

THE Round Table

SUMMER
1989

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

HOPE IN HARD TIMES:



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WHY THIS ISSUE?



Just as today corporations flee to Brazil, Korea and Taiwan where labor and resources are cheaper, around the turn of the century they flocked to cities such as East St. Louis and its surrounding environs. Cheap and plentiful land lured the stockyards and the railway yards and terminals away from St. Louis to the east side. A cheap coal supply drew the steel foundries, the iron and aluminum manufacturers and the packing plants. Of course, the workers who were to toil in these plants soon followed. East St. Louis' population jumped from 15,000 in 1890 to 70,000 in 1912. The communities of Granite City and Madison sprung up both to house and separate the Bulgarian and Macedonian immigrants, among others, from the African-Americans arriving from the South. The influx of the latter group was enormous. In a single four month period in 1912 the black population of East St. Louis shot up from 12,000 to 20,000. Many of these laborers had been railroaded into the city to be used as strikebreakers. This laid the ground for the worse race riot in our country's history. For 10 days in 1917 white citizens hunted down and brutally massacred men, women and children of African descent, laying bare the economic roots of racism.

The communities on the east side of the Mississippi have endured years of economic and racial oppression. This issue, however, is not a litany of complaints and struggles. Instead it illustrates the truth of St. Paul's words that the sufferings we endure will teach us patience and perseverance, that these virtues bring hope and that this hope is not deceptive. His point was not to glorify suffering, but to redeem it. The articles in this issue reveal that although the east side is economically poor, it is spiritually very rich, for hope has had fertile ground in which to grow. Judge Milton Wharton offers his perspective on the roots of crime and the need for community. Sister Julia Huiskamp lists the environmental abuses which the east side has had to suffer. High school students at East St. Louis Senior High voice their concerns and dreams and tell us not to be afraid of their city. Joe Angert provides photographs of the city. In addition to our house articles, Bill Miller presents a review of Jonathan Kozol's book, Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America.

We have sent to the east side the industries that were too smelly and too dirty for St. Louis, the businesses which were too immoral and the people who were too poor. This issue will reveal to you that in return, the people on the east side have given us hope.

Front cover drawing
by David Klein

-Ellen Rehg

the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community

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I WANT THE STIGMA REMOVED...

by
Ellen Rehg

"The paper exaggerates a lot. East St. Louis isn't that bad. It's like, they put it, walking down the street you might get shot at! They exaggerate a lot." I was talking to Kendall Peabody, a 16-year-old junior at East St. Louis Senior High School, and he was gently revealing a part of myself to me that I had been unaware even existed. "They put it like there's regular people and then there's East St. Louis people," he continued. "We're just like everybody else!"

It shouldn't be necessary for a group of people to have to demonstrate this basic fact of our shared humanness. Yet I myself had unwittingly accepted the view that there was something different about those east-side people which warranted just this type of interview. Sixteen-year-old Lisa Jackson told me, "I want the stigma (of being from East St. Louis) removed. I want to say 'I live in East St. Louis' and not have people say, 'Oh my God, can she read?' I want it to be like, 'Oh, I'm from Idaho.' Nobody cares!"

As Lisa's remark pointed out, I didn't care about students from Idaho, or even Kirkwood, for that matter. I had come to East St. Louis Senior High School to examine the students there, to put them under my microscope and discover what they were like, what life for them was like 'over there', as if they were from another planet.

What I found was a high school very much like my own. The students were preparing for their Prom that Saturday; on Sunday their baseball team would be playing another high school team at Busch Stadium. Seniors were studying for their final exams with that mixture of ease and tension which I knew so well. A student back from his first year away at college was visiting his old haunts, laughing casually with his former teachers as only graduated students can. The easy camaraderie and shared purpose that often exists between students and teachers was evident here as well.

Why should this surprise me? Why should I be surprised, for example, to learn that East St. Louis High has a chess team, which defeated Ladue's high school team in their last match, and in fact placed third in the state? "The image of East St. Louis has been distorted for years," explained Principal Samuel

Morgan. "You can always accentuate the negatives and not the positives, and that's what's happening now."

Carlos Skinner, a soft-spoken, 17-year-old senior related that "The articles in the paper, they keep putting us down. One time they'll write an article about how dirty it is and how rough East St. Louis is. Then they'll come back with an article about our football team making it to state. [They finished second in the state.] They'll make it seem like athletes come out of real, real, real tough neighborhoods, so..."

"So that's why we win," Jason Ford, a senior and football player, interjected. "They think, why we so fast? Because we're running from the police, and stuff like that. That's not true." The school's football



team was the subject of a four-part series in the Post-Dispatch in April. The series focused heavily on the material conditions at the school: the lack of equipment, unheated weight room, bus on the verge of breakdown, etc. It was as if the poverty of their surroundings made it impossible for the students to be normal, let alone successful. As junior Aronda Spearman pointed out, people "think only bad comes

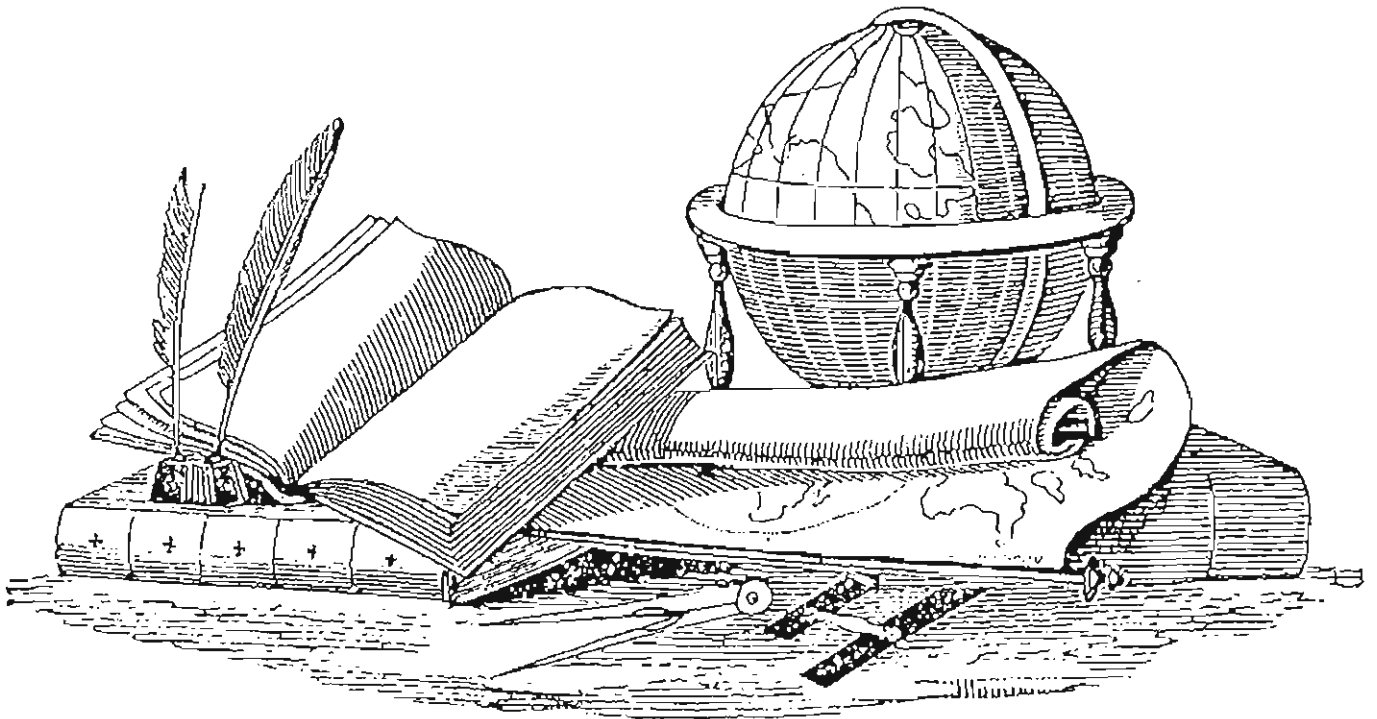
from (East St. Louis)." But why should we be surprised that a winning football team can come out of East St. Louis? Doesn't the very fact that we can be surprised that something good can come from the city reveal a prejudice against the poor? Their winning team is made into a curiosity, exploited by the media as a incongruent situation equivalent to a carnival's bearded lady.

