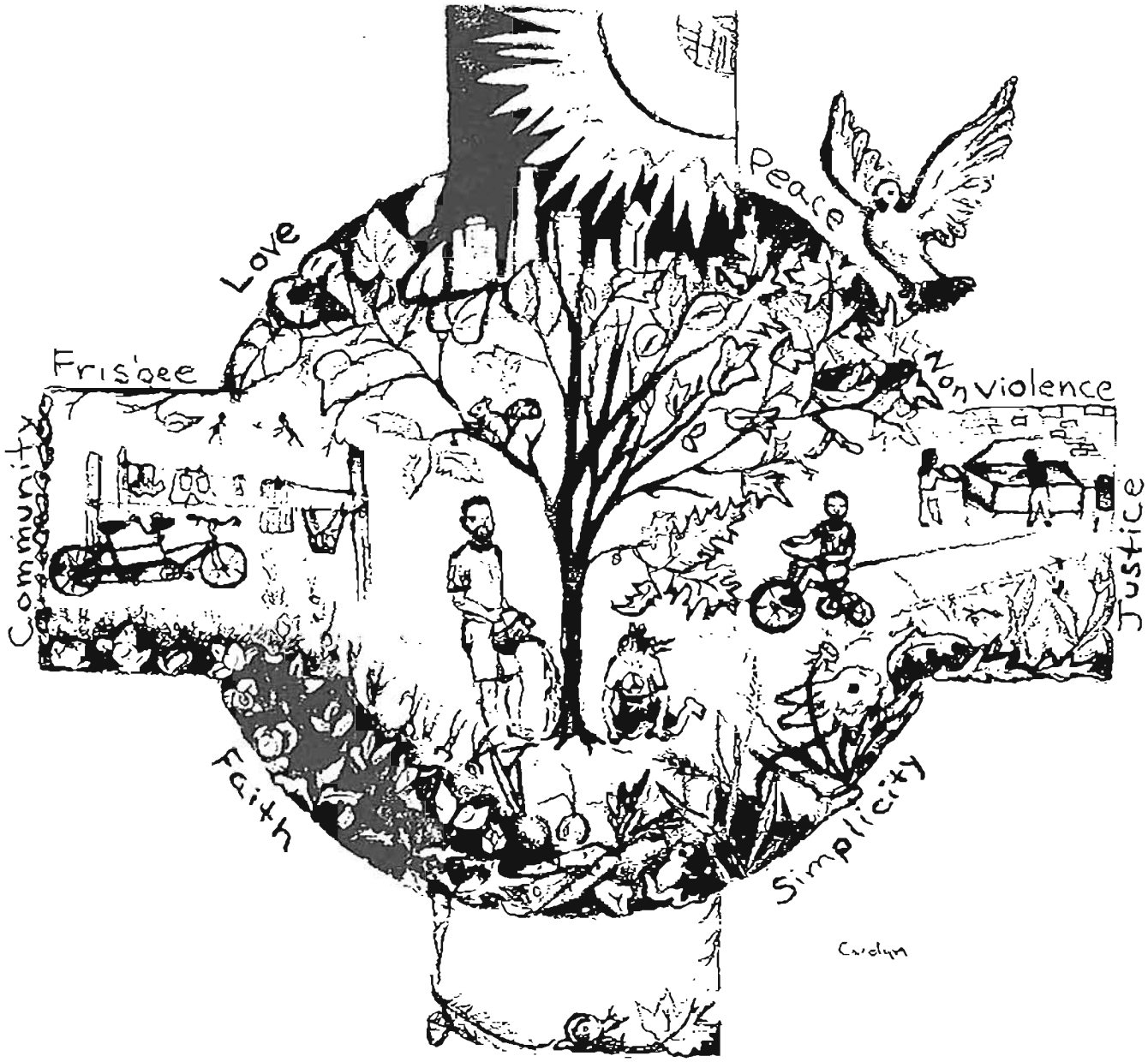
THE Round Table

Winter
2002

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

Simple Living



Why This Issue?

It wasn't too long ago that Teka Childress, who has worked (and mostly lived) at Karen House for 20 years and going, worried a bit about how much longer she could do so. Not that she tired of her life as a Catholic Worker, but the community had become so small, it seemed there might not be enough people to carry on the work. Tim Pekarek, himself a "lifer" almost as long as Teka, and Becky Hassler, were among the faithful remnant. But, as it turned out, we were like Moses as he worried about whether he ought to strike the rock twice (instead of his usual once), since surely God would not continue to bring water out of a rock after all those years. After all these years, God's grace continues to pour on to Karen House, in the form of a new generation of people dedicated to the harsh and dreadful (but also incredibly joyful and beautiful-Doestoievsky was only half right) life at the Catholic Worker.

I remember the precise moment when I saw the sea change coming - the generational tide beginning to turn. Fittingly, it was on Teka's 39 birthday. Christy Finsel, who had herself heard the siren call of the Worker since her High School days, brought a roomful of her 20-something friends and aquaintainces to celebrate Tuesday night mass with us. Courtney and Jenny, present day community members, were almost surely among this crowd, most of whom were not necessarily there to stay. But I saw it as a portent of things to come. Today there are 11 community members, the majority of whom are in their 20's, and an even larger co-housing community, whose membership overlaps and exceeds that of the Karen House community. In addition there are a number of "fellow travelers" (to use an old phrase most likely only one of my generation knows) and friends living and/or volunteering near-by.

I write this as a 45 year old former member of the community (and I hope, always a "fellow traveler") who has felt the impact of this "paradigm shift" in generations both at Karen House and on the Round Table committee. And I am overjoyed to see it. To me it is truly a sacrament - a sign of God's presence and love working in people's hearts, blooming in their lives. I am inspired by each person's story of his/her deepening committment to live a life with the poor that led them to Karen House. I am deeply grateful that they have chosen to share their many gifts with the guests and all of us.And I am simply happy to know such good hearted people and to call them friends.

Some of these gifts and stories are evident in this issue. We write about the perennial topic of simplicity, yet this "new generation" (there I go sounding like my parents or something) has taken the call to live simply to a deeper level than that of "merely" divesting oneself of too many possessions. Instead, the simplicity they write about focuses on the fundamental issues of time, food and how we get from one place to another. Julie Jakimczyk, Karen House community member whose dedication to simple living is unparalleled, unless by Tony Hilken, opens the issue with a reflection on how to remove the clutter from our time, rather than our dwelling places.(Of course, the two are connected.) Carolyn Griffeth, a member of Dorothy Day co-housing community, writes about just eating practices, being in right relationship with our food, and hence our world and each other. Elizabeth Madden, Karen House community member, writes about her experiments in transportation, from air travel to bus and bike. We include our usual columns and a few of the always-on-target easy essays by Peter Maurin.

I feel like I ought to conclude with some appropriate phrase like, "The King is dead, long live the King", except that those of us old "kings" aren't really dead, I hope, and I'd have to change it to, "The Rulers are dead, long live the Rulers!" So perhaps a simple "Adelante!" will have to do. If you don't understand the reference, ask a forty-something.

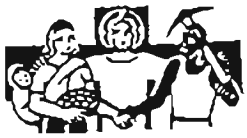
✝

Front cover art by Carolyn Griffeth

--Ellen Rehg

the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community

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



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

Time Uncluttered

by Julie Jakimczyk

Time. . .Time is of the essence. . .Timing is everything. . .Only time will tell. . .The sanctity of time is well acknowledged in the wisdom of our language's proverbs. Upheld as truisms, such clichéd maxims frequent popular conversation, but is time's sacredness observed in the practices of our daily lives? Where is this reverence in our day-to-day reality?

When we contemplate the simplification of our own lives, we examine the choices we make in light of our deepest values. We seek to prioritize—to unclutter. We choose our relationships, our health, our Earth, our spirituality (the dearest and most meaningful facets of our lives), and we strive to eliminate the choices, the actions, and the things that impede us from more truly upholding these cherished values. We de-complicate our lives in search of personal growth.

This search would surely be incomplete if we neglected to include in this analysis our use of the precious gift of time. The commitment to simplify permeates every aspect of daily living: what we eat, what we own, how we get where we're going. . .and whether we even go there in the first place, and, of course, how we choose to allocate our time. Naturally, all of these choices are interrelated. Choosing to prepare healthful food, or grow it ourselves requires quite a bit of time. Biking requires more time than driving; walking, more time than biking, etc. But to challenge ourselves to truly examine our usage of time throughout each of our days is to accept the great responsibility of ensuring this sacred gift of ours is veritably well spent.

I first began to simplify my time as an act of resistance. In our frenzied society of fast foods, rush hours, and rat races, it's downright subversive to aim to slow down. We live amidst a flurry of activity and a constant, gnawing pressure to accelerate. Cell phones, beepers, and e-mails quicken communication while breakfast shakes, lunches-to-go, and prepackaged dinners swiften even the meals we take into our bodies. It's incredible what we're willing to sacrifice for the sake of speed! Why not make time for the nutrition of foods freshly prepared at home, or the intimacy of encounters face to face?

I'm amused again by the insightfulness of our idiomatic expressions where the "hustle and bustle" associated with an average day in the mainstream have become synonymous with "the daily grind." The word "grind" hardly implies a movement toward personal growth. Rather, it indicates a continual, monotonous erosion. So what is it that is wearing away? Maybe it's our very nature, our humanness that is disintegrating in this ruinous hustling and bustling. Perhaps the unbridled velocity of our speed-driven culture literally pulverizes the human spirit—grinding the purposefulness, the meaning, the simplicity, and the beauty right out of our lives—daily.

