

THE Round Table

Spring
2006

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

Crossing the Divide from Privilege to Community



Why This Issue?

Dr. Martin Luther King called racism a pathology of the white culture. Aware that this is indeed pathology, or illness, we offer this Roundtable in hopes of exposing our wounds - to begin to heal them, or at the very least, to let them be known to ourselves and to others. We know that often to become aware of our problems of privilege we need those affected by them to speak truth to our power. It may only be when our son or daughter confronts us about our drinking problem that we start those twelve steps. Whites need to be confronted with privilege. We all need to talk about how we will move forward and evolve into a community. To do that we must challenge ourselves out of silent and insidious racism. It is not only that breaking down racism is a beautiful thing, it is our duty.

Jenny will launch us into this discussion of white privilege through historical and contemporary contexts. Miguel (Mike) relates a telling story of his current life of vulnerable solidarity and how that teaches him. We will hear a conversation with Lorraine and Dorothy as they share their experiences with white authority and privilege. Melissa reflects on her educational privilege. Tony will speak of his experiences at Karen House and in the neighborhood. And we hope our regular columns will speak to you as well.

A sickness this old and this infectious is an often unnoticed malady. But there is health to be had. The paradox of this illness, it seems, is that its direct effects are felt by another, and it seems that the way to cure it is to move closer to that other - physically, emotionally, relationally.

The process itself of writing this issue has been one of dialogue, introspection, and connection. If it calls to you, heed the call. Bridging the wide gap of racism and economic injustice needs all of us - today. And so, let us listen and engage...



-- Christen Parker

Front cover photo from Annjie and Jenny's wedding
by Christine O'Rourke

Centerfold by Jenny Truax

Suggestions compiled from 1) "What Families Can Do About Racism" (ipj-ppj.org) 2) "Ten Things to Remember: Anti-Racist Strategies" by Chris Dixon (colours.mahost.org/org/whitestudents.html) and 3) "How White People Can Serve As Allies to People of Color" by Paul Kivel, [White Privilege](http://WhitePrivilege)

Note: Information and graphic in centerfold from last issue came from the following sources: *The Palestine-Israeli Conflict: A Beginner's Guide* by Dan Cohn-Sherbok & Dawoud El-Alami, The Jewish Virtual Library website, and *When the Rain Returns: Towards Justice and Reconciliation in Palestine and Israel* by the International Working Party.

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The Privilege of White Inheritance

by Jenny Truax

Ask a fish what water is, and you'll get no answer, says author Tim Wise in describing white privilege. We white folks are often unaware of our privilege, although we're swimming in it. Ask a person of color about white privilege and racism, however, and she will probably have more to say. White privileges are opportunities and advantages, both large and small, that whites receive in contrast to people of color.

Author James Baldwin once said, "Being white means not having to think about it." Indeed, we white folks mostly think of racism in terms of 'them' - what it means to be a person of color. We have a vague understanding that racial minorities had a hard time 200 years ago, but we often underestimate the fallout of that historical experience. We may even recognize that people of color still face discrimination, but we just as surely miss the flipside of the racism coin: that these disadvantages are, in fact, great advantages to us. We walk around the obstacles that people of color must hurdle repeatedly. When I shop at a store, apply for a job, or look for an apartment, I am not threatening. Most of the people evaluating me look like me, and they see in me a reflection of themselves. I am white, I am one of them. This gives me an advantage that many of us don't want to admit.

All people of color are denigrated by white privilege. This article will focus on white privilege's impact on African Americans. It is written by a white person, for white people; in an effort to confront both individual and societal racism.

Looking Back

Slavery, first of Native Americans (whose land, in places, was as densely populated as Europe when Christopher Columbus invaded in 1492), then primarily of West Africans, was an institutionalized form of labor for the first 400 years of U.S. history. This free labor enabled early white Europeans to amass

huge sums of wealth and power. Across the board, race played a key role in allowing whites to get ahead:

"[E]arly legal systems authorized attacks on Native Americans, and encouraged the appropriation of their lands. These systems legitimized racialized slavery, limited naturalized citizenship to white immigrants, identified Asian immigrants as expressly unwelcome, and provided the pretexts for restricting the voting, exploiting the labor, and seizing the property of Asian-, Mexican-, Native-, and African Americans"(1)

In 1865, Congress approved the Thirteenth Amendment, outlawing slavery. Many recognized the impracticality of simply freeing millions of slaves without providing structural support for entry into free society. It had been a crime punishable by death for slaves to learn to read. Former slaves were promised "forty acres and a mule" as part of Reconstruction after the Civil War. This promise, along with others that guaranteed education and equal rights, was largely unfulfilled. The Compromise of 1887 ended federal protections for former slaves, and soon, southern states began instituting laws to restrict former slaves in virtually every aspect of society.

In the years following, the largest migration in U.S. history would occur. Former slaves, desperate for adequate employment, left the south for promises of work in northern cities. Finding employment in factories and rail yards, they were often used as scabs to break union strikes. This exacerbated racial tension towards a peak in 1919, when over 20 white race riots broke out in so-called "Red Summer". One of the bloodiest riots was in East St. Louis. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch described that July night in 1917: "I saw Negro women begging for mercy and pleading that they had harmed no one, set upon by white women of the baser sort, who laughed and answered the coarse sallies of men as they beat the Negroes' face and breasts with fists, stones and sticks"(2) The rioters

Jenny Truax and Tony Hilkin have put together a talk on privilege for high school and college students, with movie clips, discussion time, and suggestions for action. Call them at 621-4052 if you'd like them to speak.

destroyed over 200 homes, and killed up to 200 people. It was estimated that up to 7,000 African Americans fled to St. Louis, many walking over the Eads Bridge in a shocked and sorrowful march that very night.

In Our Lifetimes

The G.I. Bill was one of the largest programs of 'white affirmative action' in U.S. history. Returning veterans of World War II received preferential treatment in jobs, and financial assistance for education and home ownership. Over 2.5 million African Americans had enlisted in the military, but received almost none of these benefits. Lawmakers, willing to mandate federal assistance to white veterans, were unwilling to mandate equal rights for African Americans. White colleges did not admit African Americans, and the few historically black colleges were filled to capacity, hence forced to turn away over 20,000 veterans. By 1946, only 20% of the 100,000 African American applicants actually got into college. The resulting upward mobility of the millions of white men receiving free college degrees widened the gulf between black and white.(3)

Another law of the New Deal era, the Federal Housing Act of 1934, provided federal government credit for home buyers, enabling millions of (mostly white) people to purchase homes for the first time. Administered by the Federal Housing Agency (FHA), this credit was steered towards the emerging all-white suburbs, rather than racially-mixed or urban areas. Between 1934 and 1962, less than 2% of this FHA financing was available to nonwhite families due to both overt and veiled discrimination. In St. Louis, homebuyers in the mostly white St. Louis County received six times as much loan money, and five times as many mortgages, than those in St. Louis City between 1943 and 1960. These facts reveal a systematic policy towards de-funding and "de-whiting" cities, while diverting funds towards constructing racially exclusive suburbs.(4)

The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights' investigation of the once-promising "1968 Housing and Urban Development Act" described the Act's results: an intentional process that gutted inner city neighborhoods:

"FHA officials collaborated with blockbusters in financing the flight of low-income whites out of inner-city neighborhoods, then arranging the purchases of substandard housing by minorities desperate to own their own homes. This...brought great profits to lenders, unscrupulous realtors and speculators (almost all of them white), but led to price fixing and inflation of housing costs by more than 200 percent. Bankers then foreclosed on the mortgages of these substandard homes. In re-



sponse, the Department of Housing and Urban Development essentially redlined inner cities, making them ineligible for future loans, a decision that destroyed the value of inner-city housing for generations to come."

Even those not receiving G.I. benefits were affected: redlining and FHA policy ensured that whites would be steered towards suburbs and African Americans towards inner cities. After World War II, my grandparents were given money, a free college education, and loan guarantees for a new house in the 'burbs. A ticket out and up, de-

scribed well in Ani DiFranco's song *Subdivision*: "White people are so scared of black people/ they bulldoze out to the country and put up houses on little loop-de-loop streets, And America gets its heart cut right out of its chest/ And the Berlin Wall still runs down Main Street, separating east side from west."