I had to stop and ask myself why I had been so easily seduced by the media into seeing only the worst about East St. Louis, and into thinking that somehow poverty made people radically different from me. "Generally they walk the low man on the totem pole," Mr. Morgan said. "We're the low man on the totem pole. In Chicago they have drug problems, we have drug problems. OK, but they have a large tax base with which to eliminate some of those problems. (Our city) is so small that things become magnified by the smallness." That there are problems

sell these drugs for \$2000.00 a day, making more money than Michael Jordan. When kids been poor all their life and they grow up, like they don't have a mother and a father, they just have a mother. Their father leaves. They want to do things to make them have money so they can see how they feel. You walking around with nothing in your pockets, you can't have the things that you want, clothes passed down from big brothers."

But Carlos Skinner is optimistic. "I think in a few years the drug rate will go down, because they're seeing what's happening. Their buddies, friends..." "They're dead!" Ford exclaimed.

Crystal Jones, a junior, transferred to East St. Louis High last year after moving from Memphis. "When I was preparing to come here, I was told to look for the worst," she related. "Look for this to be happening and that to be happening. When I got here, (I found that) all those things they said, some were



no one denies. Even though, Lisa Jackson told me, laughing, "I think we should let people know that everything is not like they saw in National Lampoon's Vacation where you pass through downtown and leave with no hubcaps or doors. We have been stereotyped and people tend to lean into it. They think, 'Oh well, they think we're all thugs and hoodlums anyway, let's do it.' But everybody's not that way."

Drugs are a real problem, but as Kendall Peabody points out, "That happens every other place, not just here. It happens in more abundance here because it's poor. There are more poor people around here. It gets back to money. They want money. They're watching TV and want the things (they see on TV) so they think, how am I going to get money now?"

"Yea, the quick money," Ford agreed. "You go to MacDonald's, that's \$3.99 an hour. You could go

true. Then I realized to turn and look to the good side of East St. Louis. There are good educational opportunities here. In Memphis, I was majoring in child care to become a child psychiatrist." When she got to East St. Louis High she wanted to simply take more child care classes, but was challenged instead to widen her horizons. "I had felt there weren't any classes I could take since I couldn't take third year child care classes. Mr. Morgan talked to me (about taking other classes) such as psychology and general business."

Peabody also sees the strengths in his community. "East St. Louis is together, you know one for all. It brings us closer. Somewhere else, they might have crime but everyone's apart, going different ways, but we're all together here in East St. Louis."

I asked them what they did to foster this spirit.

Skinner replied, "For instance, we're all on the honor roll. We try to be a role model for the younger kids in grade school. I had a lot of scholarship offers in basketball but I was looking at it from different points of view. I chose St. Louis University, to go to school in the area. I'm the first one to be recruited ever in St. Louis U.'s history, from the east-side, so that's a plus. I want to help the other players over here."

"When he attends St. Louis U. they'll look upon him like he's nice, he's a good student. They'll say, 'I guess there's some other people over there just like him,'" Peabody explained.

Given the struggles of the city, its poverty and the stigma attached to those who live there, it is not surprising that "Some students, they would just like to get out of East St. Louis," Peabody said. "Other students, they want to prove the paper wrong. I myself, I want to graduate from high school and attend college. I want to major in medicine, make some money, you know! I'll be back, though. I won't just leave East St. Louis and go off like that, but I'll be back."

Aronda Spearman echoed these sentiments. "I would like to graduate from high school and then

leave and get my life together and then come back and try to do something with the city to help it. It's hard to get your start here because everybody always looks down on East St. Louis and thinks only bad comes from it."

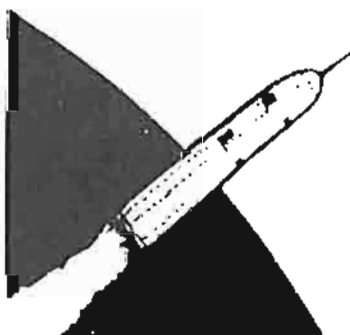
"I feel the same way Aronda does," Jackson added. "I want to go out and see more of the world and bring ideas back to help East St. Louis, because if we don't do it, nobody else is going to. There is a lot of hope here. We had a very wonderful, flowing type of city (once). As long as we keep trying, East St. Louis can be what it was and even better. And there's a lot of us who are willing to try."

"You have to prove it to some people because they say, 'He's in the college bound classes but he's a great athlete so they passed him through, to make it seem like he's smart. But I feel like, we'll prove it to them. So they'll know that we're not just getting passed through, we are doing our work. We want to be something,'" Ford said.

"Yea," Skinner replied, voicing a universal high school experience, "If you pass Miss Mayes (honors English class), you're doing something!"

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BUILD HOMES NOT BOMBS



Trident-II Missile



Renovated Public Housing

WHICH DO YOU WANT?

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We could build 524 more Trident-II nuclear missiles which are designed to allow the U.S. to strike first in a nuclear war. Each missile has 250 times the destructive power of the bomb dropped on Hiroshima in 1945.

A total of 845 Trident-II missiles are planned by the Pentagon.

COST: \$22 Billion

OR

HOMES

We could renovate and completely modernize 1.3 million units of public housing, creating thousands of new jobs in housing construction and other industries that provide materials and services for homes.

COST: \$22 Billion

Source: 1987 study for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) done by ARA Associates and Center for Defense Information.

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FIGHTING FOR A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT

by

Julia Huiskamp, D.C.

Could anything else go wrong in East St. Louis?

Weary residents say, "Don't ask, because the answer is always, yes, yes, yes!"

The latest problem is a massive sewage back up into people's homes, into schools, most notoriously, into a two million gallon sewage lake at the Villa Griffin Public Housing projects in the Landsdowne area of East St. Louis.

The sewer problems became so severe on March 20, 1989, that the entire Public School system was shut down because of sewage back-ups in the schools and school cafeterias following a heavy rain. East Side High School remained closed for a week until 4 inches of raw sewage was pumped from the school basement and boiler motors repaired.

In the meantime, the States Attorney of St. Clair Co., Ill., John Baricevic, brought suit against the City to force repair of six particularly troublesome sewer breaks cited by the Illinois EPA. Two of the sites involved failed pumps in the Loisel Hills area of the City. These failures have sent raw sewage into ditches in the most expensive and exclusive neighborhoods. Thus rich and poor were reduced to the same level of indignity of third world living by the failed sewers.

Feeling that their problems were the most grievous and demanded the City's first attention, the tenants of the Villa Griffin Housing Projects enlisted the services of the Land of Lincoln Legal Assistance Foundation to initiate a class action suit against the City to force a first priority clean up of the sewage lake in front of their complex.