Even in our self-constructed counter-culture of the Worker, it's difficult to slough the industrial values of productivity and efficiency. Each week in our meetings, we become tempted to reduce the time allotment for important discussions under pressure to cover our entire agenda, share personal reflections, eat dinner as community, pray together, and still finish by nine o'clock. Moreover, our

---

Julie Jakimczyk, who recently joinded our community, has brought her great talents as a teacher to tutoring the children of our community.

conversations at Karen House are incessantly interrupted by our mad dashes to answer the ever-ringing phones and doorbells. It's a struggle to resist this pervasive push to speed up, but succumbing to this sort of impetuousness precludes especially our most treasured value of personalism. How can I be present to you, to you as a uniquely beautiful individual, if I haven't the time?

Thus, even the most well-intentioned acts can fall victim to the haphazardness of reckless speed. (Hence, another trite yet truthful adage, "Haste makes waste.") Rushing from task to task and person to person readily invites a deficiency of action and interaction: cheapening our efforts with careless inadequacy and scarring our relationships with hurried half-heartedness.

Ironically, despite this trademark carelessness of trying to do too much too quickly, a sense of busyness often fosters a much inflated sense of self-importance. A jam-packed calendar of commitments can boost the ego regardless of the quality of execution or the depth of engagement, thereby rendering undeserved self-aggrandizement as yet another symptom of the motion sickness that plagues our fast-paced culture.

Fortunately, we can prevent and treat this illness in our own lives by choosing the healing power of simplicity. Just as we can dispose of the materialistic clutter in our closets, we can work to rid our time of its haphazard emptiness and self-important busyness. I'm reminded of an anecdote of a wise seeker of peace who recounts the tale of a dear friend anxiously explaining his future ambitions. While excitedly detailing his upcoming plans, the man repeatedly places sections of fruit in his preoccupied mouth, all the while neglecting to chew. Thich Nhat Hanh gently interrupts his eager friend's words with this terse yet poignant admonition: "Eat the tangerine."

Focus. Eliminate distractions. Do whatever you are doing and do it well. To simplify time is to be present to the moment—to reject the recklessness of haste and to choose instead the thoroughness of mindfulness—learning to truly live each moment, and to savor each juicy bit of tangerine.

I've learned a lot from and continue to grow in my efforts to simplify my time. The intense selection process involved in choosing how to allocate my time heightens my sense of purposefulness overall. The process of analyzing and evaluating my choices and my consequent well-being, and challenging myself to live each day more simply and, thus, more fully, has itself been deeply fulfilling. I spend more time with myself—reflecting, examining, forgiving, and then challenging. I'm learning to be more honest with myself—accepting my limitations and developing realistic expectations about what I can do, when I can do it, and whether I value it enough to do it at all. This kind of reflection bears an intentionality and integrity of living that is very satisfying. I'm more connected to my choices, more intentional about my life, and, therefore, more engaged in living it. Striding toward simplification really is enabling me to be more present, live more mindfully, and feel more alive.

So, gladly, I can attest that we need not succumb to the hurried *mindlessness* of our surrounding culture. Through concerted effort, we can work toward and enjoy the thoroughness, honesty, self-acceptance, and mindfulness of living simply. We can consciously remove ourselves from the wasteful haste around us and choose the reflective practice of honoring the gift of time. By rejecting the breathlessness of our culture, we can learn to breathe more deeply and more fully. Only then can we begin to relish in the inner peace of simplicity and the simplicity of inner peace. After all, it's about time.

Ann Marie Appelbaum Widner

Eating Nonviolently

by Carolyn Griffeth

As a dinner guest, how often I've been asked, "Now, are you a vegetarian or vegan?" Or "Are you eating fish, milk, and eggs these days?" I am left to choose from these familiar labels or to attempt to explain my concern for justice, world hunger, animal torture, the devastation of the rainforest and extinction of wildlife, exploited workers, toxic landfills, consumerism replacing humanism, and, not lastly, my health.

My mind spins to answer these seemingly simple questions. "Where does your food come from?" I'd like to ask. Then I could reply: " Now if you milked that cow and treated it well, I would enjoy some cheese. Or if you've dumpstered fresh fish, I can suggest a dumpstered-fish dish. Spinach Quiche is great, if the chicken wasn't tortured in a little bitsy crate, and your spinach grows this late. Or if I could make a request, something picked fresh would be best. What grows wild in your area?" Perhaps it would be better to offer: "Let me do the cooking. I have some greens that need picking, and apples that need harvesting, and eggs from a friend's farm down the way." But none of this do I normally say.

It is hard to explain that although I rarely eat meat and have been vegetarian or vegan (not eating meat and all other animal products including dairy and eggs) for ten years, not eating meat is not my guiding principle. Instead, I strive to eat nonviolently, conscientious of how my consumption either affirms the sanctity of life or destroys life; how my choices foster community or alienation. I am particularly concerned about how my life impacts the most vulnerable: the hungry of the world, the farm workers, and helpless animals, for instance. Yet my concern for my health is not neglected. Having struggled with arthritis and chronic illness for seven years, I am uniquely aware of how my diet affects my well being. Furthermore, I am raising my eight-year-old son, who demands plenty of wholesome, palatable nourishment. When contemplating what I shall eat, all these concerns and goods are weighed.

Having spent five years living in intentional communities, such as Karen House, which focus on peace and social justice and sharing life with the poor, I have been surrounded by others who likewise strive to institute nonviolence into their daily bread. I have found that we have largely come to the same conclusions, although this doesn't mean our diets would be set-apart in a way that a dietician could categorize. ("They all eat copious amounts of collard greens and tofu. . .must be vegan!") But I believe an anthropologist would note that the way we obtain our food, the life story behind the food itself, has similar themes. (They planted greens and tomatoes, dumpstered some potatoes, ate every variety of donated day-old-bread, dipped in coffee from worker-owned cooperatives.) We are united by an appreciation of the often hidden impacts of our consumption, and the shared value of restoring our right relationship to the earth. There is no well-recognized term for individuals whose food choices are so motivated, who would superficially qualify as vegetarian, omnivore, or vegan, but are truly rooted in a common ethic, which is much deeper. Our shared principle is non-violence; a global pro-life ethic grounded in our love for all humankind, and respect for the sacredness of creation. Striving to achieve this is what I regard

Carolyn Griffeth could take away your reticience toward eating food from a dumpster because she's such a great cook.

as simple living.

How have I come to develop these ethics of eating? I hope to provide some answers by sharing my own food journey, leading to the realizations that motivate my decisions. Furthermore, I hope to describe how our food choices can not only prevent unnecessary violence, but also help to restore our connection with the earth, and to heal our broken human community. Ultimately, I hope to illustrate that striving to live this more simple, life-affirming way, is not simple at all, but rather a creative and challenging act of resistance.

Let me begin by going back to the time before I thought a bit about justice or simple living. Ten years ago, while in college, I became a vegetarian. My motivation was only a vague understanding of the environmental impact of eating meat and an orientation toward eating healthy foods. Having grown-up on a farm and at the time attending the University of Illinois, I saw how the majority of the land in Illinois was cleared for large-scale farming of corn and soybeans, not for people, but for livestock. I learned that it takes sixteen pounds of grain and soybeans to create a pound of beef. I reasoned that by eating meat I was contributing to more land clearing and the unnecessary hunger of many. Later I learned that we could feed most of the hungry world if we chose to use our land differently, to plant people food, as opposed to livestock feed. In other words, if our diets were changed from resource-intensive meat consumption to a vegetarian diet.

As a biology student, I learned about how the pesticides sprayed on fields of grain bioaccumulate, or concentrate, as they go up the food chain (from grain to cow to human.) For this reason, meat and dairy contain vastly larger amounts of pesticides, which cause cancer, neurological problems, learning disabilities, and birth defects, than vegetarian foods. Furthermore, heart disease and all vascular disease is greatly increased by our nation's high meat consumption (saturated fat + cholesterol = athrosclerosis). Why do we spend our health care dollars treating these preventable diseases rather than providing universal access and preventive care?

It wasn't until I began to struggle with chronic arthritis, that I became a vegan, which I remained for years. I was a medical student at the time, and studied healing from both conventional and alternative angles. I learned a couple of striking things. The first is that osteoporosis is not prevented by milk intake, and instead brittle bones are correlated with diets laden with things that leach calcium from bones. This includes diets high in protein, which acidifies the blood and thus leaches calcium, and caffeine and tobacco use which hinders the absorption of calcium, as well as sedentary lifestyles. As I studied nutrition, I learned how easily one can achieve a diet high in protein and calcium from only vegetable sources. I also learned, from sources not included in the standard medical school curriculum, that milk as well as meat can contribute to the inflammation of autoimmune diseases, which cause some types of arthritis. I include all this only to say that milk, which was deceptively listed as one of the four food groups, is not a necessary food at all.