The resistance to first passing, and then enforcing, fair housing laws led to profound racial segregation. The results of this enforced "ghettoization" are described in the Kerner Commission's report, commissioned by President Lyndon Johnson to identify the causes of the many black race riots during the late 1960s: "Segregation and poverty have created in the racial ghetto a destructive environment totally unknown to most Americans," and that to continue present housing policies was "to make permanent the division of our country into two societies: one, largely negro and poor, located in the central cities; the other, predominantly white and affluent, located in the suburbs."(5)

Obviously, these predictions have come true across the United States. Today, according to one study, St. Louis is the fourth most segregated metropolitan city in America. Segregation provides a tangible, structural barrier for African Americans. The racial ghetto both limits and defines life choices regardless of individual talent or interest. The deplorable state of public city schools and lack of access to jobs are just two examples. Another is environmental racism, where toxic waste, medical incinerators, and garbage dumps are often located in the poorest, and darkest, neighborhoods. In Houston, where African Americans comprise 25% of the population, over 75% of the local garbage incinerators and 100% of the city-owned garbage dumps are located in African American neighborhoods. In 1987, the Commission for Racial Justice of the United Church of Christ found race to be the most significant variable in determining the location of commercial hazardous waste facilities.(6)

Racial housing segregation has led to racial isolation in public schools. In the City of St. Louis, 82% of the

students are black or Hispanic, in Philadelphia and Cleveland, 79%; in Detroit, 96%. Per-student dollars allocated at these urban schools are often half or three-quarters of the allocations in nearby suburban schools. Elements that directly affect student performance and probability of continued education such as small class sizes, current and available textbooks, and basic safety in school all deteriorate with the decline in local, state and federal funding. It is common within inner-city schools to find electives for hairdressing and cosmetology while two zip codes away, students in public suburban schools receive advanced college preparation classes, and assistance with SAT and ACT test-taking. Education, viewed by many to be a 'ticket out of poverty' often acts more as a prison, where only the smallest minority manage to continue education past high school. Jonathan Kozol, in his most recent book on educational disparities in inner cities, describes elementary schools teeming with rats, bugs and asbestos, while teachers scramble for basic supplies. One principal gestured towards the decay and disrepair, "This would not happen to white children." (7)

Looking Forward

Many white folks believe that the playing field is now level among races. We wonder, if only to ourselves, "Why can't black folks get their act together? After all, slavery ended a long time ago, and my ancestors didn't own slaves, so I shouldn't feel guilty. I've worked hard for what I've earned. I'm not a racist, like those KKK people. African Americans need to stop focusing so much on being black, and stop playing the race card." Most of us haven't considered that our wealth, status, and education are largely inherited and unearned, the product of a system that affords us preferential treatment. Tim Wise describes this mentality:

"Indeed, we pride ourselves on our hard work and ambition, as if somehow we invented the concepts. As if we have worked harder than the Latino immigrants who spend 10 hours a day in fields picking strawberries; harder than the (mostly) women of color who clean hotel rooms,

or the (mostly) men of color who collect our garbage. We strike the pose of self-sufficiency while ignoring the advantages we have been afforded in every realm of activity: housing, education, employment, criminal justice, politics, banking and business." (8)

The importance of inheritance cannot be understated when considering white privilege. The car my parents bought me at age 17, the private education I received all my life, and the loans I could take out for college all resulted from wealth passed through generations. These assets, especially home ownership, were simply not available to most African Americans just one generation ago.

White families, on average, now have a net worth that is 11 times that of African American families even when comparing families of like size, education and income status. Past discrimination, which promoted wealth accumulation for whites, coupled with current discrimination in pay scales (in 2005, a college educated man earned \$66,000 if he was white and \$45,000 if he was African American,) both contribute to a higher poverty rate in comparison to whites. (9)

I took an online association test that assessed preferences for gay versus straight, white versus black, etc. I have lived with African-Americans, in an African-American neighborhood for all of my adult life, and educate myself as much as possible about privilege. I was not surprised (but a little disappointed) that after taking the test (twice!) I showed a "strong white preference". A note on the site was instructional for many of us white folks who consider ourselves free of prejudice:

"Q: If my test shows automatic white preference, does that mean that I'm prejudiced?

A: [M]any people who show automatic white preference on the test are not prejudiced. These people can make active efforts to prevent this preference from producing discriminatory behavior. However, when they relax these active efforts, these people may be likely to show discrimination in thought or behavior." (10)

Daily Effects of White Privilege

Many racial minorities can't count on these conditions that most whites take for granted:

- ✓ I can if I wish arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.
- ✓ If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure that my neighbors will be neutral or pleasant to me.
- ✓ I can go shopping alone most of the time, assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- ✓ I can turn on the television, open to the front page of the paper, or go to the movies, and see people of my race widely represented in a positive fashion.
- ✓ When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization" I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.
- ✓ Whether I use checks or credit cards, my skin color will probably not work against the appearance of financial reliability.
- ✓ I can swear, dress in second hand clothes, or not answer letters, without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
- ✓ I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
- ✓ I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.
- ✓ I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having coworkers suspect that I got it because of race.

Adapted from "The Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh

Mass media provides one last example of racial disparity. Recent surveys demonstrate that people of color are still largely portrayed in stereotypical ways (ie: African Americans as criminals, Asian Americans as scientists, etc.) Local news programming contributes towards a white fear of black men in particular; it is four times more likely that your local news will show a mug shot if the suspect is African American rather than white.(11) The lone success of an all-African American sitcom like the *Cosby Show* does not overshadow the across-the-board whiteness of mainstream media. In her book *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, bell hooks observes:

"Whites may well believe that our presence on the screen means that the racial apartheid that keeps neighborhoods and schools segregated is the false reflection and that what they see on television represents the real. Currently black folks are often depicted in situations where they charge racist victimization and then the viewer is bombarded with evidence that shows this to be a trumped-up charge, that whites are indeed far more caring than the "misguided" blacks realize. The message that television sends is that the problem of racism lies with black people—that it exists in our minds and imaginations. On a recent episode of *Law and Order* a white lawyer directs anger at a black woman: 'If you want to see the cause of racism, look in the mirror'."(12)

Today, it is the responsibility of those of us with privilege to work to confront racism and injustice. Racism is not a thing of the distant past, nor confined to a few extremists. All white folks directly benefit from white privilege, and it's our job to challenge it. +

Sources:

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11. Racism in media: thirdway.com/BTN/racism/public/stats.asp
12. *Killing Rage: Ending Racism*, bell hooks p.112

Cleveland Indians Trademark



Barbara Munson of the Oneida Nation: "We experience (the use of Native mascots in sports) as no less than a mockery of our cultures. We see objects sacred to us - such as eagle feathers, face painting and traditional dress... in another culture's game. Yes, we are proud of the warriors who fought to protect our cultures from forced removal and systematic genocide... We are proud, and we don't want them demeaned by being "honored" in a sports activity on a playing field."

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From Privilege to Mutuality

by Tony Hilkin

At Karen House there exists more beauty than can be described. The goodness that permeates this structure has forever changed my life. I am surrounded by a unique group of people who are passionate about creating a "new society where it is easier to be good." Together we have chosen to live where we are challenged to grow in love for others, our environment, and ourselves. Here I spend my days accompanying the poor and building friendships. Fortunately, I am welcomed by these wonderful people and given a chance to share in their joys, pains, and hopes. I stumbled upon this place six years ago and since that time I have received much more from folks than I have given.

Within all this beauty there also exists struggle. I experience many struggles at Karen House. My privilege is one of them. I am of a social and economic class that is very different from that of our guests. I went to private schools my whole life and graduated from an expensive college. My family had the purchasing power to buy what we needed and also what we wanted. For example, we owned a lot of unnecessary electronics and entertainment items. We also had access to proper health care, usable credit, and stable employment. We were not wealthy by any means, but my parents made it a point to teach me the skills for upward mobility.

Because we had more access to resources, we used them excessively. I did not realize that there would be consequences to this. Though I was unaware of it, our lifestyle contributed to a social imbalance. An underprivileged class is created from a privileged class.