The Villa Griffin Projects consists of 99 units of low rise apartments, currently occupied by about 90 families—approximately 300 persons, including a large number of children.

Since Christmas, 1988, sewage had been backing up in the sinks of some apartments. The "lake," comprised of run-off rain and backed up sewage, covers an area of over two acres directly in front of the development. During the warm February, the smell from the "lake" became over-bearing. The

East Side Board of Health sent a sample of the "lake" to the State lab in Springfield, Ill., which confirmed the presence of fecal material.

Joe Kurre, director of the East Side Health District, warned the City that residents could be infected with ailments ranging from severe diarrhea to hepatitis. He sent Board of Health nurses three times to the housing complex to operate out-reach clinics to inoculate the tenants against tetanus and to give advice on the potential water borne illnesses which might be contracted from the contaminated "lake."

On March 17th, at an acrimonious court session, Judge O'Brien ordered the lawyers for the County, the City, and the tenants to try to come to some agreement. The City did agree to begin by-pass pumping of the collapsed sewer near the Griffin Homes by March 20, and to begin structural repairs as soon as possible. Within a day the City began the by-pass pumping—moving sanitary sewer water into a near-by storm sewer. While this solution was an improvement over the previous solution tried by the Housing Authority of pumping the sewer water into the open "lake," it may have resulted in sending raw, untreated sewage into the Mississippi River.

Since no substantial progress had been seen on repairing the underlying sewer collapse, the Judge has ordered that the Mayor personally appear in Court every other Friday to give sewer repair progress reports.

A delegation of tenants has been at every court hearing to give testimony and to take reports of the court proceedings back to the complex. They have also been interviewed by all local newspapers, TV stations, by reporters from Chicago, from the New York Times and Los Angeles Times. Although it is inconvenient to attend court 15 miles distant and to show off "for the 20th time" sinks where the raw sewage backs up, tenants realize that there will be no improvement in the sewer situation without persistent legal action and media attention.



Photo by Joe Angert

This citizen's campaign is reminiscent of a similar campaign waged between 1982 and 1985 by Sister Cecelia and the Concerned Citizens organization of block clubs near St. Patrick's Catholic Church in East St. Louis.

In 1982, a truck driver gave Sister Cecelia, then principal of St. Patrick's school, a tip that uranium hexafluoride and uranium yellow-cake were being secretly stored at a warehouse at 3100 St. Clair Ave., a few blocks from the school.

Sister Cecelia notified a City health inspector who at first scoffed at the idea that low level radiation uranium was being stored near homes and schools. After he made an inspection, however, he reported that the information was indeed correct.

Nuclear physicists from Edlow Co. who operated the warehouse, and from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in Washington D.C., called soon to tell Sister Cecelia that the stored nuclear materials posed no safety threat to the people who lived nearby.

Neighbors requested a meeting with the president of the Edlow Co., Jack Edlow. He sent a corporate vice-president and a nuclear physicist to verify the safety of the storage arrangement.

A physicist from St. Louis consulted for the neighbors. He and the community group asked for more information and for possible removal of the stored materials.

In December, 1983, a fire broke out at the warehouse. It was partially destroyed. Upon investigation, it was found that the warehouse had no sprinkler system and that a number of fire and safety violations existed.

At this point Rev. Buck Jones and his organization, Project House Catholic Workers, 1814

the residential neighborhood of these stored nuclear materials.

After persistent, insistent protests, mostly on location, but also in Springfield and with lots of press coverage, Edlow Company finally removed the stored nuclear materials from the warehouse in 1985.

Victory was celebrated by the neighbors with a "yellow-cake" party. Refreshments were served; yellow balloons were released.

The fight against environmental hazards has hardly begun throughout the Metro East area, however. Other serious problems needing citizen attention are:

1. Air pollution caused in large part by factory emissions in areas both north and south of East St. Louis.
2. Onno-present garbage which is piled in heaps in alleys, in vacant buildings, and on vacant lots. There has been no regular garbage pick up in East St. Louis for over 18 months.
3. Toxic wastes dumped into the Mississippi River described by the regional EPA as...."the most toxic waste water ever measured in our region." This water is the end product of the Saugei II, American Bottoms Water Treatment plant.
4. Lead saturated soil which has infected hundreds of pre-schoolers with lead poisoning.
5. Both military warheads and nuclear waste from Three Mile Island are transported through and switched through the East St. Louis rail yards. These trains represent a potential accident with terrible consequences.

Community activists will have no shortage of causes to which to address themselves once the sever problems are corrected.

CRIME & HOPE

by

Judge Milton Wharton

Anyone growing up in East St. Louis in my era was keenly aware of the segregation. One knew there were certain areas you could not enter without risking attack or arrest. Even if you chose not to confront barriers directly, they hung over you like a cloud.

As a direct result of segregation there was injustice, and as a result of that there was an awareness of rights and liberties that you didn't enjoy at that time. So it was very natural for me to become interested in the law and to become an attorney.

One of the advantages of segregation, if you can call it that, was that there was no lack of local leadership and role models in the black community. All kinds of people had to live together. Children of doctors and professionals grew up next door to children of quite poor families. You came to realize that those kids were not really all that different from you and that you had the same capacity for success that they did. That is not the case now.



The church gave me the opportunity to get over the first great hurdle in my life: coming into formal education with not the best background. I had been raised by my grandmother who was illiterate, although a very smart and a very moral person. I came into school being able to read but not able to understand, because the sentence structure was so different from anything I had ever known.

I can recall one incident specifically. The line was "See Spot run," said Jane." I still remember struggling with that, trying to figure out what "said Jane" meant. If you aren't aware of punctuation and that this is not a continuous sentence, it makes absolutely no sense. So I was branded a slow kid and proceeded to fail first grade.

At that time my father, who was a hod carrier, had gone to Milwaukee to find work during a strike here in East St. Louis. When he heard about my problems in school, he sent for me and I was placed in a little, Catholic, German school called St. Francis. It was culture shock going from an all black class to that all white one! I still remember the first nun I encountered. Her name was Sr. Mary Hildegard. She was a very patient, loving and dedicated educator.

Because of being placed there I got the special attention that I needed. When I came back to East St. Louis, I was re-enrolled in a Catholic school and graduated from eighth grade there with no more academic problems.

I think providing quality education to poor people is the most important thing the church has done and I hope will continue to do. Yet next year the Catholic grade schools in East St. Louis will be consolidated into one. I have heard that classes are already filled and that neighboring schools are not going to take the overflow. Perhaps the Catholic church should be less reticent in publicizing what it is doing in education and health care and ministry for the poor and be more aggressive in the black community at seeking the support we need to continue the work.

One of the duties of the family and of a religious education is to let a person know the difference between right and wrong and its importance to the self-worth of the person. Although I have not always done the right thing, I have never been in a situation where I did not know what was the right thing to do. There may be mitigating circumstances and aggravating circumstances, but we need to know that even if we "succeed" in getting away with something there is still a cost. There is still guilt. The person still has to deal with herself or himself.

Milton Wharton is currently a member of St. Joseph Parish and a native of East St. Louis. His law degree is from DePaul University. He is Circuit Judge on the Twentieth Judicial Circuit of Illinois.
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I think many times that is the difference between someone doing something wrong and not doing it. There has to be that instant where you stop and think, "Hey, what am I doing?" That's enough. But many young people today don't have that concept of simple right and wrong, clearly defined, that says to them "What I'm going to do right now is wrong and there's going to be a consequence to that. It's wrong and I'll be betraying what my parents taught me; or I'll end up in the newspaper and disgrace my family."