Yet, health reasons play a small part in my decision to avoid most grocery store varieties of meat and dairy. My convictions stem from every filthy detail you would see by visiting factory chicken farms, witnessing the hormones and antibiotics given to milk cows while their calves are locked in darkness to become veal, or the abusive mechanization of most large-scale farming. These realities are too disgusting for me to want to expound upon them further, yet I suggest to all who want to learn more to visit *www.veganoutreach.org*, or, better yet, to ask for a tour of a local slaughter house or egg factory.

With this formative awareness, I entered my first community living experience in Simon community, an egalitarian community of homeless individuals and volunteers in London. Here food took on a new significance in the context of poverty, community, and celebration. During winter, maintaining a wholesome and varied vegan diet, on the budget given, meant learning to scavenge, and the local markets were a scavenger's paradise. Being young and fresh, scavenging contained for me novelty and an anthropological appeal. It was both an enjoyable and educational task to steal away in the afternoon to fill my canvas sack with abandoned produce gleaned from boxes, dumpsters, and curbs. I would slowly walk home, devouring my share of the most succulent tangerines and reflecting on life's disparities.

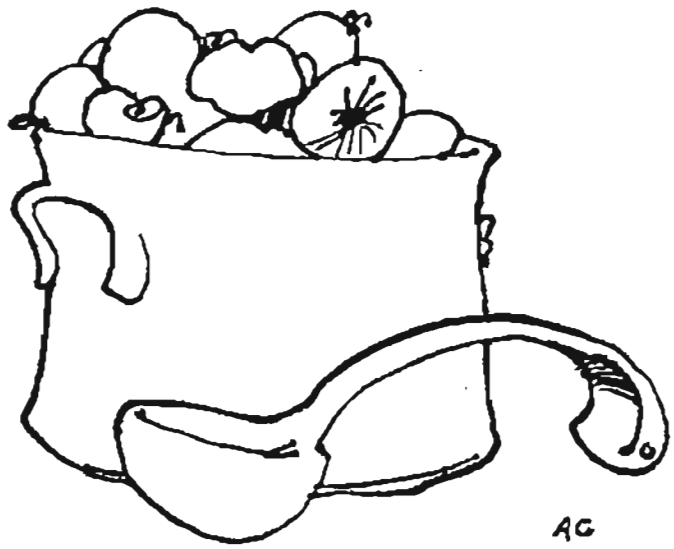
Scavenging was an eye-opening role reversal for me. I was taking a break from a position of great privilege studying in a prestigious medical school and now most of my friends were "bums" and most my of dinners were absolute "garbage"! Scavenging also fostered a new understanding of the precarity in which much of humanity lives and the shameful feelings of the poor. I was filled with compassion for the refugees and elderly whom I met in the market also looking at the ground. With humility, we shared with one another the treasures we found.

My dinner contribution was invariably dumpstered delight, usually in the form of stir-fry or vegetable curry.

In our communal sharing of these gifts, I experienced uncommon thankfulness and celebration. My family and future community members will sigh or laugh at the above retelling of my first love of scavenging. What a deep root was planted in my spirit, and, too, what joy I have in this creative act of resistance! Since then, I have become an avid dumpster diver, saving mountains of beautiful produce from the fate of landfills, eating the rejected fruits of exploited workers without supporting their exploitation, enjoying the taste of agribusiness without supporting its distasteful practices.

I will return to the subject of dumpstering as it has given me many meals and insights, but for now I want to follow the course of my life to insights of a different kind. Following my time in London, I had the chance to live in Panama, visiting a friend of mine who lived in a small village in a clearing in the rainforest. In keeping with the principals of simplicity, this drastic change of place necessitated a similarly drastic change of diet. When people share of what they have grown — rice, corn, chicken, and cow — who am I to reject their gifts in the name of preference or principle? Here I saw chickens that where treated nearly as one of the family, finding perch on our shoulders, usefully eating insects and table scraps. I was challenged to recognize that it was an honor to eat the homemade chicken soup that invariably signified my status as a guest. Unfortunately, in my recent embrace of veganism, I struggled to eat even their wholesome eggs without disgust. Too slowly, I recognized that no diet is universally reasonable, communal, or the most sustainable. Only afterwards did I see that by enjoying local food, I was also participating in their culture, choosing community, and the path of simplicity.

In this relatively undeveloped land, food was connected with the seasons and landscape in a way that fostered community and celebration. For example, an ordinary activity for youth was going out together to find a mango tree or to gather coconuts. Not only did these outings make a great occasion for athleticism and socializing, they also *included* sharing discovered treasures. After returning with a harvest of coconut, we would cook coconut-treat in quantities large enough for all. The object of gathering was not just to eat but also to enjoy each other's company and ultimately to share with the community. (It is for these same reasons that I also greatly appreciate dumpster diving and gardening.) Thus, I came to understand that foraging from the fullness of the earth is not only a great practice for simple or sustainable living, but also a catalyst for healthy human relationships built on sharing and interdependence. How eager are we to share our grocery store bought goods with our neighbors or a hungry stranger? Rather than the attitude of shared abundance, we often think, "This is mine, I bought it with my hard earned dollars."



There was something else that I saw clearly in Panama: the demand for beef destroying a sustainable way of life, as the villager's lands were bought by outsiders and cleared for cattle grazing. Many of the villagers, who had long been sustenance farmers, were now employed to clear the rainforest to raise cattle, with no improvement to their quality of life. Rather, with the clearing of the land, many of its free gifts, (mangoes, avocados, and citrus) upon which the people had long depended, were becoming scarce. This is just a small picture of the global environmental destruction resultant of inappropriate and excessive beef consumption, the spreading meat materialism.

It was only after moving to St. Francis house, the Catholic Worker in Uptown, Chicago that I began to realize how integral our food choices are to creating culture. Peter Maurin expounded that building a new society would require a renewing of cult, culture, and cultivation. At St. Francis house, we created a cult (group with shared ideals) with a unique culture that embraced sustainability, creativity, resistance, and non-violence, all of which we achieved through the cultivation, foraging, dumpstering, and most of all, sharing of food. I believe that no one with whom I lived in community at St. Francis house would down-play the role food has in creating bonds of community and forming a non-violent culture. Just as a fishing village develops a culture built on the exchanges at sea and on the docks, the sharing of tall tales and wisdom of where and when to make a good catch, and regular fish fries, ours was a village of scavengers and gardeners, daily sharing our greatest finds, developing a wisdom tradition of where and when, recounting our dumpstering tales, reveling in good soil and compost, and joyfully creating dinners and festivals of wholesome eating.

Upon entering the community, I saw that here food was something different, and, in part, it was the decadent natural food selection that led me to stay! The community lived off the waste of others, homing in on natural food stores as much as possible, and as I was to discover: If you look for waste, you'll find an unlimited supply. I

have come to believe that just as visiting our nation's prison system is essential to developing critical consciousness of the outcome of racism and exclusion, visiting our dumpsters is necessary to understand the ends of this culture of consumerism. I was shocked to ultimately realize that our food distribution and packaging system guarantees that more goes to waste than is ultimately consumed. This waste, while completely sickening, makes this act of resistance, dumpstering, all the more satisfying. I never ceased to be struck by the beauty of serving our homeless friends our dumstered near organic curries, fresh squeezed orange juice, with fifteen-dollar pies for desert, or blocks of dumpstered organic chocolate. Yet, a greater and more necessary act of resistance is the work of gardeners who, despite the abundance of cheap and free corporate food to be found, grow fresh food from the ground. Only this produce has a story that we completely know, and having grown organically in our heavily composted yard, it provides beauty as well as superior nourishment. The shared work of composting, planting, harvesting, and even weeding, as any gardener knows, is nourishment for the body and soul, and builds community.

The violent, wasteful way much of today's food is produced, is something we must resist to the extent we can, but we also must create what we believe is just and life-giving. I believe this is essential for healthy human communities, as well as for healthy bodies and a healthy earth. I remember a community member washing-up her hard earned harvest of carrots under the garden hose, while another worker arrived with a load of dumpstered produce. The gardener just sighed. She had produced these succulent roots in our yard from only earth and seed, a real act of simplicity, but vastly more complicated than either dumpstering or going to the store. Like such, are our choices to live simply: not expedient but of greatest worth.

Certainly it is not for everyone to scavenge or grow their own food or to become a vegetarian, but we can all eat nonviolently by choosing, when possible, food that has been grown or raised under conditions that are humane to animals and least damaging to the earth, such as buying direct from organic farmers, eating locally grown, avoiding packaging, or joining a food co-op. Unfortunately, we await a change of values in our society before the choice of wholesome, non-violently grown foods are made available to all, the poor in particular. In the end, I believe that the heart of simple eating is the sacrament of a shared meal, the communion food can create with one another, as well as with the natural world. It seems that the sharing of good food, which truly reflects the goodness of our lives, is one of the most live-giving, peaceful actions possible. ✦

Walking the Path of Peace

by Elizabeth Madden

Pointing to my crusty brown sandals, she told me my shoes were ugly. I learned early in life not to take fashion tips from preschoolers, so I gently explained that the shoes were comfortable for the walk to see her, and for playing on the jungle gym. She couldn't have had any idea of the story behind the ugly brown sandals, and couldn't have known that they had been carefully selected from the mélange of shoes that I owned to represent my various personas.