My privilege has been enculturated in me. It has shaped my personality, decision-making, and worldview. Information passed on to me by my family, friends, and school was certainly well-intentioned. I was taught responsibility, accountability, and respect for others; but that information was also biased. Many experiences concerning social and environmental justice that were absent from my childhood would have been quintessential to my development. Because of this, anything dissimilar to my white, middle-class paradigm was unfathomable to me. This remained constant until I stumbled upon Karen House and the Catholic Worker movement as an adult.

I believe that the majority of people in our society are benevolent and charitable. I also believe that if privileged people knew more about poverty, mental illness, homelessness, drug addiction, prisoners, illegal immigrants, etc. they would be more active in helping and alleviating the causes. But the underprivileged class can be hidden from the privileged class. We live in a society where most schools, neighborhoods, and grocery stores are segregated. We also live in a society where people can become consumed by the consumption of goods. These are among many factors that can distract us from our compassionate selves. The current economy offers little help with this. Our economically-motivated elite mask our societal problems through trickery and propaganda. At the same time, we live among corporations that place material wealth over human worth.

Since I was arrogant in my privilege, I assumed I could immediately help at Karen House. I saw myself as ca-

Tony Hilkin gives a great deal of time to Karen House and has many great friendships with some of the teens from the neighborhood.

pable of providing wonderful services to the needy. It took a little time to discover that I was wrong. In my first year at Karen House, it was I who was learning and receiving rather than the guests. The guests were patient with me until my perspective changed from one of service to one of mutuality. My community was also generous in tutoring me on new concepts like consensus, resistance, and personalism. I have discovered through my experiences with the women and children that I can only be helpful as we grow in relationships together. I was offering physical resources as needed, but essential growth occurred when it came from both sides.

Charles is a teenager who lives two blocks from Karen House. We have had the opportunity to become friends. As time has passed, I have learned much about Charles, and he has learned much about me. Charles' childhood was complicated. From a privileged point of view, I feel he has missed some essential opportunities. However, Charles is resilient. He has a dynamic personality, which makes him easy to be around. He is funny, maybe a little too silly at times, but nevertheless, he always makes me laugh. Above all, he is a genuinely good kid.

Charles' and my friendship was altered one afternoon from a mishap that occurred at Karen House. Desperate to be creative, he and a friend marked graffiti on our walls as I was gathering snacks for them. After realizing what they had done, I immediately went to speak with Charles. My intentions were to scold him severely as I felt disrespected by what they had done. However, something quite

different occurred. Our conversation became about expectations and promises and how we could follow through with these things. That afternoon we decided to be more intentional about looking out for each other; that afternoon we became a little more like family.

Charles helps me with his humor, cultural knowledge, and friendship. Without humor, I could not sustain this work, and Charles always has some to offer. Although I've been here for several years, I am still pretty clueless when it comes to black culture. I often inundate Charles with questions about hip-hop music, the meanings of certain phrases, and his perspective on things. In return, I try to help Charles with employment, school, and friendship. Though he is not always excited about budgeting with me or figuring out summer school, I think he appreciates my persistence and concern.

I feel that what Charles and I have is significant. Considering the vast differences between our backgrounds, cultures, and opportunities, it is surprising that our paths ever crossed. But, remarkably, they have because of Karen House and because of the willingness in each of us to be open to the other. Karen House is a catalyst for change for so many people. Its existence encourages equality as it brings together the lives of people from diverse upbringings. The relationships that are built here are truly revolutionary in breaking down social disparity.

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A NEW SOCIETY

by Peter Maurin

To be radically right
is to go to the roots
by fostering a society
based on creed,
systematic unselfishness,
and gentle personalism.
To foster a society
based on creed
instead of greed,
on systematic unselfishness
instead of systematic selfishness,
on gentle personalism
instead of rugged individualism,
is to create a new society
in the shell of the old.

Tell Us, Please

Interview by Christen Parker and Virginia Druhe

Two African-American women, Dorothy Jackson, a friend of the Catholic Worker community and Lorraine Stewart, a member of the co-housing community, met for questions and conversation with Virginia Druhe and myself, two white women and Catholic Workers. I began with the introduction that we, the all-white Roundtable committee, wanted, even needed, to hear their life experiences of being black in a white dominated society. We needed to hear of both white privilege and racism from people who experience it beyond theory. Dorothy and Lorraine were excited to speak on the topic. Virginia and I were teeming with questions.

We started with an upfront "What does this make you think of?" and "How have you experienced white privilege?" Immediately both Lorraine and Dorothy rallied answers: on the job in treatment, salary, and promotions, in department and grocery stores, when applying for jobs, in dealing with the police, and specific examples like when Lorraine was experiencing chest pains and called an ambulance. Each example was informative.

In the ambulance example, the two white EMT persons who came to Lorraine's house never once touched her – not even to take vital signs. Interestingly enough, it was her neighbor Gary, a white man, who helped her into the ambulance and prayed over her. I asked what she thought made the difference for Gary. She said, "Gary lives in the neighborhood, is a veteran and knows poverty; therefore, he knows that we all need each other to get along." She wonders if it's worth the effort to report those EMT workers, if it will accomplish anything.

On the topic of department and grocery stores, both Dorothy and Lorraine asserted that store owner routinely follow them around, assuming they're going to steal something. "Yes they do!" exclaimed Dorothy. "And it's embarrassing," Lorraine sadly added. "Yes some people steal, but it's not me."

"Really, it hurts me. It's so convenient to be white. Sometimes it gets the best of me. You know we're ALL God's children," Dorothy said in response to examples they both cited about discrimination in job application. "If you and me went in to apply," Dorothy said to me, "they would approach us differently." Lorraine shook her head and said what would become a mantra in the conversation: "Lack of knowledge." Almost with every example of racism, DJ and Lorraine came back to telling us that discrimination was tragic "lack of knowledge" about the other person.

We talked about the police and I heard stories I thought only happened in fictional movies. Dorothy and Lorraine both said they've been stopped randomly and had their person searched. Lorraine said: "If they feel like messing with you, that's exactly what they'll do. Even plant drugs." I was taken aback and asked if they knew of anyone personally that had happened to. Both women emphatically said: "Oh yeah."

I found, though, that I was most startled by the way that they have been spoken to by police officers. "Get you're f***ing a** in the house," was shouted at Lorraine when she stuck her head out her door to see just who was getting beat up by the police on her street one day. I cannot even fathom being cursed by a police officer. It's outrageous to

me as a white woman, but apparently all too common of an experience for people of color. Both women matter-of-factly reported on how long it took police to show up for a call to their neighborhoods, if they showed up at all. Another mantra of Dorothy's was simply "White has rights."

On the job, Dorothy said, "It pisses me off that on Easter or Christmas I have to work, and they know I have a small child. Then some days when I say I can't make it, the (white) boss says 'Can't you bring your son to work with you?' I think to myself that he wouldn't bring his child to that (rough) neighborhood." Her co-workers tell her: "Wise up. They don't care about you other than the work you do." "I have to go with the flow," she said. "I'm in a bind because he (the boss) knows I need the job."

Dorothy said, "Sometimes I fake it when I'm talking with white folks, you know 'fake it 'till you make it'. I'll say what I think they want to hear. But with blacks I can be more down to earth." "You can have 4-5 personalities," Lorraine said. We asked if that went for all situations. "Depends on what their mood is like (white or black); I can't judge by the color of the skin. Depends on what space they're in. Like with Teka (who's white) I can talk about anything. She's been with me through it all." "Sometimes," Lorraine said, about blacks censoring their conversations with whites, "(black) people feel they'll be judged if they tell you (whites) everything... It's also embarrassing sometimes (when you feel judged) and you feel like you better not ask too many questions because you're afraid to look ignorant."

This launched us into a deeper conversation about prejudicial expectations. Virginia noted that for herself she's found it's hard to be who you are when people don't see you for who you are. Lorraine seconded that and challenged us to think about how a woman feels when some man looks at her and makes her feel stripped down. Lorraine said that in the same way she doesn't feel like she can be her best self when she feels stripped down in someone else's eyes for being black.

Not being seen, having the worst expected, "Gives you low self-esteem instilled in you when you hear it so much—that you're worthless. I started to believe it, but now I know better. It's just ignorance," Lorraine said.