It's my belief that we all need structure and discipline in our lives. By learning right from wrong, for instance, we have that structure. We know what choices we should make. We know basically how we should live our lives. We know how to treat others: we treat them as children of God who have feelings like ourselves. We treat them as we would want to be treated. And so we are spared a lot of stress that people without that concept of right and wrong have to endure.

Because you are disciplined, you can go to school. You can become a success because you can defer gratification of one thing to get something more vital. If there is a lack of that discipline, there is also usually a lack of self-worth. There is a lack of belief in oneself. There is a great deal of stress that translates many times into violence. Particularly in poor areas, where many feel that they have no ability to effectuate any change in their lives, this stress is internalized. They endure the things that people who are poor have to endure and the things that people who are powerless have to endure — and they explode.

I see that in many of the young men who come through my court, men who are totally anti-social if you would look at their records. But if you put them in the environment of the penitentiary, which is strictly disciplined, they become model prisoners because then they have that structure. They're told when to get up, when to work, eat, go to bed. And they can live with that. It may be what they were seeking all along, just that kind of discipline and structure in their lives. Upon being released many will revert to the prison environment. The person has become a success there and naturally will be more comfortable in that environment. We like things we can do. We don't like things we can't do.

I had a next door neighbor my age who grew up to be a very competent and very intelligent individual, but lacking that structure, he wound up in the penitentiary. He'll get out and say, "I'm not going back to that place." Maybe for a few months it'll work but then he's right back in. And he's a whiz at ceramics. Some of the things he sends home from the penitentiary are fabulous.

I approached him when he was out and I said, "Hey, I know you can make a good living selling this stuff." He told me, "Well, I don't have the materials and an oven." I told him he could get a loan and some help from the Small Business Administration, but he



said, "No, I can't do that." It's that same lack of self-worth; that belief that you're like a feather in the wind and that you have really no control over things. If you really want that control you almost have to go back to the prison environment.

Drugs, of course, is another form of a sought-after discipline. It's something you can make all-encompassing in your life. You can say, "If I can get this one thing I am a success. I get that feeling that I want and I can direct all my energies toward obtaining this one thing." That's another sort of convoluted, but self-enforced discipline.

I don't think we know very well how to help a person carry that experience of structure and discipline out of the prison with them. The only thing I can say is that when any offender is sentenced to prison there should be a definite separation between the violent and the non-violent, and a further separation between those who have a possibility of rehabilitation and those who have no possibility. It may sound very cold, but these are the hard decisions that we're going to have to make. We have to look at those people who are a danger to the community and hope that everything will be done to keep them incarcerated as long as possible. And for those that are not, we want to get them out of that system as quickly as possible.

I talked with a friend of mine who is a warden at a prison. He explained that some years ago most of the inmates in prison were neurotic. They had an understanding of what was right and wrong; they recognized that they deviated from this standard and on the whole were sorry that they couldn't make their behavior conform to it. They had a concept of right and wrong and guilt.

Today's inmate is much more psychotic. In what makes me

happy." Forget about the fact that the other person is a human being with feelings. There is no sense that by hurting someone there is going to be some kind of cost to myself. I do it because I want to do it and there is nothing wrong with that. If I'm being penalized right now, that's because society likes to do their thing and they don't condone my thing. When I get out I have the power again to inflict my opinion.

So how do you rehabilitate a person who has the attitude that when I take drugs, when I rob, when I rape, that's okay because it's what I want?

There are many, many success stories in East St. Louis. But there is still prevalent here a belief that you have to leave to become a success. So we have Kellon Winslow, Jackie Joyner, the former U.N. Ambassador Donald McHenry, Miles Davis. But until the city can hold those people that we are producing in East St. Louis it continues to be just a drain.

Yet, we can look at the accomplishments of the youth. For instance Lincoln Senior High School, which is in a destitute area, has won the state basketball championship three years in a row. We have a jazz band there that is number one in the nation. These are young people from poor backgrounds that have come

together and dedicated themselves to hard practice and have been able to excel. It required not only raw skill but a great deal of discipline.

I've always wanted to go the business schools of the nearby universities and say, "We have an area here that everyone recognizes as being one of tremendous potential because of its location. There is coal to the south, steel mills to the north, a railway transit system, the river. Let's come up with a list of ten products that can be manufactured here cheaper and better than anywhere else in the world."

I'd like to see local people come forward to provide funding and find funding. I think that if you can have one or two success stories, people could begin to see it as something they could become involved with. You could begin to let people know they have the power to lift themselves up, to develop their own economic base rather than waiting around for some industry to come in and create jobs—pie in the sky. That's not going to happen.

The effect of that could be epidemic. Children would see there are things here that can bring success to whatever aspirations they have.

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Photo by Joe Angert

Notes on the Photographs:

Photographs are deceitful. In the blink of an eye any photograph will receive and reflect back years of prejudice and bias and misconception. Their meaning is most often the meaning we give them, and often it is far removed from the truth.

I am suspicious of documentary photographs for this reason, and so I approached the task of this photo essay with grave concerns. What should I photograph? Should I look for images that I knew would illustrate the stories? Should I photograph the people or should I photograph the place? What can I cover with 10 images? What business do I have taking photos over there? I don't live there. I hardly know how to get there.

I made five trips across the river to take photos. I decided to concentrate on photographing the

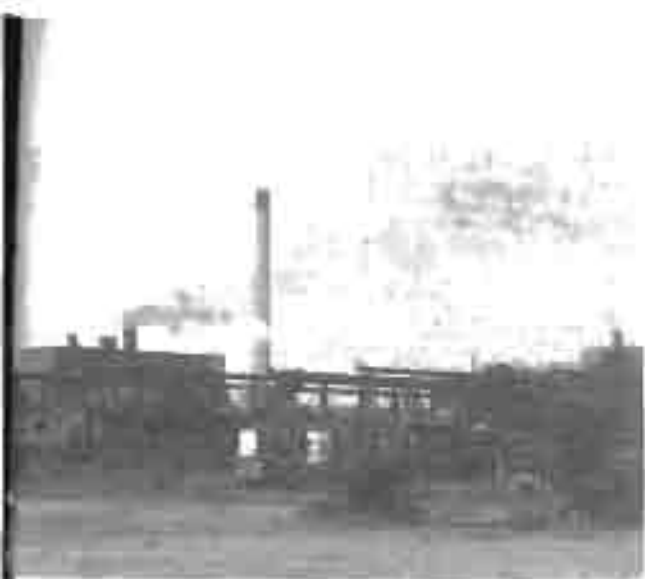
place. I didn't feel honest photographing the people without getting to know them first. I had advanced knowledge of the topics of this issue's articles and I allowed myself to be biased by that information.

So then what meaning is contained in these photos? They are as superficial as my experience was. The only truth they contain is directly visual; this is what the place looks like. In short, if you drive across the Poplar St. Bridge and get off on any one of the first three or so exits, you're likely to encounter a scene just like one of these photos.

I'm not trying to trivialize the photos with this comment, but I do want to caution you to view them carefully for they are not representative of the lives of the people there, and nothing else there is important.