Every new identity I have wished to create for myself has demanded its own unique journey, and with each journey, a new set of shoes. While teaching for the summer in Costa Rica, I had chosen the "ugly" brown sandals to create my "simple, ready to play in the dirt, clean up urine from the floor, and walk to work" persona. I can identify and chronicle each phase of my life by my footwear. Grammar school was sponsored by cheerleading shoes, basketball high-tops, volleyball low-tops, golf spikes, ballet slippers, track and tap shoes. High-school demanded softball cleats, kick-boxing boots, water-polo pool-side flip-flops, and work heels. With college came a dramatic change in climate, and with it a new parade of shoes. In came brown snow boots, black dress boots, black clunky flats, new running shoes...until I had accumulated a shoe for every persona, whim, and hobby, and created a pressing need for increased closet space. When I first heard the quote, "There is no path to peace, the path is made by walking," my pricked consumer conscience was soothed by the smug assurance that when I did choose to walk the path of peace, I would be equipped with the proper footwear.

However, when I took on the identity of a Catholic Worker, instead of purchasing a new "voluntary poverty" pair of shoes, I purged my closet of nineteen excess pairs (including the crusty brown sandals). I still wonder how my black leather boots are doing, if their new owners are good to them and fully appreciate their intrinsic worth; but I don't wish them back. I am perfectly satisfied with the few pairs I have left, and life has tasted better since I decided to walk the path with a lighter load.

When the events of September shook us so violently, I was ready to walk the path of peace in earnest. I joined the peace community at marches, stood on street corners with leaflets, and paced the pavement with signs. Hearing a renewed call from Washington for U.S. energy independence, appalled by ongoing demands for oil exploration in the Arctic Wildlife Refuge, and tired of wars motivated by U.S. oil addiction, I started reflecting on my own oil and gasoline consumption. Wanting to take some kind of action, I decided to attempt an automobile Fast.

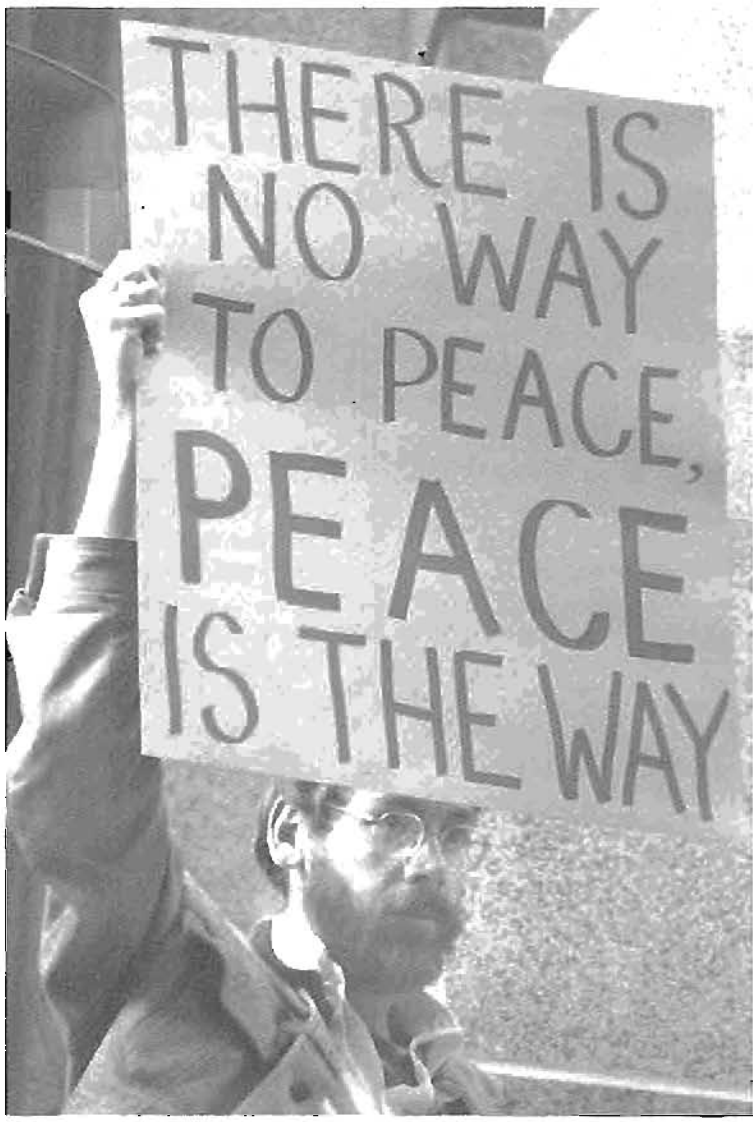
With the money I saved on unnecessary shoe purchases, I was able to purchase a used bicycle, a fuschia pink monstrosity that is popular with nine-year-olds around the neighborhood. This gave me the means to park my car and promise myself that for one month I would not drive my car or purchase gas or oil; instead I would walk, bike and bus everywhere.

The resolution to use a bike as a means of transportation was a difficult one for a person with a strong aversion to spandex, and who, just one year before, found it

---

Elizabeth Madden sells fair-trade coffee at Soulard Market on Saturdays.

perfectly normal to rent a plane to grab a burger. As far as simplicity and transportation is concerned, an overabundance of shoes is not the only mark on my consumptive past—gas-guzzling airplanes are the other. I learned to solo an aircraft at the age of 20; and it was the most empowering day of my life. Before my 22nd birthday. I had a commercial pilot's license for multi-engine land aircraft and an instrument rating under my belt. In my measly little 200-plus hours of flight time, I saw with fascination the fields change seasons under my wings. I wound around silos, took off into sunsets, and extinguished the cockpit lights at night to be able to see the stars unobstructed from 5,000 feet in the air. There was a great deal I had to learn before I could travel comfortably without an engine expressly under my control.



The Karen House community served as an indispensable school of simplicity in transportation for me. Tony and Julie took me on my first bus ride. Tim helped me figure out what buses to catch, where to stand, and what time to be there. Courtney let me know how many layers I needed for a bike ride on particularly cold days, and Julie helped plan my route for nights when I needed to know the safest, well-lit streets.

However, even with this wealth of guidance and assistance, only experience could fully initiate me into the realm of alternative transportation and save me from my gas-guzzling past. Punctuality not being my strong suit, I left late for my first ever commute to work by bike and found that instead of just running stop signs, I had to pedal fast up hills and down hills until my heart beat its way up to my eyeballs. Meanwhile, I was trying to force down the toast I had, in poor judgement, made myself to eat along the way. On the way home, I was so excited to toss my head back and breathe the airy sunset from the top of a bridge, that I lost control of my bike and almost crashed when I hit a hole in the ground. I also repeatedly reached the bus stop late, only to have it reinforced each time that neither the world nor the bus schedule revolves around me.

Yet simplicity teaches where stupidity cannot, and despite myself, I found the joys of simple transportation. I swear I saw every tree change color this fall, smelled every animal as I passed the zoo, and was inspired to write 20 poems at least. I made friends with bus drivers and received free career advice from passengers. I marveled at all the places I could go for only $1.25 or for free with some physical exertion.

On the first cold night, I felt the exhilaration of pride as I faced the dark, daunting elements alone on two wheels. For the first time, I was able to imagine my life free of an ice-crusted, insurance claiming, parking ticket magnet of a car, that is held together by rust and spilled soda. I felt truly connected to my surroundings, independent, and free of the need for my car at last. On the second cold night, I confined my four-layered body and runny nose to the house, and envisioned a life where there was nowhere else I had to go for the rest of winter.

At the end of my month-long transportation fast, my car was broken into and I couldn't drive it for another two weeks. The day I finally got my car fixed, my bike was vandalized and the brakes were damaged. My bike and I have stayed in-doors ever since.

Since my automobile fast, I don't drive nearly as much as I used to; I share rides whenever possible and plan in advance so that I can limit my transportation needs. I feel confident on the bus routes now, and think that I could get left-behind or stranded anywhere in the city and still manage to find my way home. My automobile fast certainly transported me to a simpler space; but I confess that due to my aversion to the cold, true simplicity in transportation still eludes me. I have high hopes for the spring. ✦

Musings on Speed

by Randy Kehler

"Nobody sees a flower, really — it is so small — we haven't time, and to see a flower takes time, like to have a friend takes time."

— Georgia O'Keefe

For many years now I've had an idea in my head for an illustrated children's book that I'd someday like to write. It would be the kind of children's book that, hopefully, adults would also enjoy, and perhaps profit from. Though I haven't thought of a title for this book, the topic is clear. Speed.

My first mental outline for this book, going back at least twenty years, is still the one that keeps coming up whenever I think about it. It's very rough and undeveloped, and if I were to really put my mind to writing such a book, this outline might be radically revised, if not scrapped altogether. But here's how it goes.

A young boy, accompanied by his mother, is taking his first trip in a jet airplane. He's very excited and spends all his time looking out the window at the clouds flashing by all around him. But soon he becomes dissatisfied and wants to see what there is to see underneath the clouds – the mountains and valleys, the cities and farmland that are only a distant blur now and then when the clouds part for a few seconds. His mother explains that jets fly too high and too fast to see much more than that, but she promises her son that on the return trip they'll travel on a smaller, slower, propeller-driven plane that usually flies beneath the clouds.

The trip back proves to be as exciting as the trip out, only this time the boy is able to see all sorts of interesting and amazing things race by below him. But again the boy becomes dissatisfied. As they are flying over a dense forest, he tells his mother that since he's lived all his short life in a city, he wants to get closer to the forest to see what it's really like. So she promises that the next time they make this trip – to visit the boy's grandparents— they'll go by train, explaining that the train passes right through the forest the boy saw from the air.