"What can a white person do to help break down racism?" Virginia asked. Dorothy quickly replied: "Start accepting us for who we are. We didn't make ourselves. We had no choice. I accept whites for being white. It's not their fault they're white." "I can't go changing you so that it will fit me," Lorraine said. "You teach people how to treat you. People just look on the outside." Dorothy added, "Don't look at us so bad. Give us a chance. We've been neglected all our lives. We're not bad

and we get looked at as bad people... Don't judge. Not every black person is 'lazy' or 'ignorant' so try to get along or leave them alone."

Lorraine said she teaches her kids to treat all people well. For example, she tells her boys they are never to lay a hand on a woman, black or white. "You can't go mistreating people to get ahead. Anyone."



Stephen Putney

So, is it all "black and white"? Lorraine broached that with us: "Even as a child I've met some good white folks. White folks who moved into the neighborhood. White folks who helped our kids. I've had more hurt from my own people when I see them killing each other, killing kids. I love my race and I get angry with my race. We're jealous about what the next one has. It causes a lot of confusion." Dorothy praised her white friends for helping her with their vast and open connections and resources. "You all can get on the phone and do something that would take us hours because you have the education and the resources—or your family member or friend does. If you call a black person they say, 'I don't know nothin'!... But you call Teka and she says, 'I'm on my way.'"

We asked deeper into the reluctance they've found in their black friends, and both women said there's a constant struggle to get ahead, to have more, and they've found it creates competition. "You're not important until you have possessions—nice, expensive possessions. Most black people feel they're 'high class' if they have expensive things (LS)." Both women said they were still living pay check to pay check and that they've learned that beauty is relative, so to step out of the jealousy of possessions. Lorraine burst out: "Anyways, the Bible says if you're rich, give it up!" Wise women.

Lorraine said: "You meet some people—white or black—they just don't know better. They can't know more than what they were taught. I've had to get past a lot of things I was taught—like whooping kids. And I've learned you have to be

open to help.

"Have you ever been resentful of a white person's help?" we asked. Lorraine had an answer. She told us of a time when some Catholic Workers were bringing her kids for ice cream, or to expensive restaurants, without asking her first. "They can't do that without my permission. Sometimes the kids were in trouble and didn't deserve it. For a while I didn't want to say anything, but finally we worked it out and they (the CWs) ask me first."

"What about white guilt?" we asked. Lorraine said: "I've been truly blessed with help from some white people and I don't think they're doing it to make up for feeling bad... When I was unfocused, racism bothered me and made me feel separate, but now that I'm focused, I don't feel separate or angry." They said they both knew too: "If you give a black man that much power, he'd do the same."

"A lot of times we push stuff under the rug. It's scary to talk about racism and a lot of black people are angry about things that happened years ago. But Dr. King was teaching us how to live today. If I keep remembering what happened 100 years ago, how will we ever hold hands?" Lorraine exclaimed.

When Dorothy said that the only "good whites" she's met are at and around Karen House, Virginia brought up the need for blacks and whites to share space. Lorraine laughed and said, "I would love white people to come to my house at dinner time, after school, to see how much I go through. And I don't want the white to say 'If she only hadn't had all those kids!'... I advise every Caucasian to connect with a black family. To see how they feed each other and pay bills, etc. Allow each other to become friends. I used to invite Sr. Mary to our family functions and never once did we bring up racism. We need to put our feet under the table and share meals. Break bread together."

Lorraine's prescription for us to start "talking with each other, knowing how we eat, sleep, & live," started us dreaming about "delegations" to North St. Louis so white people could

have "home stays" and get to know families — like people do in other countries when they're looking for an education in language and/or culture. Lorraine sold us the idea: "We won't learn about each other just from knocking on doors or just by reading books. Experience is the best way."

Dorothy also thought having white folks see her daily life would help those people see: "It's stressful just being black!" "When white folks get stressed out they kill themselves or kill each other. I'm so used to being stressed out I think I wouldn't know how to live without it. (LS)" "They so use to being on top (white folks) that when things are unfolding they can't handle it and maybe kill themselves before going through the pressure and hitting bottom — where us black folks are everyday. (DJ)."

Dorothy told us: "I used to want to make myself white. I knew it would be easier for me. I thought that maybe if I painted my skin things would go better. I know there a lot of white folks out there standing in welfare lines too, but I still think (if I was white) I'd have had less struggle."

"So what can a white woman like me do to know that struggle?" I asked. Almost in unison Dorothy and Lorraine replied "Paint yourself black!" "We'll get us some shoe polish and watch for yourself how you'll be treated in the stores."

Finally, we asked if they thought the conversation of "racism" and "privilege" could be more today about rich vs. poor than black vs. white. Lorraine answered: "It doesn't have anything to do with black or white or rich or poor, it has to do with common sense vs. evilness."

Their closing messages were:

"Be honest. The only way we can bridge the gap is to be honest...there's still some good people out there." — Dorothy Jackson

"The way we overcome hate is with Love... Let's do special things for each other." — Lorraine Stewart

Thank you to Lorraine and Dorothy for their honesty and love.

+



Bridging the Gap:

What is wrong with us when only a celebrity... can turn our interest to our own brothers and sisters crouched at our door? - Mike Dulich

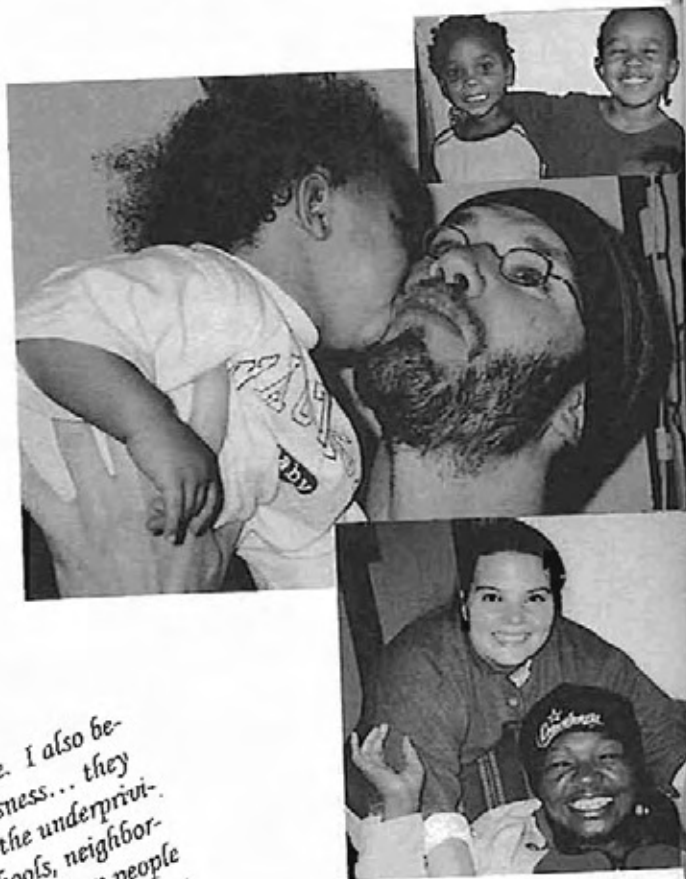
As someone who has benefited from privileges... it is my responsibility to be aware of them, to talk about them, and to insist that privilege not determine opportunity, in whatever small way I can. - Melissa Brickey

Be honest. The only way we can bridge the gap is to be honest. - Dorothy Jackson

I have discovered something that I never would have considered during my own education: the African American children at my school will have to work harder than I did to have the same opportunities as I did in school. - Melissa Brickey

I believe that the majority of people... are benevolent and charitable. I also believe that if privileged people knew more about poverty, homelessness... they would be more active in helping and alleviating the causes. But the underprivileged class can be hidden from the privileged class... Most schools, neighborhoods, and grocery stores are segregated. We also live in a society where people can become consumed by the consumption of goods. These... factors can distract us from our compassionate selves. - Tony Hilkin

I would love white people to come to my house at dinner time, after school, to see how much I go through. And I don't want the white to say 'If she only hadn't had all those kids!'... I advise every Caucasian to connect with a black family... We need to put our feet under the table together and share meals. Break bread together... We won't learn about each other from knocking on doors or just by reading books. Experience is the best way. - Lorraine Stewart



Some Suggestions:
Acknowledge Privilege and Connect the Dots. Just as gender and education influence our interactions and structures, so does race. Recognize different manifestations of oppression, including racism, patriarchy, classism, heterosexism, able-ism, and age-ism.