Joe Angert





by Joe Angert



"RACHEL AND HER CHILDREN"

by Bill Miller



Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America

by Jonathan Kozol

Crown Publishers, Inc., New York, 1988., 261 pages

"Bill and Gwen are on a list for public housing (in New York City). What they do not know is that 200,000 names are on that list ahead of theirs. They believe that, if they do things right, they will soon be living in a project. What they do not know is that the waiting period is 18 years. Driven by economic forces she cannot control and is not sufficiently informed to understand, Gwen obeys the rules, fills out the forms, goes each day to search for an apartment she cannot afford, diligently combing a diminished housing market in which minimal rents exceed the limit she's permitted by at least \$100...." This passage from Jonathan Kozol's *Rachel and Her Children: Homeless Families in America* gives a sense of the power and the pain of this book. The quote is an example of how the author compellingly combines real life experiences of homeless people with crushing facts and figures about poverty, housing, and homelessness in America.

Many of the "new homeless" are people who have worked all their lives. But "when they lose their jobs, they lose their homes. When they lose their homes, they start to lose their families too." And, for some people, losing a job has not been difficult during the last eight years. As proof, Kozol cites statistics from the AFL-CIO whereby "two million jobs in steel, textiles, and other industries.... have disappeared each year since 1979. Nearly half of all new jobs created from 1979 to 1985 pay poverty-level wages."

Mr. Kozol hits hard at city governments who, with a little common sense, could offer decent opportunities for the homeless. He illustrates how

many government officials view the situation as a penalty for failure: "In several cities it is a crime to sleep in public; in some, armrests have been inserted in the middle of park benches to make it impossible for homeless people to lie down. In others, trash has been defined as 'public property,' making it a felony to forage in the rotted food."

City governments often find themselves doing crisis management for the homeless and rarely offer any wise, far-sighted planning. For example, in New York City, the rental price of two or three rooms in a public shelter for the homeless would, in three years time, be equal to the purchase of a new home! And, sadly, city governments have not been helped by the federal government in responding to this national emergency. The author relates that "Federal support for low-income housing dropped from \$28 billion to \$9 billion between 1981 and 1986."

This lack of involvement and concern—Kozol calls it "distancing"—happens to many of us, not just public officials, when we face homeless people. Some of us try to block them out, others look for ways to blame the homeless for their plight. Whatever we do, we often find some way to distance ourselves from this reality.

The denial, the distancing, the judging and the blaming—common responses to the homeless—point to very real moral and ethical questions that public officials, and all Americans, need to address. As individuals, we can begin to face the problem by examining our own attitudes about who is acceptable in this society, who is not, and why. Mr. Kozol points out that the cultural emphasis is on those who have the "right stuff," that is, those who are "caucasian, slender and self-reliant." On the other hand, we ignore and sometimes unwittingly punish those who have the "wrong stuff"—people such as an "indigent and pregnant woman, possible of dark skin, who depends

on we does not run laps or
do as

Officials play such an
important role in income housing, but
they are less in touch with
devising local and federal
regulations and other perks to
develop upscale dwellings and commercial office
space. At the same time, hundreds of thousands of
low-income housing units are lost each year in this
country to condominium conversion, abandonment,
arson, and demolition. And all the while, median rents
for people in the lowest income sector are climbing
(rents went up 30% for this group between 1978 and
1980) and a majority of these people are forced to pay
one-half to three-fourths of their income for housing
alone! Where is the justice in this? Where are the
leaders who can affect change and create an ethical
system?

Furthermore, Mr. Kozol touches upon the
morality of pouring billions of dollars and countless
resources into the military while people go without
food or shelter. What has happened to our capacity
to judge right from wrong when, as in 1984, our
country put 3 cents into subsidized housing for every
dollar authorized for national defense?

Clearly, the author's heartfelt concern is
especially for children and, in the following example,
he highlights the insanity of military spending and
how such choices ultimately affect children: "If the
Defense Secretary were to give up just a single
Pentagon budget item, that which pays for him to have
a private dining room, one million low-income school
children could get back their morning snack--a snack
denied them by administration cuts."

The key to solving this crisis Mr. Kozol
believes, is to create enough low-income housing to
meet the needs of poor Americans. A multi-billion
dollar federal program is necessary in order to rehab
or build the millions of housing units that are needed.

Finally, this book is an important contribution
in helping us to understand homelessness and it
especially helps us to see the human faces behind the
homeless label! More than anything the book calls the
American public to an awareness of this tragedy. That
calling forth can be summed up in the words of one
homeless mother, Rachel, whom the title of the book
was named after: "How come you care so much for
people (in other countries) you can't see? Ain't we the
world? Ain't we a piece of it? We are so close they
be afraid to see. Give us a shot at something. Ain't
we something? I'm depressed. But we are something!
People in America don't want to see"



THE TRADITIONAL HOPÍ INDIANS
HAVE FOUND THE KEY
TO HARMONIOUS LIVING
HAVING NO NEED
FOR GOVERNMENT,
ELECTION CAMPAIGNS,
COURTS, PRISONS,
MURDER OR WARFARE.
THEIR WHOLE SOME CULTURE
RESTS UPON
EACH INDIVIDUAL'S
COMPLETE ACCEPTANCE
OF RESPONSIBILITY
FOR THE CONSEQUENCES
OF THEIR MOTIVATIONS,
AS WELL AS THEIR ACTIONS,
AND THEIR KEEN AWARENESS
OF THE
SPIRITUAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF LIFE.

AMMON HENNACY
FROM "THE BOOK OF AMMON"

FROM LITTLE HOUSE

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.



When the National Catholic Reporter asked Dorothy Day in 1976 how to celebrate the bicentennial, she answered one word, "Repent." One means of repentance is to do public penance by demonstrating, leafletting, speaking on the streets, and risking arrest — acts of resistance to our culture.

The Worker is a resistance community, resisting homelessness, waste of food, domestic violence, television, militarism, all the baggage and sinfulness of our culture we can name. But because we are ourselves part of the culture, it is difficult to gain some distance, to identify our own participation, to know what it is we should resist. In public demonstrations, which are certainly a penance, we see our world differently, from a new perspective. Sometimes we can catch a glimpse of our own complicity. Here below are some of the spots workers have been standing in since February.

1. One cold February Saturday, Jim, Virginia, Ellen, and Myrrah went to Rocky Fork Baptist Church, the Afro-American church burned down by whites.



Ellen, Ketchikan

Virginia: There were lots of people, busses from around the country. We walked half a mile to the charred church ruins and a tiny cemetery that's been in use 120 years. Very pretty country. We prayed, sang, committed ourselves to rebuilding the church. It reminded me of walking into some of the valleys in Nicaragua where all the houses have been burned. The theme was "Here We Stand." And then the Holiday Inn invited us back to a reception with warm food.

Ellen: How wonderful to be actually marching, blacks and whites together against racism. To hear the words people said was healing.

Jim: I just remember the pastor spoke. He was honest enough to be angry. Talk of reconciliation is good but the people who did this must be brought to justice.