Come the following Spring, they set out for the grandparents' house by train. Once again the boy has a great time, but again he's frustrated. The trees in the forest are whirring by so fast he can't really see them and he can't really see anything else in the forest either. He wonders whether flowers grow in the forest and whether there are bears and foxes and deer playing about among all those trees, as in a book he once read. So his mother suggests that on the way home, instead of going by train they rent a car and drive through the forest, so they'll be able to go more slowly and even stop and get out when they want to. So, after another good visit with Grandma and Grandpa, that's what they do.

As soon as they get just a little way into the forest, the boy insists upon stopping. He says that riding in the car he can see a lot more than he could on the train, but he still can't see what all these trees they're passing really look like, or what it's like to touch and smell them. It happens that the place where they pull over is marked as the trailhead for a short, one-mile nature trail that loops around and comes back to the parking area. The boy asks his mother if they can walk it and she agrees, provided they do it quickly so as not to be too late in getting home.

Randy Kehler is a recovering speedaholic who lives in Western Massachusetts. He and his wife Betsy Corner are longtime friends of Karen House.

I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach. I wanted to live deep and suck out all the marrow of life.

Henry David Thoreau

In proportion as he [or she] simplifies his [or her] life, the laws of the universe will appear less complex.

Henry David Thoreau

Riches prick us with a thousand troubles in getting them, as many cares in preserving them, and yet more anxiety in spending them, and with grief in losing them.

St. Francis

Too many people spend money they haven't earned, to buy things they don't want, to impress people they don't like.

Will Rogers

Work and leisure are complementary parts of the same process. They cannot be separated without destroying the joy of work and the bliss of leisure.

E.F. Schumacher

Katy Schluge

The waste generated each year in the U.S. would fill a convoy of 10-ton garbage trucks 145,000 miles long -- over half-way to the moon.
From All-Consuming Passion by the New Road Map Foundation

They remained faithful to the teaching of the apostles. The many miracles and signs worked through the apostles made a deep impression on everyone. The faithful lived together and owned everything in common.
Acts of the Apostles, 2:42-44

Simplicity is as related to love as it is to justice. It is liberty to see ourselves anew and to disengage from the comforts that blind us to the face of the poor.
John F. Kavanaugh

Industrialization is, I am afraid, going to be a curse for man [and woman] kind.
Mohandas Gandhi

Create a clean heart in me, O God, And renew a right spirit within me.
2 Kings 14:24

To become [hu]man means to become "poor," before God. To become [hu]man involves proclaiming the poverty of the human spirit in the face of the total claims of a transcendent God.
Johannas B. Metz

Watering the Garden by Thich Nhat Hanh

Water and Sun
Green these plants.
When the rain of compassion falls,
Even a desert becomes an immense, green ocean.

Walking Meditation by Thich Nhat Hanh

The mind can go in a thousand directions.
But on this beautiful path, I walk in peace.
With each step, a gentle wind blows.
With each step, a flower blooms.

Some of these quotes were gathered from *Discussion Course on Voluntary Simplicity*, Northwest Earth Institute.

So they set off at a brisk pace around the loop.

But, of course, the boy is frustrated again. "We're walking too fast!" he cries out to his mother, who is soon some distance ahead of him on the trail. He tries to keep up, but he just can't help stopping every few feet – to feel the smooth bark of a beech tree, to touch the sticky sap oozing out of a white pine, to run his hand over the soft green moss on the side of the boulder, to bend down to see if the little blue wildflowers under a clump of lacey ferns have a smell, to watch a downy woodpecker peck away on a dead sugar maple. The boy is in seventh heaven.

Sylvia Hein

Unfortunately, it's getting dark and they still have a long way to drive, so finally the mother promises her son that if he'll just keep walking, they'll come back another day just to see and spend time in the forest.

I don't have a clear idea as to how to end this story, but I imagine that the boy and his mother soon come back and spend several hours in the forest and that the boy discovers that he can get to know the forest best not only by walking slowly and stopping to look at, touch, and smell things, but especially by just sitting very quietly and very still in one place, using all his senses to take in everything around him.

Hopefully, the gist, or implication, of this little tale would be clear without including an explicit "moral of the story" at the end – the gist being that the more we slow down, the more we see and the more we understand. And the more we see and understand – ourselves as well as other beings and the rest of creation all around us – the more we're capable of loving. Conversely, the faster we go, the more we're out of touch with everything and everybody. Which, in turn, can have negative, and sometimes disastrous, effects on our health, our sanity, our relationships with others, our relationship to the environment, and our relationship with, or awareness of, what some refer to as the Great or Holy Spirit, or the Ground of Our Being, or the Divine Nature of Things, or Reality, or God.

Whether this book will ever get written, I don't know. But telling you about it here at least gives you an idea as to what it is that concerns me.

> The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. More than that, it is cooperation with violence. The frenzy of the activist neutralizes his work for peace. It destroys her own inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of his own work because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.
>
> — Thomas Merton

I've long regarded "speed," as in going fast, to be addictive, just like the drug called "speed." And like other addictions, it has destructive consequences. I feel as though I know what I'm talking about here. A lifetime of personal speediness, not to mention my observations of others and, more generally, the increasingly speedy pace of life in our society as a whole, have left me with impeccable credentials. In short, I am somewhat of an expert on the subject. Sad to say, my expertise is not unique to me. Perhaps you, too, dear reader, are a speed expert.

I remember well the summer of '94, and how incredibly packed and fast-paced my life was — more so, even, than usual. We were just winding up a very intense five-year campaign around war-tax resistance and I was simultaneously involved in organizing a large benefit concert, helping to build two Habitat-for-Humanity-style homes for low-income residents of our county, consulting with my wife Betsy on the construction of a new home for ourselves, and trying to keep up my regular, nearly

full-time work on an ongoing political corruption project. One warm September day as the summer was drawing to a close, I found myself sitting outside staring at the surrounding field of grasses and wildflowers and silently, with tears in my eyes, crying out, "Please, God, PLEASE help me slow my life down!"

Two weeks later, on a day I will never forget, my prayer was "answered" (yes, it's true, we need to be careful what we wish, or pray, for): I came down with a serious case of Chronic Fatigue and Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS) which, although much milder now, continues to this day.

CFIDS is not something I'd wish on anyone, including myself. During my best periods, I still have to take a nap in the middle of the day, go to bed early, avoid strenuous physical activity, and be careful not to get chilled, overheated, or exposed to other's colds and flu. During my worst periods (which, fortunately, are less and less frequent), my body is either feverish or shivering, it's hard to sleep, my mind feels like it's fogged in, and going upstairs is like climbing Mt. Everest.

> When I came to this monastery where I am, I came in revolt against the meaningless confusion of a life in which there was so much activity, so much movement, so much useless talk, so much superficial and needless stimulation that I could not remember who I was.
>
> — Thomas Merton

On the other hand, my life — even while keeping up a scaled-back version of my previous political writing and organizing work — has indeed slowed down, which has been a great blessing. And, as a result, I've experienced during the past seven years all sorts of related blessings, or silver linings. A major one is my regular meditation-and-prayer practice, with which I begin each day. Before CFIDS, I could never make the time for it, or stick with it for more than a few days in a row. Now, when I occasionally have to skip my morning "sitting" for some reason, I feel like a boat that has set out to sea without its anchor, a tree that's been temporarily cut off from its roots.

Before CFIDS, my reading consumption was largely limited to newspapers, magazine articles, and other short pieces of a political nature that I needed to read in order to stay abreast of my work. I was usually too busy for anything more. However, in the seven years that I've had CFIDS, I've probably read more books than I did during the previous three decades — historical novels, biographies, books on religion and philosophy — often poring over them sentence by sentence, letting the meaning of the words and phrases sink into my consciousness (in the spirit, I would like to think, of what the Benedictines call "lectio divina," the meditational practice of "holy reading").

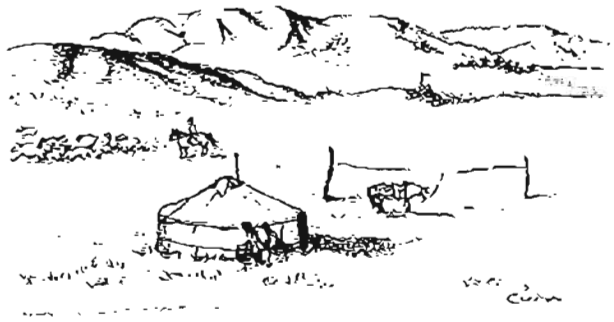
In the pre-CFIDS days I used to find it nearly impossible to tear myself away from my paid employment and other responsibilities and to "call it a day." This was largely because I was oblivious to the needs of my body, not to mention my mind and spirit. Now, because my body's messages have been too forceful to ignore, I find it much easier (most of the time) to stop for a quiet lunch in the middle of the day and to keep myself from working all evening after supper.

