

# THE Round Table

Winter  
2015

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

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## HOW DO YOU EXPERIENCE HOPE?

# Why This Issue?

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After publishing recent issues on climate change and racism, the Round Table committee thought it might be time to share some thoughts on hope. We therefore solicited articles from some people we respected, and asked them to answer the question, "What gives you hope?" This issue contains their eloquent answers.

In the lead off article on hope, the YWCA's racial justice director, Amy Hunter, provides a title with a double meaning, "Y Hope." She sees "hope for positive and impactful change" coming after the recent tragic loss of Michael Brown's life and the inspiring movement that arose in response. Sarah Nash quotes Dorothy Day's "Just Sitting There Talking" and describes the hope she finds when people build relationships and begin to understand one another. Paulette Sankofa tells about the hope that she learned from her community, that she has found in faith, and that she has seen expressed in action.

Flowing Margaret Johnson tells of the hope she experienced seeing young activists build a grassroots movement, and then the delight she experienced hearing them discuss the intersectionality of oppressions. The work she had done as a lesbian and a feminist has helped to make a difference to participants in current movements. Speaking of the intersectionality of oppressions—moving across the globe we hear from Mike Dulick, who talks about his life in Honduras and the impossibility of hope there, and, yet, he speaks of just that—hope in an impossible setting. Paulna Valbrun tells how she finds hope in children and their abilities to change and she inspiringly reminds us that there is much hope in putting resources in building strong children. Jenny Truax discusses hope in shared and common struggle, even after devastating losses. Theo Kayser finds hope in the human tradition of resistance to evil that goes on and on and on. If these articles were not enough, the Round Table is graced by a poem by Sylvester Brown who gives meaning to hope in the midst of reasons not to.

After the pieces on hope we end as always with our traditional articles. In this case, Tim Pekarek shares the loss of loved ones to suicide and provides critical information about how people can seek help, and Annjie Schiefelbein tells us of recent changes at Karen House.

At all times, easier and harder, I have felt certain that believing in the possibility of love and good is not in vain. In this lies our hope. Each of the authors has spoken in one way or another to the belief that human beings can bring about love and change for the good, even against the odds. We thank them for their inspiration, and for all that each of you does, to inspire our conviction and commitment to hope. ✚



- Teka Childress

Cover - Jenny Truax

Centerfold - Jenny Truax and Theodore Kayser

We welcome your donations and participation in this work!  
As Catholic Workers, our hospitality to the homeless is part of an integrated lifestyle of simplicity, service, and resistance to oppression, all of which is inherently political. For this reason, we are not a tax exempt organization. Furthermore, we seek to create an alternative culture where giving is celebrated and human needs are met directly through close, personal human relationships. Thus, all of our funding comes from individuals like you who share yourself and your funds so that this work can go on.

*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. People working on this issue include: Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, James Meinert, Sarah Nash, Theo Paulna Valbrun. Letters to the editor are welcomed.

# Y HOPE

by: Amy Hunter

I experience hope daily. It would be difficult to work for an organization like the YWCA and not experience hope. The mission of the organization, to eliminate racism and empower women, is a message of hope, tenacity, love and unwavering ambition. I was once told that women are the most hopeful people on the earth. I am not sure if women have an *unlimited* amount of hope for the world, but I am sure there are a myriad of ways that hope presents itself in St. Louis.

The recent events in Ferguson, MO make apparent that there is hope for positive and impactful change arising from the tragic loss and regional experience. Although the protesting may not be seen by all as hopeful, we are all hopeful that positive change will occur as a result of a tragic loss and regional experience. Our shared lens and witness to the events as they unfolded expand beyond race and gender, class and status. They bond us together with a shared experience of unforgettable events. After all, protesting is part of the fabric of America as evidenced by the labor's fight for collective bargaining, the suffrage movement, the civil rights movement and, more recently, Black Lives Matter and marriage equality movements. Change is inevitable and our hopeful spirit for positive change is equally inevitable. St. Louis was often described by outsiders as "passive" and "behind the times" when it came to social justice. Recently, our ability to dream, work and hope for a different world has been evident in the organization and activism happening here in St. Louis as a response to Ferguson.