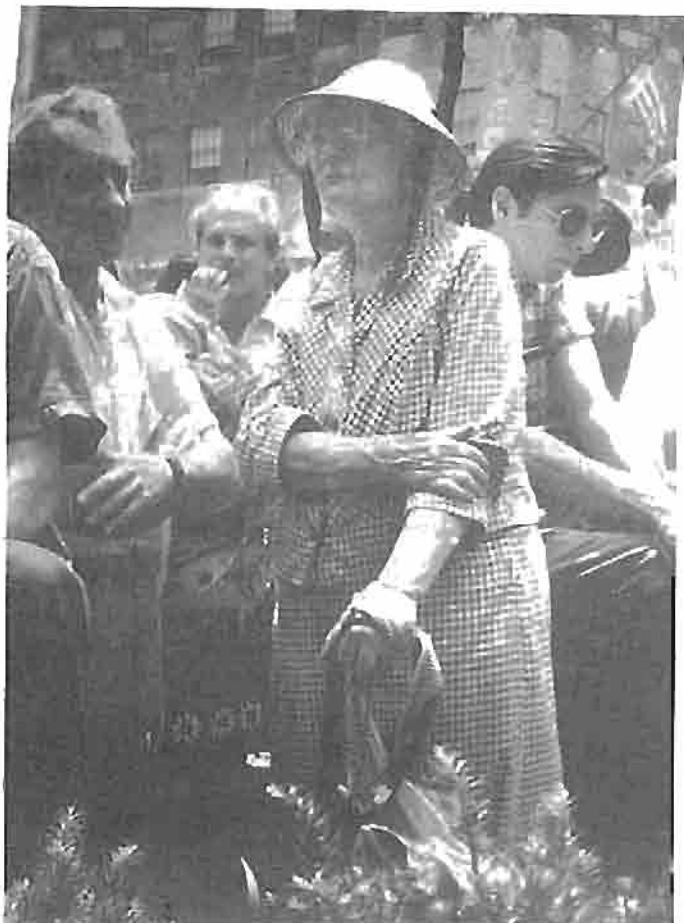
2. March 11 — Harriette and Teka helped make "Line of Resistance" pictures of personal commitment to stand with the people of Central America, for use in St. Louis demonstrations. Maria Teresa Tula who had been tortured in Salvador gave a very moving talk. Charlie King sang and the group walked from Tegler Hall to the army recruiting center on Grandell Square.

3. Community members weren't always crystal clear in their memory of events. Virginia, Pat, Mark, and Ellen all remember going to something downtown about Central America that got cancelled either because of cold and heavy wind or heavy rain. The group went to City Hall and made reports inside.

Teka: I think it was March 20. I am sure it was the day of the elections in El Salvador, and we gathered to protest them.

4. In early April Teka went to the Old Post Office to protest passage of contra aid at the senators' offices.

5. April 9 — Harriette: I went to Washington, D.C. to march in favor of legalized abortion. This has been a journey of Faith for me. I work for a society that would nurture women, never leave them homeless or without medical care. But I believe women must



Dorothy Day: Anti-war demonstration. Rockefeller Center 1969. Credit: Marquette Univ. Archives

exercise their own full humanness. And besides, I think it would be terrible to allow the government into this choice. The government could as well require abortions as outlaw them. About the march in Washington, it was a nice outlet for our pent up frustrations and made us feel we were expressing ourselves. I feel better, even if I don't know whether anyone else learns from it. I really feel women are just emerging from invisibility and that we are going to become visible to the general public. People will see that a woman's life is more than breathing, that it is as significant as a man's life and that a woman is a responsible moral agent. There is such a thing as the sin of presumption in bringing children into the world when there is no way to care for them.

6. April 14 — Mark, Pat, Virginia, Harriette, Katrina, and Teka all went to the Federal Building to mark tax day.

Pat: We were going to walk into the building and one by one pick up 1040 forms and burn them but the police told us that would violate an ordinance against open burning. It was unfortunate that we expended a large amount of energy negotiating with police about

their restrictions. The police response to our presence became as much of a focus as resistance to spending our tax dollars on war. I was carrying a sign that said, "Tax dollars for schools, not for bombs," and one of the police said, "Oh, isn't that clever, and you were even able to spell it correctly." He was baiting me and I didn't bait him back but I did engage in repartee and I didn't handle it very well. Later I felt ashamed because I remembered how civil rights demonstrators were treated, what they endured, often in total silence. It was a humbling experience, that even the most ordinary demonstration requires that we center ourselves and recall our values and principles.

Katrina: Another woman, Kim, said she felt like we were talking to the choir of a church, talking to ourselves. Not a lot of people seemed interested in listening to us. I ached in my heart for people to hear and I was discouraged people were walking away. A handful of people stayed around the steps and that is better than none. I always have to remember that success is not in numbers but in the hearts of the people who stop to listen.

Teka: We focused on Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, the death squad governments.

Mark: Others began to tear their forms up since we were not allowed to burn them. I held out in the belief that we would wear them down. Sure enough, they did finally relent and I stepped forward and burned mine.

7. May 3 and 5 — Mary Ann stood out in front of the General Dynamics M-1 tank plant in Sterling Heights, MI, and outside Orchestra Hall in Minneapolis with small bands of demonstrators in very cold weather (she'd packed and left St. Louis the day it was 95%). Local groups had gathered in both places to resist the liturgy of profits known as the corporate annual meeting at G.D. and Honeywell.

Mary Ann: Inside the meeting at G.D. I said in my speech I'd been at more of them than anyone there but David Lewis. I didn't tell the shareholders, but I find it harder and harder to go. It's not fun. I feel like I'm facing evil. The demonstrations outside remind me what we are about, obeying Ephesians 6 to "stand firm your ground against the powers and principalities."

"The contrast between expenditures on armaments and on development reflects a shift in priorities from meeting human needs to promoting 'national security' and represents a massive distortion of resource allocations."

— "Economic Justice for All: Catholic Social Teaching and the U.S. Economy" — Pastoral Letter of the U.S. Catholic Bishops, 1986

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

8. May 13 — The day before Mothers' Day Mary Ann joined WILPF outside McDonnell Douglas world headquarters with preschool children, Kool-Aid, balloons, and flowers. She came home with a ticket for illegal assembly without a permit.

9. May 15 — Mark and Ellen and Jim acted as support to those risking arrest at Union Station. Five people climbed a platform and unfurled a banner that read, "Stop U.S. Aid to Death Squad Government — El Salvador."

Ellen: It really did me good to see the truth being displayed so clearly. The banner was visible from Highway 40. It was a relief to be able to broadcast it. I had a good talk with some of the security officers and I felt it was successful. But I did regret that the captain was so tense.

Jim was the spokesperson but the police captain was so angry he hustled him off into the police car and drove it to the end of the parking lot and detained him, threatening arrest.

Jim: There was a lot of communication between people

in the action and support people and the police until the captain came. It surprised me.

June 1 — Mark and Mary Ann distribute "Peace Dispatch" papers headlining the U.S. war in Salvador in downtown Post Dispatch coin boxes.

Mark: It was one of the most gratifying actions I've ever participated in. I do believe for a few hours we broke through the media monopoly, defied the forces of thought control, and graphically spoke the truth to anyone who bothered to glance at a newspaper vending box.

There is a relief in being able to say no, to resist with one's own body. Standing with others who share our hope renews us, gives us courage. Casting ourselves out of the mainstream in an act of penance with the firm purpose to sin no more — even though in our very acts of resistance we fail to be our best selves — this act of repentance and call to others to join us is the fullness of expression of our daily lives and a source of renewal, enabling us to go back home and mop the floor or write an article or go with a guest to Malcolm Bliss.

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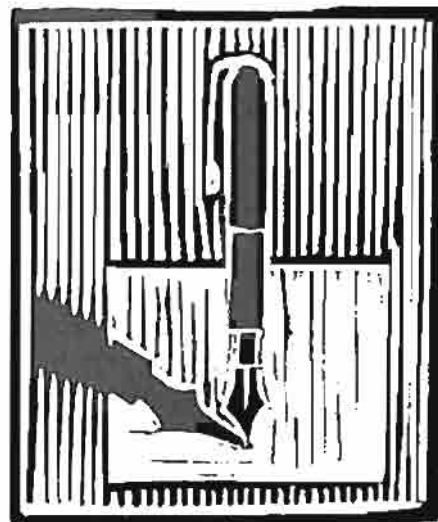
FROM OUR MAILBAG

Dear Catholic Worker,

Maybe you sometimes feel forsaken and forgotten but I want you to know I am one who appreciates your efforts among the women who need love and kindness so badly.