Then there are my treasured woods walks. I've always loved walking in the woods, which, here in Western Massachusetts, are everywhere. But in "the old days," a walk meant a fast walk, making sure to get the maximum amount of exercise in the least amount of time. Oh, what I was missing! I now see what otherwise unknown worlds open up (as in my children's story) when I walk very slowly through the woods, stopping often to look and listen, to feel the breeze, to run my hands over a lichen-covered stone, to admire the perfect little ring of melted snow around each golden blade of winter grass, or to examine a tiny clump of mushrooms that wasn't there the last time I passed by. What unending marvels of life and beauty nature offer us if we will only take the time to notice!

My time of silence and solitude in the woods became so important a part of my daily existence that three years ago I made the "radical" decision to reduce my income and go to a four-day work week so that I could spend every Friday, and sometimes the night before, in our friends' small cabin on the edge of a small forest. In practice, I've only managed to spend, on average, every other Friday in the cabin, but what a joy those days have been — days spent gathering firewood, tending the woodstove, meditating, praying, reading, water-coloring, trying my hand at verse, and strolling slowly through the forest just to see what I can see.

Despite my CFIDS, or perhaps because of it, I know that my life in recent years has been at least as full and rich and satisfying as it was in the years before, and quite possibly even more so. Yet I feel the need to slow down even more (slowing down is a relative thing, after all), and to carve out even more times of silence and solitude. Perhaps it's just that I'm getting older and that these are natural urges for a person approaching 60. Or maybe it's my own attempt to correct the longstanding imbalance between the time I've allotted during my adult lifetime to satisfying my activist impulses versus my contemplative yearnings. The latter now seem bent on making up for lost time.

From Abroad



by Susan and Carolyn Griffeth

This letter has been sent from Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia. By sharing tidbits of my life here, I hope to illustrate how different simple living looks in this unique culture and environment.

I live in the coldest capital in the world, and in the country with the highest livestock-to-human ratio. In Mongolia planting vegetables is a newly introduced foreign concept. Half of the country is still living nomadically, following their herds to better grazing in the biggest untouched grassland in the world. Here there is still no legal land ownership. When fences are built they are to keep animals away from the house rather than containing them within. Mongolia's 2.5 million people herd approximately 20 million animals.

I've lived here for three years and have learned much about living simply in this time. The hardest to learn has been simplicity concerning living space. Most Mongolians live in gers; small round tents called yerts, by some. The ger has only one circular room which functions as kitchen, living room, bedroom, and tack shop even. Mongolians, in general, do not enjoy being alone and much prefer to live, sleep, and eat in one room together. In the city, some of the wealthy have built huge (western style) houses to display their riches. But often, if you visit in the winter, you will notice that they block off the rooms that aren't warm and all the family members sleep around the kitchen stove as they would living in a ger.

I live with four Mongolian children in a two-bedroom apartment and often I feel very crowded in my relatively spacious home. I have often tried to get the boys to sleep in one room and the girls in another. But they usually feel more comfortable all sleeping in the same room. Adjusting to my crowded home, I have had to ask myself a few questions. Why does one need a separate living room and bedroom, or a couch that is different than your bed? What is the need of having separate bedrooms, especially when that makes more area to heat?

My ideas about food and simplicity have also gone through a great adjustment. It is hard to compare the food here, and the culture that surrounds it, with the way we think of food in America. One of the greatest contrasts involves the variety of food, or lack thereof. For those that live in the Mongolian countryside, there are often only two varieties of foods: milk products and meat. A nomad's life is caring for his heard, which he moves from four to six times a year depending on weather and grazing conditions. Everyday the family gets some milk from their livestock (horses, goats, sheep, cow, or even camel) and, when needed, slaughters an animal for meat. Milk can be made into about ten different variations including yogurt, hard dried curds, and fermented alcoholic mare's milk. Meat is usually dried or boiled. There are, of course, many varieties of meat including all types of livestock and occasionally game, like marmot. When there are no trading centers around, this will be the nomad's complete diet. Families that have an opportunity to trade will expand their diet with white flower. Every form of dumpling or dish that can be formed with meat and flour exists. To a Mongolian the small variations of how the dumpling is shaped constitute variety.

Nomads have been living like this for thousands of years, and simplicity lies in the practicality of their lives. Utilizing vast grassland, they waste nothing, buy little, and leave no trash behind. Their needs are simple: a $600 ger with a stove, a large enough herd, the knowledge that imbues their culture, and conducive weather. Their animals are literally their lifeblood. Not only do they provide food, but also clothing and insulation in the form of wool and hides, and heating in the form of dung since wood is scarce. A nomad spends his days rounding up and watching animals, herding. Vitally connected to the land and elements, they develop an intuition which predicts the weather and when and where to move. When they collapse their ger to move, only bones are left behind. Every other part of the animals has been eaten; lungs, heart, brains, ears, eyeballs, and intestines alike.

I currently live in a Soviet, block-style apartment that the Russians built before they left the scene here in 1990. Living in the capital city, I have access to the most diverse markets in the country, which have imported fruits

Susan Griffeth (sgriffeth@magicnet.com) lives in Ulaan Baatar and is a mother of four Mongolian foster children.

and vegetables. Nonetheless, even in the capital, all Mongolian dishes that include veggies use only the "Mongolian basic four": potatoes, cabbage, carrots, and turnips. These hearty veggies do well in the cold and are easy to ship and store. They have been integrated, mainly by the Russians, into most city dweller's diets. Mongolians say that they can flavor food in three ways: with milk, fat, or salt.

Over the last year, I have barely bought any other food than meat, milk, flour, rice, and the basic four. I'm surprised at how well I've trained my taste buds to enjoy this simple, uniform diet. Even though while living in the states I ate little meat, today I am satisfied eating this meaty Mongolian diet. It is interesting to note that all meat here is organic, local, and free-range, and that eating meat raised in such a style is the best way to preserve our great grassland. Ironically, eating meat is the way to live simply here.

Water usage is another area where Mongolians demonstrate their great practicality. Approximately ⅃ of the country does not have access to running water. Even in the capital city of close to one million people, half must walk to a water station to access semi-clean water. Some city dwellers walk over a mile to get their water, dragging a little cart and jug, and then wait in line for hours to buy up to twenty gallons of water. Because of this, water is cherished at home. There is a joke that can be translated something like this. What does a family do with their water after they have visited the water station? Well first, the father of the house bathes, then the mom, then the kids, then they wash the dishes with that water, then they wash everyone's clothes, and then the floor with the same water and finally when they are finished the mixture can be used to plaster the walls. (They use a sand/dust/water mixture to plaster.) If you meet a Mongolian, tell them this joke. They always laugh because they know that it is somehow partially true. Also because of the scarcity of water, older Mongolians will often only bathe once a year, and rarely wash their clothes which they strive to not soil.

I cannot say that in my household we have adopted such norms, but nonetheless I cherish my showers in a way I had not previously. It is certainly true that with convenience comes waste. I have heard that most Mongolian families living in apartments with on-tap water use one hundred times the amount of water they would use living in a ger. So quickly we forget how precious this resource is. Still, even apartment dwellers mandatorily use less hot water since it is turned off throughout the city during part of the day.

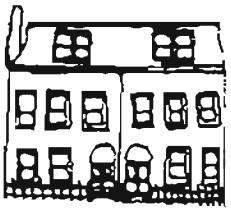
Of course Mongolia is changing from some of the old ways I've mentioned. It is going through a huge transformation, from communism to a free market economy. The climate too is changing, as global warming impacts the world's weather patterns. For this reason, many nomads aren't doing well these days. The summers have become extremely hot and dry, thus burning up the grasses, and in the winter we have had great blizzards that cover deeply the little grass that remains. Because nomads do not bail hay, they depend on good summer grass that the animals can eat during the winter by digging under a thin layer of snow. Being without adequate grass to survive our long, harsh winters, Mongolia's herds have been devastated: twenty percent of our herds have died in the past two years. An entire way of life is under threat because of environmental damage, for which this undeveloped nation has little responsibility. Just think, if we could only live simply in the United States (and elsewhere), we could help to preserve the traditional way of life of Mongolia's nomads.

Tragically, many herders, who have already lost all their herds to global warming, have headed to the city only to find very few job opportunities. There is very little production or industry here. Most of the profitable venues have been started by the Russians or the Chinese, and because of our poor economy, Mongolians are easy to exploit with low salaries, and poor working conditions. Other Mongolians have sneaked through borders for better paying jobs in places such as Korea. This is an interesting example of globalization, both of the consequences of environmental degradation and the resulting displacement of peoples and dependence on foreign investment.

Globalization of trade has influenced urban dwellers in other ways too. Young people now desire marketed things over the more simple ways of the past. The Nike symbol is everywhere and even a popular form of graffiti, while factory-made clothing from China is becoming more popular than traditional Mongolian clothes. I am sad to see make-up and fashions robbing tremendous amounts of money from the poor. Coming from the states, I have insight into where this is all heading that my teenaged children lack. How can I explain that some of these new things are not an improvement and simply not worth having?