The YWCA has certainly experienced the growth in demand for our racial justice programming throughout the region. The YWCA's Witnessing Whiteness Program is a perfect example of hope. This program, designed and implemented over five years ago to teach people who identify as white to unlearn racism, was offered once or twice a year at the YWCA. There were anywhere from 30-50 people in attendance in each class or session. Prior to the death of Michael Brown, the YWCA was hosting a group in Old North St. Louis, an integrated area surrounded by primarily black neighborhoods. After his death, the demand from white people to learn more grew

so intense that we started four more groups. In 2015, those five groups completed the course and we started ten more. The ten groups are now winding down and we have requests from over 20 organizations to start a group at their school, church, synagogue and workplace. That brings our organization great joy and hope. With over 300 people having attended this 20 week program, it gives us great hope for the changes to come in the St. Louis region.

Living without hope is unimaginable and we must work to keep hope alive in our young people. When I look into the eyes of the children who are fighting to take their textbooks home, publish a student newspaper, host a diversity club, or even demand certified teachers instead of substitute teachers... I see extreme hope. This witness is not only hoping they succeed in these efforts within the educational system; I am hopeful that their realistic and loving demands result in a world with smart, well-informed, STEM capable, loving and productive members of our society. They will be gifts to the universe. We all benefit when as a society and as a community we are doing well and when all our children are being well-educated and cared for. My hope for my hometown of St. Louis is to utilize the talented people and organizations within our region to improve in issues

of equity. My hope is that all voices are heard, respected and welcomed—welcomed to imagine, and to create and implement innovative solutions to our problems of racial inequity. With organizations like the YWCA and many others, I not only remain hopeful, I am inspired by the strength, courage, tenacity and vision of the young and "seasoned" members of our community. Together we can make a community's hopes and dreams actualized and serve as model for the world of love and equity. The YWCA is deeply committed to ending institutional and systemic inequity and is not only hopeful but strategic and deliberate. We look forward to the wonderful changes to come as a result of the everyday good people of St. Louis. Y or YWCA hope is the best hope to have; we have nothing to lose and everything to gain by remaining hopeful, connected and deliberate about creating a better tomorrow. ✦



Brittany Ferrell at the nonviolent direct action shutting down Highway I-70. The action took place during the Moral Monday actions on the anniversary weekend of Mike Brown's shooting. Photo - Patience Zalanga



**Amy Hunter** is the director of the anti-racism work of the St. Louis YWCA. She oversees the Witnessing Whiteness groups which are happening across the city.

# "Just Sitting There Talking"

by: Sarah Nash

I read Dorothy Day's autobiography The Long Loneliness last summer as I traveled through Europe. I was on a German train somewhere between Berlin and Munich when the word "postscript" suddenly appeared on the top of my page. I distinctly remember debating with myself about whether or not I should keep reading. "If I continue reading it," I thought sadly, "that means that the book will end." So I closed the book, placed it in the empty seat next to me, and stared at the passing landscape through the window.

Two minutes later, the book was open and back in my hands. Dorothy Day begins the end of The Long Loneliness with these six words: "We were just sitting there talking..." Over the next page and a half, she repeats those six words four different times. As someone who always reads with a pen in her hand, I couldn't stop myself from underlining the phrase each time it appeared. I was so struck by the nonchalant nature of her words. "It was as casual as all that," she writes. "It just came about. It just happened."

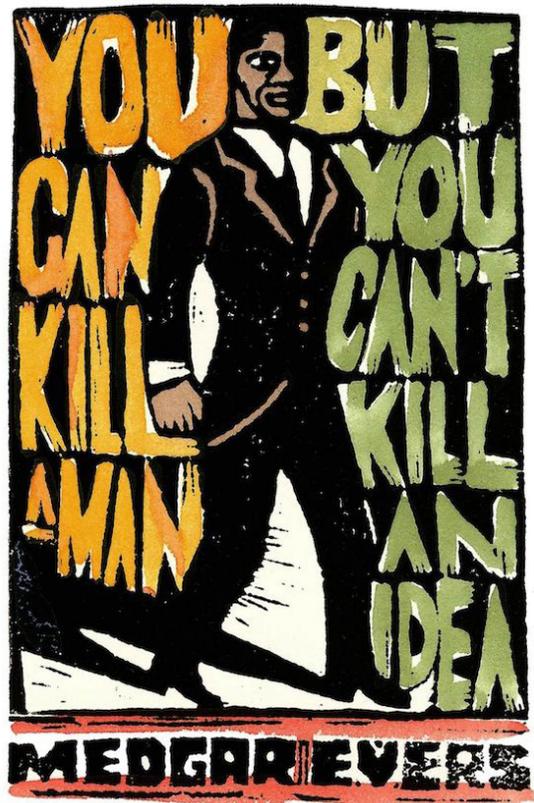
Conversations. Can it really be that simple? Did the Catholic Worker Movement really begin eighty two years ago when Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and countless others "were just sitting there talking?"