If only there had been such a place for me and my four children to go, I might not have wasted twenty-eight years of my life with an abusive husband. Perhaps under religious supervision I might have learned not to hate my mate but to have prayed for his soul. The poor man is dead now and I never realized he was abusive because he felt less than a man and drink made him feel like the king of his household. By holding me and the children in fear of him, he could live with himself. He died at seventy-five by pulling loose all of his life support system. I now pray that God will be merciful to him at the resurrection. I wish I had prayed more for him while he was living instead of hating him.

Thanks for listening,
Name withheld



FROM KAREN HOUSE

by Virginia Druhe



In some ways one could say there is never anything new at the Worker. The dynamics of relationships between guests, supporters, community, children and neighbors seem in some ways eternal. Certain elements of human nature are revealed over and over again: fear and heroism, cheer and discouragement, blindness and kindness. I sometimes think there is more instruction on sin, grace and the Gospel in a Worker house than one soul can bear. Which is, I suppose, why we live in community.

Nonetheless, at times a certain theme will catch my attention, seem suddenly to occur over and over for my benefit. In these last months there are two moments that keep striking home, calling me to full attention to the grace of the interaction.

One of these motifs began on a late winter afternoon. I was rushing to answer the front door. The man waiting was middle-aged and had apparently been an outcast of society for some time. For some reason when I opened the door to him I said, "Yes, sir?" It will be a long time before I forget the look in his eyes in response, although I have seen it many times since. It was relief, I think, at finally being addressed with the dignity he still felt he merited as a human being.

The circumstances of his life were far from dignified. He was obviously struggling to meet each small necessity of life and at times failing in the struggle. He was evidently without food, shelter, a place to wash, a change of clothes, a place to belong. Yet his dignity was there, wounded enough by all those circumstances, but still intact. In that brief moment I saw just how wounded he was. That anonymous man taught me how very simple it is to restore some dignity in the lives of those society rejects because of their wounds. This man had held on to his humanness through all he had endured. Because of that, he showed me again the power of simply being with the poor, even when I am powerless to change our situations.

The other series of interactions that have caught my attention and sustained me in the long months of late winter and early spring are the generosity and wit and courage of the women who stay with us. Over and over again I have been awed

by these women, supposedly in straits far more dire than my own, who have so much left over to give to others. I am touched by how often one of them will take the time to specially greet me or give me a hug when I walk in the door. And how often when they crowd into the clothes room on Tuesday nights the conversation turns to giving rather than getting: "Rhonda, won't this fit your baby?" Or, "Here, this will look good on you. You take it."

I see an amazing raw courage when these women come home furious after getting the run around from an agency or a landlord. There is real beauty in their capacity to honestly own so much frustration and pain and anger, and not be destroyed by it. Often enough someone will come in and make



us all laugh, hard, in our anger. Then they go off to do someone else's chore, watch someone else's child, listen to someone else's problem. There is heroism in these women. It astounds, often enough stops me in my tracks, to see them not only endure, but to live with so much grace and humor and generosity. ✚

FROM LATIN AMERICA

by Ann Manganaro, S.L.



Dear Friends,

First, I apologize to so many of you—all those who have written me in the last few months and have yet to receive a response. For some reason, I have found it very difficult to write anything to anyone recently, in this situation which grows increasingly and ominously more complex and more brutal, and yet where I encounter a consistent and most amazing vitality, resiliency and hope. I fear that what I write will come out sounding grim and that would be misleading. My days are anything but grim. I find that our health care work in this region is blossoming. I feel a growing fondness and gratitude for the people with whom I live and work and whose wonderful spirit so marvelously sustains me. I am most grateful to have Martha, a good friend and also a Sister of Loretto, here sharing with me in the life of this community with all its problems and all its joys.

Yet, objectively, things are often grim. There has been a clear rise in death squad activity since the election of Christiani, the right-wing ARENA party's candidate, in the mid-March elections. There have been absurd accusations made by ultra-right members of the armed forces, against prominent Church people and organizations (for example, that the pastor of a church serving a large poor population was a member of a group of "urban commandos" [FMLN groups that operate in the City of San Salvador], that the Jesuit University was a center for planning "urban terrorist" activities, or that the Legal Aid Office of the Catholic Archdiocese of San Salvador was a front for the FMLN). There have been raids and arrests at the offices of several popular organizations, including the office of an organization which provides services to displaced people and refugees and also serves as a house of hospitality for those who live in re-population communities when they come into the city. Most of the approximately 70 people who were arrested in the latter raid were brutally tortured, including sick people who had come into the city for treatment or family members of people who were hospitalized.

And these grim events take an undeniable toll in people's lives. At the clinics in Guarjila and Los Ranchos we see all too many adults with gastritis, headaches, and other problems that are clearly stress-related. We see serious depressions that are often clearly situational, related to the death or disappearance of family members for example. Just today, a woman was brought to us by car from a community

to the north of us. She and several other persons had walked hours to bring news of the invasion of their town yesterday by troops who subsequently rounded up eight men from the town, including the woman's twenty year old son. When the two priests who work in the town went with the relatives to demand their release, they were threatened with tear gas and automatic rifles. The eight were taken from the town by the troops; nothing is yet known of their whereabouts. The woman arrived here exhausted, barely able to walk and near hysteria from anxiety and fear for her son. Giving her tranquilizers may help to calm her temporarily, but will not restore her son to her. The massive evil that perpetrates such incidents remains.

Indeed tragedies abound here, yet somehow they are not the stuff of our daily life. Our daily life is filled with the manner of beauty and goodness. The beauty of the green hills and the goodness of the corn growing; the beauty of children leaping and playing exuberantly in the first rains; the goodness of their mothers so steadily and patiently doing whatever needs to be done not only in their homes but throughout this community to bring it to life; the beauty and goodness of the people with whom I live and work. The very quiet health promoter whose calm competence helps to hold our health team together, the vivacious young health promoter who is always eager to learn more, the dear friend and neighbor whose easy laughter and quick generosity make our lives so much lighter, the cooks in the communal kitchen whose kind good humor is as nourishing as the food they prepare us, the matriarch whose wisdom and spirit animate all around her.

For all these dear and valiant women with whom I now share the daily bread of life itself, and for dozens more whom I could describe with equal love, I give thanks continually to God, praying for their safety and sustenance. And, I hope and pray that all of you find it in your hearts to work for the peace of this land which they so love and which I too have come to love so much.



END OF NOVEMBER 1988

Her face is lined with loss and the custom of loss,
With the leaving too often of one more
Loved one, of whom how many have been,
Or will be, destroyed in this deadly place.
How many times, from the midst of tears, will she dare
Turn toward her children to begin again
The dailiness that is their bread: the corn
To grind, the wood to find for fire, goats
To tend, clothes to mend, to wash, to hang
In the burning sun? And what fire will burn
Away her pain, as that other fire eats
Alive her son, sister, lover? Long
Years of this life's death endured have worn
Her slender hopes to the bone. Yet still hope rises
In her deep eyes, in a love beyond all losses.

Ann Manganaro, S.L.