Seek an Integrated Lifestyle. Relationships across racial lines are more easily achieved if we live and work in integrated situations, and if our children go to integrated schools. Our attitudes are affected by the people we relate to: doctors, teachers, ministers, counselors, etc.

Listen. Following the lead of people of color is a step toward toppling racial hierarchies; and it challenges us, as white folks, to step back from directing everything with a sense of entitlement.

Look Inward. Examining the dynamics of privilege in our own groups and activities is one step towards creating structures to address oppression. In your various organizations ask, "Whose voices are heard, and whose priorities are adopted?"

Building Relationships

It's About Passion

by Mike (Miguel) Dulick

(Excerpted from February 2006 email.)

On Monday, January 2, I was going to go to Tegucigalpa. I was dreading the trip, because I knew EVERYBODY would be traveling after the holidays, and it would be endless hours of sheer torture. But I figured I had to go, because I had to be back by Friday for the monthly Mass, and baptisms, where I would be godfather for two more kids. My plan was to renew my residency visa—who knew what snags I might run into?

When I got up at 4:30 a.m., I already heard the bus homing. But I thought, that's not the bus to Victoria. That's not Carlos; he's always late. That's some other bus. But of course there IS no other bus, so I was frantic. But I couldn't get the kids awake. It was like juggling plates, one would wake up and then another and then the first one would roll over asleep again. And I had to give them SOME kind of breakfast, didn't I? By the time I got out of the house, the bus was gone—"packed full," Don Vigilio said.

So I was left behind. And the bus for Tegucigalpa would no doubt be leaving early, too, from Victoria, in the rush. I prayed like a madman and headed for the edge of town, just to be moving. I was too desperate to WAIT. Then I hear a car, and see headlights. (It's still dark, you know.) I wave at it—and it goes right by! What? Didn't they understand I needed a ride? So my despair doubled. I just wandered around in circles. "That was my ride! That was my ride!" I prayed some more, this time for mercy. Did SOMEONE hear me? Here comes another car, a pickup with a double cab. I wave at it in unmistakable distress. It stops, it's Marta, my neighbor, aunt of the "guatos," the twins Eduardo and Edgardo. Her brother, visiting from San Pedro Sula, was driving and the cab was full with his family. "Can you give me a lift to Victoria—please!" "Oh, I'm sorry, Miguel"—Marta begins, and I

thought I was doomed, I might have to hijack this vehicle!—"you'd have to ride in the back." Are you kidding me! I JUMPED in! Let's go! And boy, he did. He must have hit 60 at some points, flying over the dirt road and the rocks.

Good thing too, since we got to Victoria just in time for me to catch the bus to Tegucigalpa. It was packed full, too, but that was okay with me. I knew I'd have to stand. I was ready for that. I didn't care. I squeezed on, with a few final others, and made my way to the rear, where I anchored myself as well as I could, and started reading. Yes! I had brought Doris Kearns Goodwin's Lincoln book, which must weigh 3 pounds, but I was so exhilarated at my good luck, and so fascinated by the book, I didn't mind the "inconvenience." And this bus flew! As the road twisted and lurched over the hills, I guess I bounced off every hard surface within 3 feet of me (and every soft surface too, the other passengers), but it was the fastest trip ever to Tegucigalpa (aided by the fact that another bus was right behind us, so we alternated stops, and some towns we skipped altogether), arriving in just over 4 hours. (It's usually 6.)

And just when I was getting hungry, a woman offered me a nice piece of fried chicken. Her name, she said, was Altagracia (which I might translate as Sanctifying Grace). Earlier, you see, on one particularly sprightly bump, my finger rosary dropped into her lap (this was BEFORE I started reading—I had to pray, didn't I?), and when she admired it, I said, "It's yours." She said she had wanted to be a nun when she was young, but ... and she pointed to her two kids. I said, "You're doing just fine." I felt like Holden Caulfield with his two nuns—that good.

There was one more miracle yet, the sweetest of all. I mentioned snags, and when I found my bank still closed for the holiday, I could not get the letter I needed to confirm that I have been buying Lempiras with dollars every month, as my residency visa requires. So I already lost a day. But this "snag" made the next miracle possible. The bank is by the big mall in

Mike Dulick retired from years of teaching at Parkway North to fulfill his dream of moving to Honduras.

Tegucigalpa, so I went over there to get more peanut butter, jelly, honey, Nesquik, etc., at the PriceSmart for the kids' snacks. I had to pass Los Cebollines restaurant in the parking lot, and oh, man, it smelled tasty! But I thought, no, I can't afford to eat there. Suddenly, out runs Oscar, Regina's boyfriend. "Miguel! Come to lunch with us! It's Regina's birthday!" Regina is the youngest daughter of my dear friends Elio and Mema. But I said, Well, that's nice, but you know what they say, two's company.... But Oscar says, "NO! Chavelita's here, too. She invited us!" Well, when you put it that way.... We had the most fun, the servers sang to Regina, put this enormous sombrero on her head and a jumbo baby bottle, outrageous stuff, and the best food, don't forget the food--all doubled because of the surprise.

You know, when I jumped in the back of Marta's pickup, I was so thankful that I blurted out, "I'll never be selfish again!" Because I have been selfish, you know. I had turned some folks away, like Nubia, who has a very sweet smile, but I thought, I've already given her enough money this month. I had been short with some others, like young Danilo Cortez of Nueva Palmira, whose very young wife Marleny lost her baby. I gave him a little money and said I would give him more IF he was at the bus stop the next morning--that, of course, was the bus I missed. I am ashamed of myself. I'd been grabbing for handouts myself.

It's bound to be a rash vow, but, again, SOMEONE was listening, who sent me all the money they would have spent on Christmas presents. I hope the would-be recipients know what a wonderful gift they actually received, in the name of the poor! This and other generous donations, such as the proceeds from a Pickle Ball tournament organized by the Amazing Duo Jon Lindberg and Brian Schwadron, have made possible a few more miracles. Danilo, thank God, came back and barely understood why I was apologizing so. Marleny, he said, "lost her mind," in the extremity of her grief. "She doesn't even know me."

So, did you find the TIME "Persons of the Year" issue a little strange? From the X-Men poses of Bill Gates, Bono, and Melinda Gates (in that order!) to the reams of fatuous reporting, it seemed an exercise in irrelevance. Or irony. I thought I was reading "The Onion," or Jon Stewart's latest book. Bono apologizes to his band for "boring" them at stadium sellouts with his diatribes. The Gateses fly their private jet to the distant poor and share hours of conversation afterwards "about everything they've seen." The cover calls them "The Good Samaritans," but you have to remember that the original Samaritan in Jesus' parable (Luke 10) was a despised outcast who breached all protocol to aid a bloodied Jew. What's the parallel? (Well, I guess anyone with a computer has cursed Bill Gates at one time or another--but Melinda?)

Don't get me wrong. I appreciate their work, and if they

have made world health "sexy," great! But where are those billions? Could even Bill Gates get a few bucks to Nueva Palmira--which YOU can and do! And the proliferation of "institutions" and "foundations" may validate the ideology of competition that submerged the poor in the first place. If we can't work together, well, that's why there are so many poor already. Yes, poverty is diverse, the need is multiple, the poor are the biggest "country" on the planet, but the poor are not anonymous. The poor are persons, and one's response must be personal, no matter how much it may be filtered through a "charity."

Take a cue from John the Baptist. When asked to identify himself, he said, "I am NOT the Messiah." Don't be, be not. Disappear. Fade into the tapestry. What is wrong with us when only a celebrity, with whom we fantasize an intimacy, can turn our interest to our own brothers and sisters crouched at our door? Live with the poor, don't "issue" them.

The only thing that re-deemed the TIME issue was Nancy Gibbs' introduction. She is amazing. Her articles after 9/11, after the tsunami, after Katrina, all remind me

of what someone said of Lincoln's Second Inaugural when they called it one of the best sermons in American history. Nancy Gibbs may be one of the best spiritual writers in America today. (Forget "The Purpose-Driven Life"!) And she does it to a deadline! Let me quote her:

"This is not about pity. It's more about passion. Pity sees suffering and wants to ease the pain; passion sees injustice and wants to settle the score. Pity implores the powerful to pay attention; passion warns them about what will happen if they don't. The risk of pity is that it kills with kindness; the premise of passion is that it builds on the hope that the poor are fully capable of helping themselves if given the chance."