Still, I have much simpler choices to make here than I ever had in the United States. This is one of the many reasons that I enjoy my life here in Mongolia. When I buy food I do not wonder if it is pesticide laden or genetically engineered, or whether the meat was raised sustainably. It is easier for me to avoid excess accumulation of goods, because of our lack of space and because there is less to choose from here. I have learned to see the world in a different way and no longer desire all the conveniences common to life in the United States. Instead I use what is available and have learned to make-do. I probably have an easier time raising kids without TV and Nintendo than I ever would in the United States. I am blessed to share my home and resources with my four Mongolian children, and, although our space is tight, I'm sure that it makes us closer, more intimate. It seems that with simplicity comes a greater sense of togetherness. I experience this when I get on the bus; no matter how crammed it is there is always room for one more. +

From Little House



by Mary Ann McGivern, SL

The Loretto Community has Non-Governmental-Organization (NGO) status at the United Nations. Our representative, Betty Obal, urged me to attend the Preparatory Commission on Financing for Development in January. I read the document draft on the web and saw that it did not mention how military spending limits development. I sent an email to the NGO caucus, asking if it was appropriate to raise the topic. A few people said yes and one woman, Florence, offered to include me in a panel on militarism as part of the prepcom. I decided to go to the prepcom to raise the issue of military financing.

My hubris was daunted at the Sunday orientation in the Methodist Women's Building across the street from the UN. NGO reps, who were experts in trade, aid, taxes, and investment, had come to do battle with the World Bank, IMF, ILO, and WTO as well at the U.S., E.U. and G-77. * I was the only NGO talking about the cost of armaments. So I took a deep breath, jumped into the domestic caucus, and got an NGO proposed insert to paragraph 17: "We urge that weapons production and sales programs designed to generate cash flow be dismantled and replaced by productive commercial industry."

Monday morning I got my UN NGO photo ID upstairs in the big visitors' lobby. Then I went down stairs to the shops and post office. Next to the post office are unobtrusive glass doors, with a guard on duty. He checked my ID and nodded me through to the basement of the United Nations. Underneath the pavement, grass, and sculptures that line 1st Avenue between 42nd and 46th Streets, there are four conference rooms that each seat negotiating teams from all 180 countries plus a gallery for 200, with simultaneous interpretation for all. There are four smaller rooms equipped with translator service that seat a hundred or so, and four ordinary meeting rooms that seat 60.

The NGO delegates met as a group from nine to ten every morning. Then we met in caucuses. Secretary General Kofi Annan, U.S. ambassador John Negroponte, and others spoke to us on Monday morning. Negroponte stated what would be the US mantra: that the primary resource for development is internal and trade and investment are better than aid. Then the work began. From ten a.m. to one p.m., and from three to seven p.m. (midnight the last days), every day for two weeks, the FfD delegates met to debate the document, sixty paragraphs divided roughly into domestic, trade, aid, investment, and systemic issues. On Tuesday morning our NGO domestic caucus made my proposed sentence insert. It was never mentioned again. But Tuesday night the ambassador from Norway hosted a side event: talks by Oscar Arias** and Omkar Goswami, an Indian who gave an excellent talk on corporate responsibility and governance. But Arias outshone Goswami; he was brilliant. He said (responding to the U.S.) that countries devastated by war, drought, and AIDS do not have the internal capacity for development; that we cannot develop the South and militarize it at the same time; and that transparency in military budgets would be a good first step. There were two respondents. They managed to talk about transparency without using the word military. The first four questions from the floor were directed to Goswami. Then I asked why we couldn't simply put a call for military budget transparency in the FfD document. (First I apologized that I had been too shy to give Arias a one-woman standing ovation.)

The Norwegian ambassador took my question. He said the UN operates by consensus and while many nations want to reduce military spending, many others don't; and so militarism won't be mentioned in the document. Then he said: I can offer you some encouragement. Ten years ago, corruption was like militarism: nobody ever said the word. Then a few voices here began to insist that we address corruption. No one paid attention. But at home, people were demanding that we address corruption. Then the president of the World Bank gave a major speech on corruption. And today, although we haven't succeeded in getting rid of corruption, no one is silent about it.

Such a fine answer, so helpful to me. So I took courage and went to the caucuses: trade, labor, aid, systemic, investment; asking them to propose insertion of some language about militarism in the document. (None of them

Mary Ann McGivern, SL is heading to Mexico for a UN conference.

did; they were afraid it would tar their proposals.) And I began to lobby. One can walk down from the observers' gallery right on to the floor of the conference hall, sit in a vacant chair behind the delegate, and lobby.

But really, I didn't know what to say or even whom I was talking to, beyond their nationality. Still and all, I was astonished to find myself whispering to the Ghanaian and Russian chief delegates about transparency and listening to a long, useful explanation from the Irish representative about how the European Union comes to its decisions.

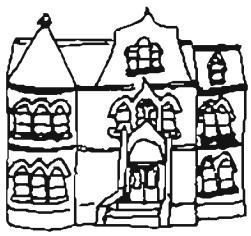
Thursday of the second week, I gave a talk on why military spending is bad for the economy — any economy. The other two panelists were Nitin Desai, Under-Secretary General for Economic and Social Affairs and Jayantha Dhanapala, Under-Secretary for Disarmament. And yes, they are as important as their titles imply, reporting directly to Kofi Annan. Our side event was in a small conference room, packed with at least sixty-five people. Desai and Dhanapala talked about the UN structural efforts to move toward a more coherent worldview. Their staffs meet regularly, but the diplomats with economic portfolios don't meet with those holding military portfolios — even within nations. It was very interesting and I continued daunted, cowed, overawed by the enormity of the tasks before us all.

I'm going to the FfD summit in Monterrey in March with two Loretto friends from Mexico and Guatemala. We'll try to raise the issues of human rights, freedom of corn from patenting, and military spending in the context of development. I'll try to speak mostly with the U.S. delegation. One of the NGO reps from Nigeria chided us at a morning briefing that we Americans ask the poor countries for support but we don't lobby our own country. Sure, it feels futile, but write to George Bush, write to Colin Powell, write to Congress, put a sample letter in your church bulletin. Ask the U.S. to give as much aid to the poor nations as we spend on the military. ✦

* International Monetary Fund, International Labor Organization, World Trade Organization, United States, European Union, originally Group of Seventy-seven poorest nations but now comprising 130 countries.

** former president of Costa Rica and Nobel Peace Prize recipient

From Karen House



by Annjie

Tony is getting a little precocious. The guests and community here at Karen House have watched him move from docile baby to adventurous fourteen month-old toddler. In the short two months since I've returned to Karen House from Africa, he has learned to walk and is now taking full advantage of his new skill. I imagine it must be like a new world for him. Two months ago his view was restricted to that which could be viewed from his walker or his Mom's shoulder, dependent on the angle of the particular mode of transportation. The world must seem bigger to him now, fuller, perhaps scarier, and certainly more entertaining. He has, in this transition, found his voice. He seems to have been a fairly silent baby, but now, in his adventures, he screams with delight or terror, depending on the moment.

I think a lot about Tony because I relate to him. I was thinking that our bond was because, as I mentioned, I just returned from Africa. In many times and many ways in the last two months I've felt like a stumbling toddler, feeling my way about. The only difference is that culture has taught me that screaming when I feel like it, is perhaps, not appropriate. I am learning a bit to walk again—find my way in the new worlds of a community, relationships, and a culture in which I haven't walked in quite some time. It is, for the most part, a joyful process, but one does tend to fall once in a while—in fun ways like the absolute wonder I feel at how organized traffic movement is here, and difficult ways like trying to figure out how to continue to choose commitment to friendships that have suffered for my absence and choices.

Annjie Schiefelbein is a delight to have back at Karen House.

I also relate to Tony in how it feels to suddenly discover an entire new world in your very own home. Karen House is very much my home, and has been before and throughout my travels. Coming home to a very different community has been amazing. It was odd, my first day back—going to take a shower. I realized that, while I was totally comfortable in my little shoes with my towel going down to shower in my home, most of the people in the house had no idea who I was, why I was there, and certainly why I was using their shower. Those two conflicting realities were a bit difficult. Also, there are thirteen community members now, which is larger than I have ever experienced. And the contrast and complement of each member is mind-boggling. Thinking of that, my own process of learning to walk in this new community, I realized that maybe I'm not unique in my relating to Tony. Our community is certainly and continually learning to walk as well. Learning to walk despite our obvious differences, talents, desires, graces, demons and intentions, is an amazing process. The amazing thing is that we are most often there to remind each other that we chose this path, this Catholic Worker House and philosophy, and that our community is dependent on our different swaggers, swings, limps, sways, and skips. As each of us finds our own walk within this house, within our collective spirit, we pull the community into a wider view. Sometimes with delight, other times with terror but always, we hope and with love

We continue with what we've always tried to do—hospitality for people like Tony and his mom. Sometimes it seems like we're doing it pretty well. There are glimpses of heaven—such as on Thanksgiving Day when we had a meal with women and children and community of the house, men and women from the neighborhood including co- housing folks, an Afghani family, and a couple of dogs! Looking around it seemed like this is the "place we should be". Another such glimpse came on Christmas Eve morning, when a woman ,who has been homeless with her children since 1994, told me, that it was the best Christmas she had ever had. Another time came when a guest, who had been sick, dressed up as our silent-Santa as the kids exuberantly waited for their turn on Santa's lap. I wonder if Tony ever thinks, "Hey, I've got this walking thing down". In those moments, it feels like we do too.

The activities in and around the house are so diverse now, and amazing to me. Two years ago co-housing was a dream. Now the Dorothy Day Co-housing Community is a reality in our neighborhood. We tried and failed in a tutoring project. Now a group of committed volunteers helps the Karen House and Co-housing kids every day in education, creativity, and togetherness. Two years ago we were composting and recycling, and now we are choosing so many daily things in the house to meet our responsibility to the earth and resources.

