription, and others. As I began saying this some in the congregation got up and walked out. Others were fidgeting nervously in their seats. As I finished I turned to discover that the celebrant had turned beet red in embarrassment. After Mass several parishoners angrily confronted me and told me that my comments were inappropriate for the Eucharistic celebration. I responded that this seemed to me to be precisely the moment at which to share such experiences and ideas. How

is the Body and Blood of Jesus in our everyday lives if not in the experience of the suffering Christ who demands very hard concrete decisions on our part?

This was my experience of Christian base communities in El Salvador and Guatemala. It does not, however, describe my experience and impressions of the North American Church in large part. Perhaps the greatest wound the Church has suffered has been the accomodation of the Gospel throughout the centuries with the powers that be and the subsequent acquiescence of its moral authority and credibility.

This incident in my home parish remains one of the most profound Eucharistic experiences in my Christian life. Why is it difficult for us in the first world to hear these words? Why when we are gathered as a believing community to share the Body and Blood of Jesus do we balk at the demands of that very faith? It is clear that we as a church of position, comfort and wealth have indeed been "socially conditioned" to tune out the uncomfortable demands of the Gospel. It seems to me that to the extent that we (as church and Church) concretely choose to en flesh the Eucharist in our personal and communal lives we will find ourselves more and more at odds with the prevailing attitudes and values of our society and Church which destroy the spirit within us and drive us toward acceptance of the status quo. Jesus offers us very little immediate reward for responding to the difficult demands of following him. Least of all success. All we can hope and pray for is the Cross.



Jim Plato is a member of the Karen House community and is one of the best fix-it people we've ever had in the house.

HAUNTED BY GOD:

The Life of Dorothy Day



Tina Sipula

Benefit Performance for the
St. Louis Catholic Worker

SATURDAY, February 29

8:00 pm

Tegler Hall, 3550 Lindell

Followed by snack pot-luck.

\$5.00 Donation Requested.

Tickets available at Paul's Books, Catholic Supply
north and south, and Karen House.

The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to The Round Table, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Margaret Boyer, Kris Dennis, Beth Druhe, Virginia Druhe, Bill Miller, Tom Nelson, Katrina Plato, Barb Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

1840 Hogan ■ St. Louis, MO. 63106



Bulk Rate
U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Louis, MO
Permit No. 3087

Forwarding and Return Postage Guaranteed
Address Correction Requested

Karen House Catholic Worker 314.621.4052 www.karenhousecw.org 1840 Hogan St. Louis, MO 63106