Too bad SHE doesn't have the billions! The assumption of celebrity messiahs is that they can "solve" the "problem" of poverty. The Gateses proudly run their foundation "like a business," which doesn't quite measure up to the "passion" TIME attributes to them. Running things like a business is, again, why there are so many poor to begin with. And just drawing attention, shining the light, "featuring," "special edition"-ing, publicizing, worst of all, televising the poor is NOT the "key" to a "cure," counter-intuitive though that may be to our media-saturated system of values.

Attention assumes distance, even if sympathetic. Of course, we need an AIDS vaccine; of course, we need clean water; of course, we need schools. But poverty is not a "problem." Poverty is the poor. Looking at the poor is nothing, even if Angelina Jolie happens to be looking in the same direction. The real problem is not poverty;



the real problem is wealth, which comes so after at the expense of the poor, such as the wealth of the United States built on the backs of 250 years of slave labor. Wealth traps the rich, and celebrities more than most perhaps, in a self-sufficiency that cannot imagine the SHARING of the poor. King Lear knew nothing till he lost everything and wrapped a fool in his own shirt and offered blind Gloucester his own eyes. That's how you look at the poor!

I'm not blaming anybody reading this, nor flattering myself. The poor are not restricted to my neighborhood. The poor are as close as the mirror, and sometimes I can't even stand to

look at myself. In fact, I'm really talking to myself. YOU are my hope. Lacking a private jet, lacking a band that sells out a stadium, I'm going to Nueva Palmira to see Marleny. And I'm taking you with me!

Pity. Passion. It's really about love. As the Pope just said in his first encyclical, "God is Love," "Love is free; it is not practiced as a way of achieving other ends." Love costs nothing, only all you have, and all you are. Love, especially God's love, is not run like a business, more like the extravagance of the sun, wasting most of its warmth and light on a solar system that only the Earth enjoys. Love is not cost effective.

Educational Privilege

by Melissa Brickey

When my oldest brother was in eighth grade and I was in fifth grade, he took the PSAT with other eighth graders from the area. His teachers selected him as the school's representative because of his previous academic success. He scored well on the standardized test, and received a scholarship for high school because of it.

I scrutinized my place in society to the extent that I could as a fifth grader. What I knew to be true at that point in my life: I had an atypically large family (seven children at that point, two more to come for an eventual total of nine); I wore hand-me-downs and off-brand clothing; my family's financial stability was always an issue; we were on food stamps at various junctures throughout my life; I always had to share a room (and oftentimes a bed) with one or more of my sisters; we relied on our church and neighbors for food and utility assistance. We were poor. And for most of my life, even into adulthood, I equated my poverty with being underprivileged.

Now, twenty-five years later, I am astounded and appalled at my ignorance. And astounded and appalled at

how privileged my life was, especially in the area of education. Currently, I work at a middle school in an impoverished area of St. Louis City. Through observations of the children, conversations with their parents, education by African-American professionals who have spoken at our school, and my own contemplation, I have discovered something that I would never have considered during my own education: the African-American children at my school will have to work harder than I did to have the same opportunities as I did in school. Now it seems so obvious, but when my brother was taking the PSAT, I could not have guessed how truly educationally privileged I was.

By the time I was in fifth grade, I knew what the PSAT and the SAT were. I knew when I was in high school that I would have to take standardized tests to get into college. I knew the term "standardized test". I knew how to read my scores and what my scores meant. By fifth grade - actually starting in kindergarten - I was on my way to taking the ACT and SAT. I assumed everyone my age was looking at the same future.

I thought everyone had parents who went to college. Even

Melissa Brickey works at De La Salle Middle School, a nativity school aimed at offering a good education to economically disadvantaged children.

my grandmother was a college graduate - I heard about her Fontbonne College bridge parties before I could read. I understood that she grew up during segregation and that she had educational opportunities that young black girls did not have. However, I did not make the connection that I directly benefited from her opportunities, and therefore her race.

Nonetheless, my mentality throughout grade school and high school was one of entitlement to college. Paul Kivel in his *Uprooting Racism* describes entitlement as the belief that one is "owed certain rights, privileges, services or material goods because of who you are" (42). I thought that because my par-



ents went to college, because I did well in school, that I deserved to go to college. And because I felt entitled to college, I really hardly thought about it.

My tangible educational privileges began when my parents sent me to a suburban, predominantly white, Catholic grade school in West St. Louis County. Catholic grade schools in St. Louis groom students to go on to Catholic college preparatory high schools. I graduated from Rosati-Kain High School, the same college prep high school my aunts and mother attended; this educated, white "network" was definitely a factor in my admittance. I also had done well in grade school and scored well on the entrance exam - again, not because I worked that hard, but because my parents set up a learning environment for me at home. As Kivel explains, "it has been demonstrated many times in hiring and academic recruitment that test and educational qualifications are not necessarily the best predictors of future success." (188) Unfortunately at the time - and hopefully this has changed - grades, entrance exam scores and standardized test scores determined acceptance into my high school. I did well in school and scored highly because I was born into an educationally privileged family.

Truthfully, I didn't need a college prep high school to prepare me for college - I knew what to expect. My parents talked about their college experiences. My older brother and sister were in college when I was in high school: I knew to expect stress during final exams; I observed them researching and writing papers; I saw the amount of time they studied for tests.

Not to say that I was completely in my comfort zone, but at least I knew what to expect when I started college.

The process of applying and getting accepted into college were easy for me. My grandparents, parents and older siblings had experienced it before me, and were able to knowingly and confidently help me along. I would have been much more anxious - and maybe I wouldn't have done it at all - had I not been assisted by people who knew the process. Aware of my educational privileges, I think about students in my school and in our neighborhood. Although improvements are steady, standardized tests are still biased towards white students. Curriculum continues to focus on white, Western culture and history. Wealthy areas put more tax money into schools, resulting in better facilities, higher paid teachers, more teaching and learning resources.

More importantly, and certainly less talked about are the intangible challenges that make educational success difficult for the students in our neighborhood. Many do not have the privilege of having sisters, brothers, mothers, fathers who have pursued academic advancement. Most have the drive and ability, but not the practice of standardized test-taking, the observation of good study skills, the experience of filling out applications and forms, the culture of educational commitment. As someone who has benefitted from these privileges, it is my responsibility to be aware of them, to talk about them, and to insist that privilege not determine opportunity, in whatever small way I can.



Relinquishing Power, Building Relationships

by Teka Childress

The Round Table articles for this issue were past due. I came to the meeting and had to confess that my article was not yet finished. It wasn't that I hadn't worked on it. The problem was, I was pulling the piece out of myself one painful paragraph at a time. I felt everything that I had written showed an incredible lack of understanding and wisdom.

I had been thinking about how *given* the evils of white privilege and economic injustice, do we overcome them and build loving, honest and just relationships with people who are living in poverty? Those evils cause a great divide between those who have and those who have not.

We long to cross this great divide that separates us because one of the greatest human joys is the realization that we are all one. We long for unity and healing. What is essential to this process is a recognition of the dignity and value of each person and that none of us is complete without all of us being whole. This is the central element of a Personalist philosophy. In general, at Karen House, we love one another well, and we value the gifts that each person brings and respect the various struggles that each must grapple with. Yet, it is amazingly difficult to break down barriers of power and privilege and avoid being patronizing.

One of the things that makes this so difficult is the position we are in by providing shelter. We ultimately have control over whether someone stays at Karen House or has to go. That is not the most equal of relationships to begin with. In our favor, I will say, we exercise our power agonizingly and scrupulously. We have very long discussions about whether to put someone out and wait as long as possible to do so. I have been interested in how other Catholic Worker Houses decide these questions. I know Dorothy Day was very slow to make someone leave.

However, can we simply stop exercising authority?

Sometimes we address serious issues; behaviors that are harmful such as drug use or violence toward children. It is challenging to address these things in a way that respects the dignity of another person and avoids using power to make the right thing happen. To give an example: if a mother in our house is abusive to her child, do we put her out? Do we tell her she can stay, but must seek help such as parenting classes or counseling to deal with the issues that might impede her ability to parent her child well? When we ask a woman to seek help, we always try to do so in a way that offers her a choice. We might tell her she can stay for a limited period of time, but could stay longer if she were to take the opportunity to deal with the problem. But, the amount of freedom she has over her response to us is quite limited if it involves her losing her place to stay. She doesn't have many options.