We have also done work on broader issues such as working to educate people on the sanctions against Iraq and our war against the Taliban which has caused suffering for many Afghani people. This work helps me look outside the community and myself and realize the world itself is in Tony's same situation. What are we as a country doing since 11 Sep if not learning how to walk in what to many Americans is a new world with horrible possibilities? Hopefully some, a few at least, are learning that when we walk without looking, we leave heavy tracks. We are learning that walking has ramifications if, when we walk, we walk without care for that on which we are walking, damaging, and destroying. I hope that we, as a nation, are learning to tread a little more lightly.

The greatest thing about Tony's process into walking is that it has come with the help of many hands around Karen House guiding him along the way. People willing to stop for a second and help him down the hallway, people who are around to dash for a save if he starts walking more quickly than he's ready to and ends up in a nose dive. I hope this becomes truer and truer for all of us at every level. We are all just the same as Tony, I think. I hope we all revel in it as much as he does, and maybe even scream in joy of fear once in a while (whether it's appropriate of not), and accept or give a hand when it's necessary. I think Tony would say the same thing.

✝

Whatever befalls the earth befalls the people of the earth.

--Chief Seattle

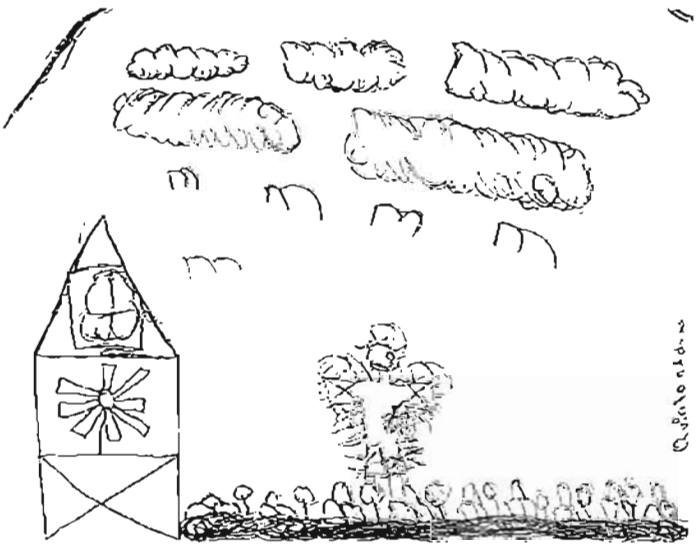
Round Table Talk

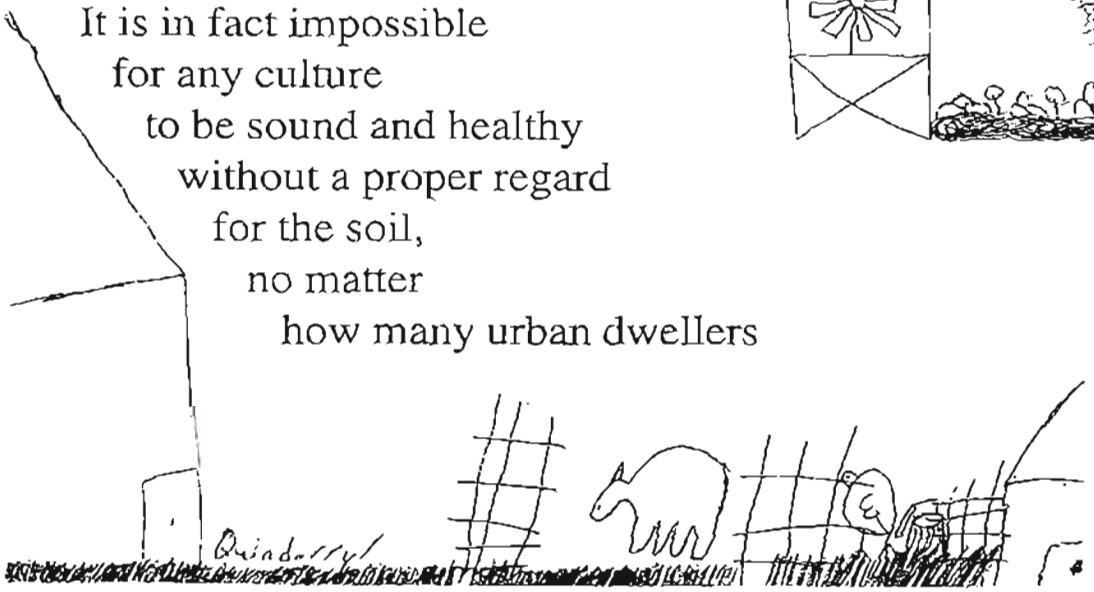
The children from Dorothy Day Co-housing Community illustrated some of Peter Maurin's Easy Essays during one of their recent tutoring sessions at Teka's house. We hope Peter would have liked them.

Easy Essays by Peter Maurin

Regard for the Soil

Andrew Nelson Lytle says:
"The escape from industrialism
is not in Socialism
or in Sovietism.
The answer lies
in a return to a society
where agriculture is practiced
by most of the people.
It is in fact impossible
for any culture
to be sound and healthy
without a proper regard
for the soil,
no matter
how many urban dwellers
think that their food
comes from groceries
and delicatessens
or their milk from tin cans.
This ignorance
does not release them
"from a final dependence
upon the farm."



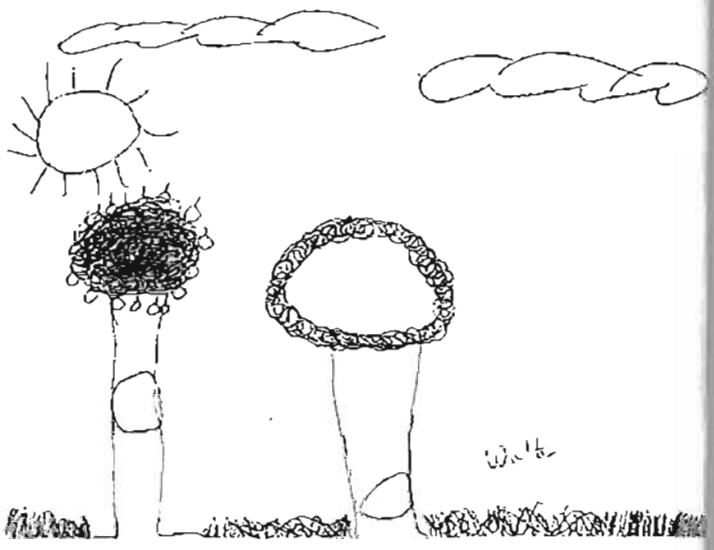


Radically Wrong

Monsignor Fulton Sheen says:
"Modern society is based on greed."
Father McGowan says:
"Modern society
is based on systematic selfishness."
Professor John Dewey says:
"Modern society
is based on rugged individualism."
When conservatives
try to conserve a society
based on greed,
systematic selfishness
and rugged individualism
they try to conserve something
that is radically wrong,
for it is built
on a wrong basis.
And when conservatives
try to conserve
what is radically wrong
they are also
radically wrong.

A New Society

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
within the shell of the old. . .

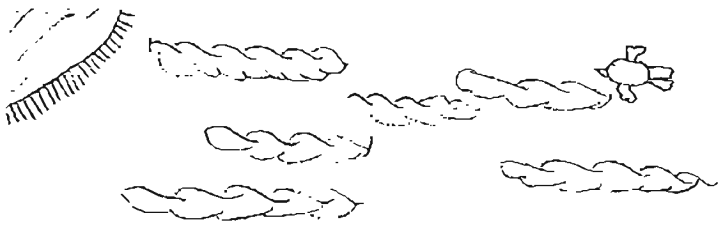


They and We

People say:
"They don't do this,
they don't do that,
they ought to do this,
they ought to do that."
Always "They

and never "I."
People should say:
"They are crazy
for doing this
and not doing that
but I don't need
to be crazy
the way they are crazy."
The Communitarian Revolution
is basically
a personal revolution.
It starts with I,
not with They.
One I plus one I
makes two I's
and two I's make We.
We is a community,
while "they" is a crowd.

Better and Better Off



The world would be better off
if people tried to become better.
And people would become better
if they stopped trying to become better off.
For when everybody tries to become
better off,
nobody is better off.
But when everybody tries to become better,
everybody is better off.
Everybody would be rich
if nobody tried to become richer.
And nobody would be poor
If everybody tried to be the poorest.
And everybody would be what he [or she] ought
to be
if everybody tried to be
what he [or she] wants the other fellow to be. ✦

The Home Grown Organic Troupe

presents:

New MacDonald:
The Growing Underground Resistance

A musical written and directed by Suzanne Renard regarding the dilemma of the farmer and genetically-altered foods.

Saturday, April 6th 7:00 p.m.
Sunday, April 7th 2:00 p.m.

Tickets: $5.00 adutls
$3.00 students
Seniors and children under 7 free

House Needs:

- Tutors for children
- Housetakers
- Fair Trade Coffee

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, Teka Childress, Mark Chmiel, Carol Giles, Carolyn Griffeth, Elizabeth Madden, Bill Miller, Barbara Prosser, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table
Karen Catholic Worker House
1840 Hogan ■ St. Louis, MO. 63106
Address Service Requested

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
St. Louis, MO
Permit No. 3087