This past spring break, I traveled to the South to participate in a "Civil Rights Pilgrimage" with some students and faculty members from Saint Louis University. I spent time at memorials, museums, and historic sites in Memphis, Birmingham, Atlanta, Montgomery, Selma, Little Rock, and Jackson. While there were many enlightening and challenging moments, perhaps the most transformative one came in the form of a brief and unexpected conversation in the living room of Medgar Evers' home in Jackson, Mississippi.

Before entering through the only door of the house, the carport where Medgar Evers was assassinated in 1963, I silently sat in the grass trying to center myself. When I stepped in, a

small group had gathered in the living room around a woman who I presumed to be the museum's curator. I listened to the very end of her speech about the legacy of Medgar Evers, and after a short round of applause, the room cleared out and I continued my way through the house.

I saw the hole in the kitchen wall left by the bullet that killed Medgar Evers—it went through his body in the driveway, through the living room window, through the kitchen wall, and



**Sarah Nash** is a senior at Saint Louis University and is currently discerning what life path will allow her to combine her passions of urban social justice, conversations, and writing.

stopped only when it embedded itself in the metal refrigerator. I sat in the children's room where the mattresses rested on the floor without a bed frame because maybe if an assassin decided to shoot into their house, the bullets would sail over their children's heads. I stood in the bedroom that Myrlie Evers shared with her husband and read about their lives as individuals and as a couple. I desperately wanted to learn more about the life and legacy of the man whose home I was standing in, yet whose name had never appeared in any of my textbooks.

As I slowly meandered back through the living room, I saw the museum's curator standing alone, thoughtfully watching tourist after tourist walk through the house. Although I knew that the rest of my group was waiting outside for me, I felt an inexplicable pull to introduce myself.

"Hi, my name is Sarah." "Hi Sarah, I'm Minnie," she responded as we shook hands. "How long have you been working here?" I asked. "Well, I guess since it opened," Minnie answered.

As we stood together in the Evers' living room, I realized that I didn't want the conversation to end. Maybe Minnie sensed that too, because her eyes lit up as she began sharing her story with me. "While I was a student at Campbell College, the sister school of Jackson State, Medgar Evers spoke on our campus. Hearing him speak in that crowded room changed my life...I became involved with the Civil Rights Movement after hearing him speak that night."

"When I heard that they were going to turn his home into a museum, I was thrilled. But when it opened and I began visiting it regularly, I was really disheartened to realize that people were coming and leaving without really knowing who Medgar Evers was and what he stood for. The museum didn't have enough money to hire a curator, but because Medgar Evers changed my life, I felt like I had a responsibility to continue his legacy by teaching others about him, his life, and what he fought for."

I stood in awe, staring at Minnie as tears started to form in both of our eyes. "You see," Minnie said. "Someone talked to Medgar and it changed his life, Medgar changed my life when he spoke at my college years ago, I get to share this with you, here, at his house in Jackson, Mississippi, and then you get to go back home, tell your people the story, and inspire them. Today, by just meeting each other and telling stories, we've kept Medgar's legacy alive. That's how you transform the world, Sarah, meeting people and having conversations like this one."

At that moment, one of the students I had been traveling with rushed back into the house, "C'mon, Sarah! We are all on the bus waiting for you."

I looked at her, and then back at Minnie, and said the only words that I could articulate in that moment: "Thank you."

"Don't thank me, baby," she said with a wink and an embrace. "Just remember to do your part and keep the conversation going when you get back home."