One of the reasons I wanted us to start the Dorothy Day Cohousing Community was because I longed to move into greater solidarity with some of the families that I had come to love at Karen House. Indeed this has happened to a great extent. And yet, there are still struggles. I had assumed that it would be a simple matter to make consensus decisions together. I had thought that making decisions together would put us all on a more equal footing with each other, but it has not been quite as easy as I had hoped. There are different styles in the meetings, some of us are very vocal and assertive, while others might not speak up for a whole host of reasons. Some of us are used to meetings and find them a natural way to conduct our business and lives and others find them foreign or actively dislike them. The mothers often find meetings more difficult to attend, simply because of the multiple and unexpected needs of their children. Thus, this is an area where difference in background and experience can make a dif-

Teka Childress is embarrassed that she has gone through dozens of drug-store reading glasses and she hasn't even left her forties.

ference in one's ability to exercise authority over our decisions and sometimes it is simply a matter of how different personalities interrelate.

Issues of need also affect the ways people feel about community. Some in the community are more dependent financially on the community while others are more independent. This itself can set up tensions or struggles. When we tried to address financial issues there was reluctance to share information and finances by both those with more resources and those with less. It is a challenging thing to unite lives at a such a deep level and we could probably do better.

Another challenge in community, as it is in any family, is how to deal with dysfunctional behavior. It has been difficult to know how to do this well. I feel, that for my part, I could write a book about my own co-dependent, dysfunctional behavior, always trying to keep bad things from happening, but too often in a controlling way.

Blind Crossing

I'm lost in your enigma -
I never got the code
though I'm deciphering words better
I'm lost on winding roads

Dare I ask now for directions
when my skin tone owns the town
We will never meet each other
only looking down

I know I'm lost, and now we're two
who can't show ourselves the way
With your locks and with my doors
we'll lead ourselves astray

It's tricky to be blind
as we cross the color line

How do I drop my parents' gift
of poisoned age-old wine
How could you see through all the hurt
of twenty generation's line

I know that I'm inside of you
in bone and cell and soul
And you in me - it's plain to see
it's more than being told.

The water's deep as we approach
an abandoned water well
They told us if we drink from it

To enter into relationships, justly, with people in poverty, requires relinquishing a great deal of power and demands a great deal of honesty. When one thinks of this it seems natural and easy, but in reality, relinquishing power is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with relinquishing power in dreams. In the dream, we all go happily sailing up into heaven, hand in hand. In reality, we see children and adults struggling, sometimes suffering, while those of us who think of ourselves as quitesential helpers, find ourselves frequently helpless.

I have been thinking, perhaps how we relate to others with respect and love, simply comes down to living out the wisdom of the Serenity Prayer, "God grant us the Serenity to accept the things we cannot change, the Courage to change the things we can, and the Wisdom to know the difference." I wish that I had more to say. We can only keep trying. And, in the end, it's all about building relationships, the only bridge across the divide between us.



together we would dwell

Will we drink of it the same
when I've never tasted thirst?
I didn't ask if you could swim
'fore I asked you to jump first

How do we breathe together
when we've held our breaths so long?
I'm afraid of deeper weakness
as I ask you to be strong.

It's tricky to be blind
as we cross the color line

We'll have to make a bridge, they say
but there's a maximum for load
So we cannot all atop the bridge
agree to build a home

So now, we'll need to cross
and decide that every day
Blind be our eyes and not our hearts
choosing where to live and play

Help me cross into your world
with hop-sotch-agile feet
and know that it was never mine
as I offer up the seat.

C.E. Parker

From Abroad

by Trish Grim and Joe Black



Early on in planning our trip, we decided we would try to live as closely as we could to the level of the poor here, as a means by which to relate to individuals. We realize that international travel is an opportunity not necessarily available to those whose poverty is not chosen. For this reason, we wanted to make sure that our trip reflected this awareness and our commitment to voluntary poverty, as well as remaining focused on personalism and service. This meant using only modes of transportation available to the poor in every leg of our journey.

We left Saint Louis in a mini-van with seven migrant workers. Five buses and forty-five hours later, we reached Mexico City. From there, we've traveled in the back of pick-up trucks loaded with wood, on top of school buses, standing up all night, sitting with sleeping children in our laps, driven by sleep-deprived Mexicans on their way home non-stop from San Diego, California to southern Oaxaca, and spending several hours waiting in second-class bus stations.

Our travels put us among people who lack some of the many comforts that we still manage to have in the United States, despite the fact that we chose to live well below the poverty line there; simple comforts like public bathrooms, access to clean(er) air to breathe, garbage disposal, and the availability of some amount of personal space. Sharing the experience of poverty in Central America with the people who live here has brought us a sense of solidarity with them that we would otherwise not have been in a position to feel.

The Inter-faith Committee on Latin America offered us the opportunity to work with their sister-city project in San Juan de Limay, Nicaragua. Limay is the poorest municipality in Nicaragua and has little to no economic importance to the country. Because of this, it receives little attention from the national government and meager funds are stretched beyond their capacity. As representatives of the Saint Louis Sister City Project, we worked closely with the mayor and visited several communities. The most basic of infrastructure is missing, and its ab-

sence only increases the more remote the community is. Most people share homes with two to three families per residence. The homes are usually one or two room structures of earthen plaster on a wood frame. Most communities do not have easy access to water and the water that is consumed is often times contaminated with arsenic due to previous gold mining. The roads in many cases are impassible by automobile, there is an inadequate amount



of latrines, and there are no waste systems, high schools, or electricity in the majority of the communities.

Our affiliation with a sister-city project brought with it the 'royal treatment' from the pueblos. It was a lesson in love and generosity, when often times it was the poorest who offered us the most. We went to Limay to serve the poor, yet we found ourselves repeatedly the recipients of unwarranted love and affection. When visiting

Trish Grim and Joe Black live at North 18th Street next to Karen House and farm a CSA in their back yard.

the more remote villages, we quickly learned it was best to arrive unannounced. Otherwise, the community would slaughter chickens or a pig to celebrate our presence. Accepting these gifts was often uncomfortable. We felt shame because it was the United States that trained and supported the Contras during the civil war and here we were, American citizens, accepting such kindness. We thought we were well accustomed to receiving, being unaccustomed to shame (when one lives in a Catholic Worker Community one is often the recipient of gifts of clothing, food, furniture, appliances, etc. that are the excess of a wasteful society). It's a more humbling and powerful experience to receive gifts from those without enough for themselves. We still find ourselves unsure of how to understand or articulate this experience.

With the gifts would often come appeals for help with school supplies, homes, latrines, wells, and cooking stoves. Sometimes the appeals were vocalized, other times just sensed, but the profundity of the need was overwhelming. How do you serve the poor when everyone is poor and there isn't a generous wealthy class from which to beg? We decided to help create a community farm project with the capacity to create a communal income, based on cooperative principles. This is in alignment with our belief that biointensive farming is a direct and sustainable response to hunger and malnutrition.

It was in El Morcillo, a community outside of Limay, that we started this vegetable farm. We worked every afternoon, preparing beds, starting seedlings, and sharing with the people. We organized a workshop on organic farming and were able to arrange for a local agricultural engineer to come to the community and facilitate it. It was an incredible experience. The workshop functioned more or less like a roundtable discussion as folks discussed the pros and cons of organic versus chemical farm-



ing and were given real, practical recipes for organic fertilizers, insecticides, and fungicides, all of which can be made from natural ingredients that are readily available in their area.

Initially, we weren't sure how much resistance there would be to the idea of organic agriculture, since spraying chemicals all over the crops has sadly become the way of most farmers in this area. But the people seemed really impressed by the idea of not having to use chemicals, for the health of the environment and for the health of the many children who have been helping out with the farm. The impact of the discussion, the stories and knowledge of the people, and the sharing of ideas and experiences as farmers were all very humbling and moving.

The community was amazing. People were truly alive and every day we worked together was filled with laughter and joy. Sharing in physical labor is a beautiful way to relate with people and we found it hard to leave our friends. But our time in Limay came to an end yesterday and we leave Nicaragua with a better understanding of love and generosity.