A CATHOLIC WORKER PARODY

by Mark Scheu

(sung to the tune "When I Was A Lad" of Gilbert and Sullivan)

When I was a lad I spent some time
As a volunteer in a city soup line.
I sliced the onions and I split the beans
And I smiled at the guests no matter how mean.

Chorus: And he smiled . . .

I served the soup so graciously
That now I'm in charge of the community.

Chorus: He served the . . .

Of all possessions I set myself free
And along with them, responsibility.
I declined all meat and drank only tea
And became the very model of simplicity

Chorus: He became the . . .

That simple life so suited me
That now I'm in charge of the community.

Chorus: That simple life so suited he . . .

Then came the time to do CD;
I prepared myself to resist passively.
I denied my name, declined all bail,
And even refused to acknowledge my mail.

Chorus: He even refused . . .

I became such a pest, they set me free,
To be given charge of the community.

Chorus: He became such . . .

I woke each morning at the stroke of four
And prayed the matins behind closed doors;
Each single verse I seemed to repeat
Though some might claim I was still asleep.

Chorus: Though some might . . .

I prayed so quiet, they rewarded me,
And now I'm in charge of the community.

Chorus: And now he's . . .

Of saints and martyrs I acquired such a grip,
Of all such matters I took leadership.
Peter and Dorothy I quoted like law,
Like a pious scribe I was held in awe.

Chorus: Like a pious . . .

I quoted them so obnoxiously,
That I was given charge of the community.

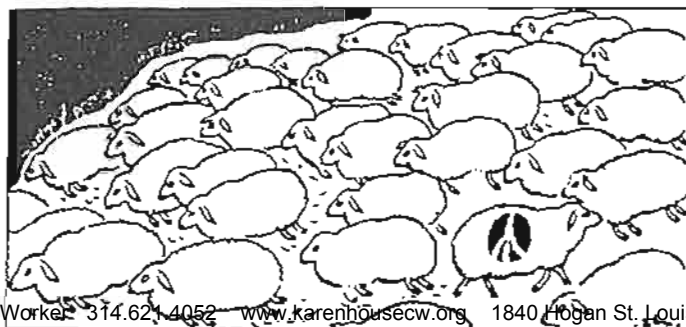
Chorus: He quoted them . . .

Catholic Workers all, whoever you may be,
If you want to rise to the top of the tree;
If your soul isn't fettered to job or school,
Be careful to be guided by this golden rule:

Chorus: Be careful to . . .

Stick close to the poor, pose nonviolently,
And you all may be in charge of your communities.

Chorus: Stick close to . . .



by Barb Prosser

I've experienced some changes in my life as of late. Oh, it's true I am always in transition to some degree, but these changes seem awfully close together.

I have mixed feelings about the changes. Some I welcome, some seem painful and others seem placed before me as a reminder of how fluid life is.

I am not one to change easily. When I image change within myself, I see tightly clenched fists, while knuckles and all, being pried open. I seem to lose sight of the fact that they are usually being pried open for a gift of someone or something. It almost seems involuntary, this clenching. My rational self tries to reassure my muscles that it is alright to relax, but the fists stay closed until peeled open, almost grudgingly, by a circumstance that demands an open palm.

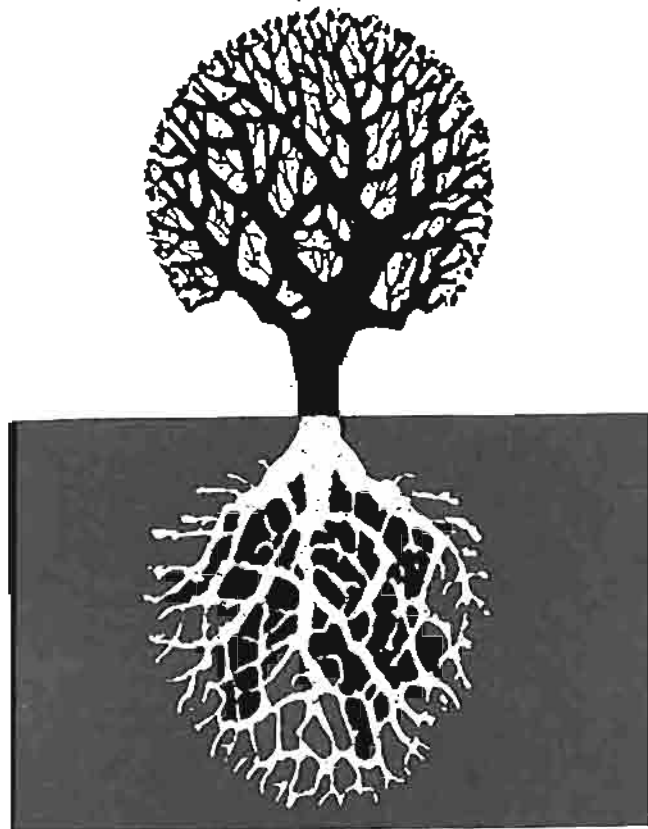
Perhaps this becomes an issue with me because this Pentecost I feel called once again to let go of some of the restrictions that are locked up inside of me. I am repeatedly reminded to be more responsive to the Holy Spirit.

But this control I seem to claim is something that is tough for me to let go of. I work too hard to attain it. And for what? When I look at how change occurs around me, in the church, in larger communities in my life, it has always been at a point where someone (perhaps myself) has let go of some of the control, some of the power, and trusted in what was happening in the moment.

I am distracted by the energy I use to focus on maintaining control, and so I miss much of what is speaking to me in the present moment.

In my work at the nursing home I will plan and organize for the next day, the next meeting, the next year. It is my responsibility to do so. But if I choose this work in health care for the elderly as a life ministry I must do more. If I cannot be present to those I minister to, where is the gift in my vocation? If I do not respond to the needs of a resident requiring my assistance, what does my planning do for her?

A guest at Cass House once reminded me of this when she exclaimed, "You are all so busy running around doing things for us, you don't have time to listen us." True it was, for I am sure we were in the process of preparing for a meal, getting laundry done, cleaning, or performing a task we deemed necessary at the time. I had lost sight of what this guest really needed aside from the food, toilet paper or towels: someone to be present to her, to listen to her.



Stanley reminds me of this at Mary Queen and Mother Center. At sixty-two years old, he is black, male and lucid. He is not the norm as far as residents go. Who would think that at this point in his life he would be living in a nursing home where the average person is an eighty-nine year old female who has lived in south St. Louis most of her life? But he ministers to those around him. He cares for, loves, responds to the residents, their families and our employees from his wheelchair. He is present to all whom he comes into contact with. He is present to me. In this witness he calls me to do the same.

So I continue to work on achieving a balance in my life. On the one hand I try to learn from past experiences by bringing any history with me that can be life-giving, while on the other I try to leave the trappings and corruptions of failed experiences behind. I work on the balance of having a vision to follow while not missing the present moment and the enjoyment it may bring. I work on peeling away the old, dead bark to allow new growth to surface.

I ask God to continue to urge my closed fists open so I may move out of what is now changing and be attentive to this new moment of grace I am to experience. ✦

A ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

"The Church in Peru and Brazil"

by Mev Puleo

Mev Puleo, photographer and graduate student in theology, is spending the summer in Peru and Brazil visiting local churches.

Friday, August 25

7:30pm, Karen House

We are grateful for the ways you support this work!

We can still use:

- Sandwiches to give out at the door.
- Extra volunteers during the first two weeks of August to cook, take house, and live in.

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, Pat Coy, Virginia Druhe, Bill Miller, Barb Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

THE ROUND TABLE

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