When I reflect back on the trajectory of my own life, like Dorothy Day, I too can recognize that many of the most trans-

formative and life-altering experiences were simple, casual conversations with people. I was just sitting there talking with my friend Joe in a soup kitchen in downtown Louisville when homelessness stopped being a statistic and started to become a person, a face, a story. I was just sitting there talking in the chapel of my dormitory with some friends my first-year at college when I started wrestling with questions about capitalism, war, the prison-industrial complex, and social injustices. I was just sitting there talking with my best friend Theresa at our favorite coffee shop in St. Louis when I decided to abandon the cookie-cutter path that was paved for me and instead follow my passion. I was just sitting there talking with community members and neighborhood friends in the third-floor chapel of Karen House when I fell in love with the Catholic Worker Movement. I was just sitting there talking with my peers in an intergroup dialogue class about black male identity when I decided that I must take action and join the struggle for black liberation. I was just sitting there talking on my couch with my friend Chris when I realized that brokenness is part of the human condition and that we all need community. I was just sitting there talking with Minnie in the living room of Medgar Evers' house when I witnessed the intertwining of our stories and the interconnectedness of humanity.

I experience hope by sharing and receiving stories. I experience hope by being with and present to people. I experience hope by just sitting there talking.

Maybe Dorothy Day is right and it really is that simple. Maybe the revolution for a more just and peaceful world really does begin with the personal transformation that happens when two or more people share life together by "just sitting there talking." ✦

...And God's voice sang in each story,  
life sprang from each death.  
Our sharing became one story  
of a simple lonely search  
for life and hope and oneness  
in a world which sobs for love.

And we knew that in our sharing,  
God's voice with mighty breath  
was saying  
"Love each other and  
take each other's hand."

-Edwina Gately

# Hope is a Thing with Feathers

by: Margaret Flowing Johnson

The request seemed simple enough. Jenny emailed and asked if I'd write a piece about what gives me hope. Since I think of myself as a hopeful woman, I did not hesitate. I've been pondering the meaning of the word 'hope' ever since.

Hope is a common word in our culture. President Obama used it as one of his signatures in his first campaign for the presidency. Hope is one of the three theological virtues of Christianity – the other two are faith and love. The archaic meaning of hope, according to the dictionary, is trust. The current meaning, according to the same dictionary is: to want something to happen or be true. I think both the archaic and the current meaning miss the mark.

Hope looks to the future. It is linked to the existence of a goal, and hope is hopeless without action. I think that true hope is attached to a specific goal combined with determination to reach that goal. Hope is both short term and long term. Since I'm 74 my personal goals are short term. My goals for my communities are both short and long term.

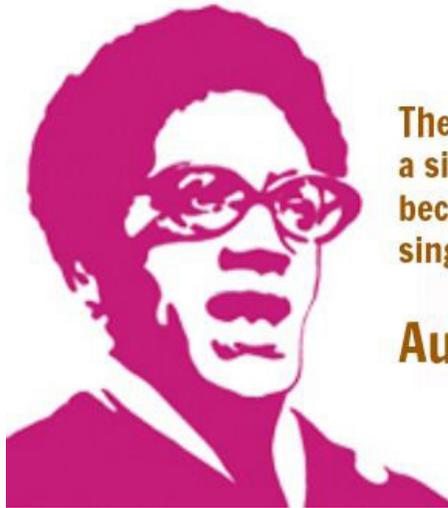
What gives me hope for the short term is the stunning appearance over the last few years of the grass roots movement that, for me, leapt out of Ferguson. It existed in small localized

movements before Ferguson, but it was the local and fierce resistance to the police state that struck a national and international chord.

This movement goes by many names but is commonly referred to as "Black Lives Matter." I'm an old school feminist who believes all oppressions are connected and the personal is political. I'm also a lesbian and worked for decades using direct action and civil disobedience for feminist issues, lesbian liberation, peace, and justice. I'd also recently become quite cynical about the use of direct action to create change. So, when I went to meetings in the early days of the Ferguson organizing I was surprised and delighted to hear the young leaders, both male and female, speak feminist. They talked of

the intersectionality of oppressions, they knew the theory of non-violent resistance - they spoke my language. I'd become convinced that, although feminism had certainly forced enormous improvements in the status and lives of women, our ideas had not taken root.

As I heard a young black woman talk of intersectionality, patriarchy, white supremacy, and male supremacy I turned to my partner with tears in my eyes and said, "they got it."



**There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.**

**Audre Lorde**



**Flowing Margaret Johnson's** activism has been an inspiration to many generations of Catholic Workers in St. Louis.



I saw young white people acknowledge the leadership of people of color. I watched clergy step between lines of riot police and angry black youth demanding answers. I participated in the surfacing of an articulate, thoughtful, intelligent movement standing in resistance to the police state which has, over the years, encroached on our freedoms. This fledging movement, with specific stated goals, is taking action. That is the very definition of hope.