From Karen House



by Laura Ragan

"The more things change, the more they stay the same."

I would like to give the moron that came up with that one a non-violent swat or two. "You make no sense!" I would shout. "How can we have both change and stability?" I would demand. After composing myself from yelling at this imaginary person, I might remember this hard truth: Nothing really changes. Or does it?

This time of year always makes me forget that change is forever with us, no matter how much we might try and shake it. Still, all the same old festivities took place, like they do year after year. The holidays have come and gone again, as did Santa Claus for all the kids in the house. The New Year is here again, like it or not, so those of us interested in pretending to keep resolutions better get on it. The kids went back to school again, so the house is once again "quiet." I had some time off before heading back to classes myself, so I did some extra chores like a good little Catholic Worker, tried to read *The Brothers Karamazov* (to no avail- I stopped on page 49 after three weeks), and had some good quality time with some of my fellow community members. Nothing new really happened though. Sure, guests left our house of hospitality to a house of their very own, and new faces quickly came to replace those who are gone. There were a few rather temperate days mixed in with all of the chilly ones. A coat of paint did wonders for the living room. My mutt got a bath. But did anything really change?

Stuck smack dab in the middle of winter and all of its freezing cold glory makes it hard to think about change. But change is something that never really goes away. Even in our cold house (and me in my tundra-like attic bedroom) there is change all around, even if none of it is temperature-related, for the better and more mild. Change does not always have to mean the earth-shattering, eye-opening, Cronkite-wielding news that we associate it with, or at least that I associate it with. Things like, "The piano is gone! Hurray!" or "We got a booty-load of that yummy yogurt donated!" or "Someone else made the coffee in the morning!" These are all good, if not great, changes, but not necessarily the kinds of things that excite most normal people (although perhaps things that excite most Catholic Workers).

Change can be obvious and small, but it can also be unobtrusive and mighty. Like watching Jameron burst

onto the scene as the bubbly, wobbly, excited two-year old that he is, not the cooing, wrinkled baby that I seem to want to remember him as. Apparently it does not matter that I see him on a semi-regular basis, I cannot wrap my mind around the fact that babies grow up, right before our very eyes. And it is not just the babies around here that are taking gradual, though monumental leaps and bounds of change.

Our dear community has seen its fair amount of change since the last writing. We have gained Andy, a medical student at St. Louis University, and his light-hearted, no-holds-barred, much appreciated sense of humor. Virginia

and her wisdom have returned to us after a few years off- the wisdom has always been around, although the quilt she is working on is comparatively new. We miss the insight of Christen and Melissa in community, although we are still blessed to have their thoughts and ideas shared with us in the Roundtable issues and when we see them around the neighborhood and at the house.

In order to embrace change, perhaps we need to come to some sort of an acceptance of it, or at the very least, tolerance. We know it is coming, and we can't really stop it. Change can be hard and demanding, soft and fluffy, or not even noticeable. But it is constant, like it or not, and that will always stay the same. Luckily enough for us, this does mean Spring is coming soon...



Laura Ragan is a member of the Karen House Community who shares her dog Jerry with the rest of the house.

by Juliann Jakimeczyk

Even the evergreens around here are a little bit brown. I noticed it on my walk home today. It's hard to tell from a distance, but, upon closer inspection, indeed, they look a little haggard.

I stopped to pity the small conifer that first caught my eye this afternoon. After all, it lives in the two-foot wide strip of parched dirt that bisects the paved parking lot of the maximum security juvenile detention center across the street from Karen House. With this in mind, I'm now impressed with its survival, in admiration of its perseverance and adaptability. However, I am still struck by the apparent struggle of this symbol of unshakable vitality. Surely, in more favorable environs, perhaps a sun-dappled spot in the deep, lush soil of a forest, this tree would stand much taller and brighter with healthy offspring sprouting below it. Instead, it's not as full as it should be, and a surprising number of its needles have withered. It's alive — no doubt about it — but, beneath it, lies only dusty, barren dirt and an empty bag of chips.

Life is tough in this neighborhood. It wears on all of us — even those of us who are here by choice. Sometimes it's tempting to wilt in despair. In fact, I think we all do at least a little bit.

A young woman who once lived with us as our guest at Karen House was shot and killed in a drive-by two weeks ago; she was nineteen years old. Teenagers regularly race stolen cars through stop signs on the same streets where five-year-olds ride bicycles unsupervised. Houses literally crumble in disrepair, bricks tumbling to the sidewalks, roofs caving in, and sometimes these homes are still occupied.

Stray dogs roam in packs here, howling at us in hunger and neglect. And our ears throb from the constant assaults of car horns honking, people shouting, tires screeching, dogs barking, sirens blaring. Even our well-intentioned compost piles, built simply to rot in peace, provide host to an unthinkable quantity of rats.

All the while, familiar faces continue to appear and reappear at Karen House, still caught in their cycles of suffering: mental illness, addiction, disability, or plain old American poverty. How could it not get you down?

We, as volunteers, as friends in community, tend to

speak of the hope, the joy, the idealism, the fulfillment, and the beauty we experience at Karen House and in our neighborhood because, of course, we love it here for those reasons, because we are overwhelmed with gratitude for those qualities, because we want others to feel them too, and, most of all, because we want others to join us. But, the flip side of all that truly can be "harsh and dreadful."

Even as I write, I feel pressure to present at least a few perky paragraphs. Perhaps I should tell the tale of innumerable starfish washed up on a beach and the inspirational rescue mission of the compassionate and insightful passerby. Or, maybe I should recount Dorothy's anecdote of her trusty pebble and its countless ripples. After all, I've thrived in the privilege of more optimal conditions for growth, and I've transplanted myself here by choice to accompany, to learn, to try to live with more love. I'm grounded, I'm healthy, I have an extensive root structure to support me — I should stand taller.

But the truth is, sometimes it's just hard, and we must learn to accept that struggle. We have our doubts. Realistically, it is difficult to trust the power of our pebbles of peace and love as we cast them into the wake of the ocean liner of greed, violence, oppression, and suffering. We see a lot of pain. We live amidst much despair. We fail often. And, dare I say, it all causes us to die just a bit in defeat.

Life around here requires stamina. We can learn it best from our guests and from our neighbors. Since beauty, laughter, and love aren't always easy to find, it's important to cultivate some resilience to pull us through — some endurance to carry us until the next surge of life, the next burst of joy, sprouts in our paths. For, deep down, we know that it will.

I'm grateful to have noticed that little evergreen across the street today. I salute its strength. I applaud its triumph over its adverse living conditions. I'm inspired by its example and thankful for its verdure amidst the death of winter. And, above all, there's a place in my heart that's now warmed with compassion for my little coniferous neighbor. Maybe tomorrow I'll bring it a bucket of water and a few shovelfuls of mulch. +



Julie Jakimeczyk can often be seen riding her bicycle even on chilly days.

Resources Related to this Issue

Movies

- Eyes on the Prize, Crash, Do the Right Thing, The Color of Fear

Authors & Books

- Cornel West, bell hooks, Angela Davis, Jonathan Kozol, Tim Wise, Robert Jensen
- White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism, ed. Paula Rothenberg
- Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America by Joseph Barndt

Organizations and Websites

- Tolerance.org
- WhitePrivilege.com
- Suggestions for Activists: colours.mahost.org/org/whitestudents.html
- List of Anti-Oppression Training Groups: soaw.org/new/article.php?id=612#hc
- Implicit Association Test: implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/
- History Of Slavery: innecity.org/holt/chron_1830_end.html
- Civil Rights Movement Veterans: crmvet.org/
- Institute for Peace & Justice: ipj-ppj.org/index.html

Karen House Needs:

Money (please see enclosed letter)

Used Bicycles

Fair Trade Coffee

Box Fans

Skilled maintenance folks (carpentry, plumbing, electric)



Please join the Karen House community for weekly Mass (Tuesdays at 8pm), and a community-led liturgy on the second Tuesday of every month.

Thank you to all the volunteers, contributors, and supporters of Karen House. We could not do this work of hospitality without such abundant community support!

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, Melissa Brickey, Teka Childress, Mark Chmiel, Andy Linsenmeyer, Christen Parker, Laura Ragan, Ellen Rebg, and Jenny Truax. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

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