What also gives me hope is working for change and seeing it happen. I worked for decades in the LGBT liberation movement. I and my partner founded St Louis Queer Nation. I was in the streets demanding our rights when lesbian teachers were routinely fired for being gay, and I was a teacher. I worked for legislative and policy changes toward homosexuals hoping to change things for future generations, yet many of them have occurred during my lifetime. Sometimes hope surprises.

Many people are despairing of the future of our planet because of the environmental degradation created mostly by the behavior of humans, but birds give me long term hope. It is true we are in the midst of a mass extinction event, but if we shift to geological thinking hope rears its lovely head.

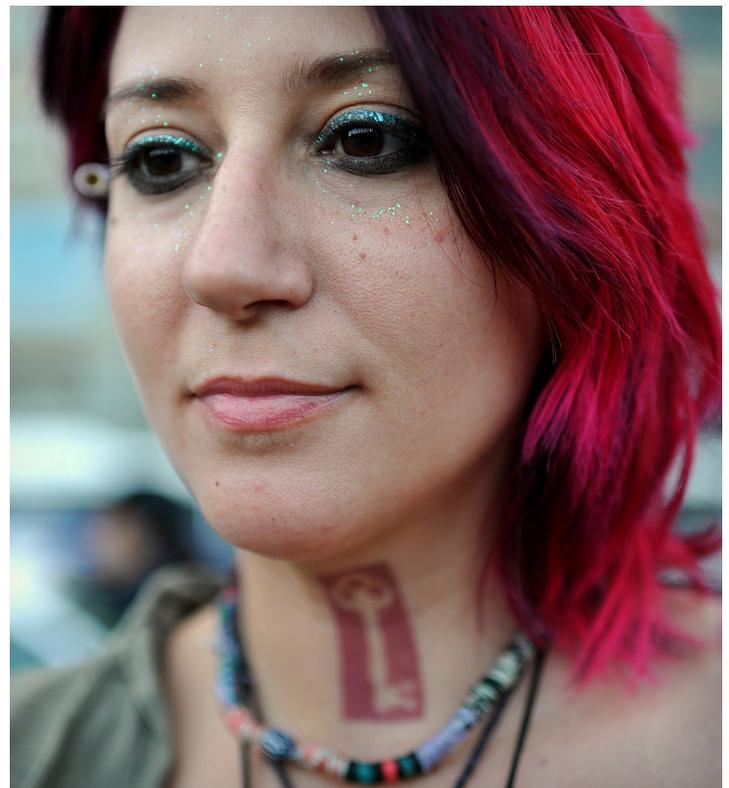
Our planet's gone through many changes during its 4.5 billion years. Continents drift apart or crash together. Water freezes into glaciers or thaws into oceans. Life continually evolves. Some species survive for a long time, some disappear. There have been five mass extinction events in our planet's history. The largest, the Permian mass extinction, took place 248 million years ago. Scientists estimate that fully 96% of the species became extinct. All life on earth today, both plants and animals, are descendents of the 4% that survived. The extinction event popularized in the media is the Cretaceous-Tertiary mass extinction that took place 65 million years and resulted in the extinction of most dinosaur species. We are currently living through the sixth great extinction event. Eventually, this event will show up in the geological record and most scientists expect that a geological age will be named by this event.

Now, with recent discoveries of feathered dinosaur fossils in China and other breakthroughs, we understand that all dinosaurs did not become extinct. We inhabit our planet with billions of dinosaurs – all birds are dinosaurs. There are about 10,000 species of birds worldwide and new species occasionally are still discovered. About 350 species either reside in Missouri year round, migrate here yearly from the South to breed, or just pass through in their annual migration. Their beauty, singing, and behaviors are a constant source of delight. Birds give me hope because they remind me that life on this planet is robust, flexible, and constantly evolving.

Emily Dickinson wrote:

'Hope' is the thing with feathers—  
That perches in the soul—  
And sings the tune without the words—  
And never stops—at all—

Next time you see a bird remember you are watching a dinosaur, and recall that hope is a thing with feathers. ✦



Woman at Chicago NATO Protest: by Viewminder

# Hope is Built on Nothing Less

by: Paulette Sankofa

I can't really remember a time when I didn't have hope. I grew up in a predominantly African American community in St. Louis, Missouri where people talked a lot about hope. This was before the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Bill. I can remember hearing adults talk about what they wanted for their children and how they hoped that one day their children would not have to face the same racism and challenges that they had faced. In church, I heard songs with lyrics like "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness." In school, our teachers spoke of the great hope they had for our futures. The idea of hope was engrained in all aspects of our lives and was a significant part of the culture.

As time moved on, I began to develop a deeper understanding of hope, the part it played in my life, and why hope was so important to those in my community. I knew hope was not just wishful thinking because I saw it in my father. My father was very active in the Civil Rights Movement. He was an active member of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters which was a very powerful union. I can remember as a girl sitting at the top of our stairway, peering over the bannister, and listening to the men who had gathered in our home to discuss union strategies. I remember them sharing their hopes and dreams for the future while they played cards, laughed and drank together. My father also participated in the sit-ins at lunch counters. He even took me along so I would remember and understand what it was all about. He and the other African American men in our neighborhood marched against unfair banking practices by organizations such as

Jefferson Bank in St. Louis. These were troubling and dangerous times, but I came to understand that hope had to be supported by action. In 1988, Rev. Jesse Jackson gave the battle cry to Black Americans: "Keep hope alive." Hope would require me to take additional action in order for it to be sustained.

As an adult, I began to see hope as a deep and living manifestation of my faith. Through scriptures such as 1 Timothy 4:10, I came to understand that faith was my belief in God and God's promises: "For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe (NRSV)." And toils and struggles I did face.

I was the caregiver for my mother while living in Indiana. When she could no longer live on her own, I relocated her to live with me in Indianapolis. I owned a home in Indianapolis, but because I worked seventy five miles away, I had found an apartment there and decided to rent out my house. Unfortunately, I had to place my mother in a nursing facility because I was unable to provide the physical and financial care that she needed. When the tenant moved out of my house, I moved back in and relocated my mother to a facility in Indianapolis. I made the daily commute of seventy-five miles each way to work and would then visit her in the nursing facility each night. Some days, I didn't arrive home and eat dinner until after ten o'clock at night. But I knew that I was my mother's hope. I was the manifestation of her hope and faith in God.

When my mother died, I faced many challenges with my job, I was financially strapped, and I had to give up my house. I stayed in Indianapolis and moved from friend to friend. I had



**Rev. Paulette Sankofa Ed.D.**, is co-founder of PEACE Weaving Wholeness, an organization dedicated to helping women heal and build brighter futures with hope through peer support and sharing compassion.

no relatives there. I faced so much that at any point I could have been rendered hopeless. In January 2013, I relocated to my hometown, St. Louis, Missouri. Within a few months, I found myself homeless. While I was shocked, I was not totally dismayed. Through Catholic Charities Housing Resource Services, I was able to get a space at a local shelter. I continued to have hope. I knew that for some reason, I was experiencing this wilderness. There was something for me to learn... a new action to take.

During my stay in the shelter, I was able to connect with resources to help with untreated physical problems, as well as

to recover from earlier physical and emotional traumas. I applied for a community research fellowship with Washington University School of Medicine/School of Public Health. I was accepted and completed the program. I was also awarded a mini-grant to conduct research on the health issues facing homeless women 45 to 64 years of age.

The hope that was instilled in me so long ago helped me to continue to move forward despite all odds. My hope helped me stay anchored to my faith in God that I would always have a hopeful future. I have now developed a program to help other women renew their sense of hope. ✝



“Look to the Heavens, Reach for the Stars” - Mixed media piece by Paulette Sankofa

# How I Experience Hope

by: Mike Dulick

Hope, in Honduras, seems impossible. We recently slipped out of first place as the most violent country in the world, but only because more of the drugs that the U.S. craves are going north by boat.

But it sure still feels like we're Number One. I just came from a wake for a young man of 23, freshly killed in San Pedro Sula—David Martinez (Angel David, if you like some irony). Early reports on the TV mentioned his name among four victims of a "massacre," rival gangs marking territory. There was some confusion whether it was David or his younger brother Ariel. So, at first I hoped it wasn't true at all, then I hoped it was Ariel (God forgive me!), then I hoped David was one of the three "victims," not the 'asesino,' the "thug," killed afterwards in a shootout with police. Still grasping for a way out, I now hoped that David was forced or threatened or scared into his killer role. Probably a false hope, don't you think?

As a little boy, David was always at my house with the other kids, watching TV, playing games, coloring pictures, though he was probably sassier than most. Living with his older brother Alexis, an evangelical pastor of a little open-air church attached to their house, David showed the signs of a "preacher's kid" rebelling against a fundamentalist upbringing. Now this.



"If hope springs from love, nothing is more shocking, every time I hear it, than the call for mercy."

And yet,

Alexis is a no fire-and-brimstone caricature; he's a gentle, halting, soft-spoken searcher of God's goodness. Tonight, with his brother lying in the rough casket before him, he knew he must speak. And so he did, without notes, without dramatics, and barely with a mic. His "congregation," usually consisting of about six to a dozen faithful on a Wednesday or Sunday, included half of the town tonight as they waited for his words. He said how terribly hard it is to lose a loved one, especially one so young, especially in the midst of violence; and not a few in the crowd could identify with that. And then he said: "Yesterday I believed in God. Today I believe in God. Today I believe even more in God." It must be true what Paul says in his most famous sermon: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:7).

And that's been my experience. Love somehow finds its way through despair, loss, and murder. You know, maybe it's the Spanish. "Creer," 'to believe,' does have a sort of a hoping, loving, trusting connotation to it. Dorothy Day put it this way when asked, "How can you see Christ in people?" she said, "It is an act of faith, constantly repeated. It is an act of hope, that we can awaken these same acts in their hearts, too."



**Mike Dulick** has lived in Las Vegas, Honduras where he moved after retiring after years of teaching in the Parkway school district. He had visited Honduras with students annually for years.

Politically, too, Honduras is hopeless. It was discovered that the current president Juan Orlando Hernandez (“JOH” for short) had helped himself to millions of dollars from Social Security funds to finance his campaign while as many as 3000 patients were dying, cheated of essential care. A seemingly spontaneous movement sprang up—“Las Antorchas,” Friday night marches lit by torches, demanding JOH’s immediate resignation. Not to be outdone, JOH sponsored other marches just as big, defending himself and protesting the corruption of former president Mel Zelaya, dredging up charges from 2009 still supposedly stuck in our craw. Well, the only spontaneous thing about either group was how quickly they both dove into the corruption they were protesting, to line their own pockets.

And yet,

At least two friends of mine kept their own counsel. Fermin, now in his forties, began protesting at the age of 12 when his principal hired a brother-in-law, who didn’t know anything about math, to teach the subject. Fermin led a walkout until the offending crony was cashiered. That was the first year I ever came to Honduras—1977. Years later, when a group of movers and shakers approached Fermin, a veteran teacher himself by then, to run for mayor of Morazan, he toured every village in the county (at least 60 aldeas), offering his vision of participation and equality. When his “backers” realized he would be incorruptible and their palms would go ungreased, they withdrew their support. And he hasn’t changed. So when “Las Antorchas” was organized in Morazan, Fermin saw to it that all groups marched together, united against corruption of whatever political party, hoping for a new way.

Elio, in his sixties, has spent his life for others. In his youth, he was arrested for simply carrying a Bible because that marked

you as a “communist,” as someone who believed in the rights of the poor, thanks to all the volunteer Jesuit missionaries who had just been sent in 1950 from the U.S. and Spain. They were already anticipating, you might say, Vatican II, not to mention Pope Francis! At their height, there were about 40 Jesuits here, mostly in parishes, and Elio was a personal friend to every one of them. Greatest of all was Jim “Guadalupe” Carney, whose autobiography, published secretly as “J.C. Hanley,” inspired a generation of priests and brothers and hundreds of laity. He wrote: “To be a Christian, you HAVE to be a communist!” He later told me, in my one chance to meet him, that “they made me change it to ‘revolutionary,’ but everyone knew what I meant.” That’s why he took the title of Mary for his nickname: “Who’s more radical than Our Lady of Guadalupe—a Mexican peasant!” Lupe was killed in 1983 at the orders of the Honduran government (and the CIA!) when he was thrown from a helicopter—a rain of grace and hope for all who continue his struggle. At one point, I had a doubt about Lupe and I asked Elio, “Lupe says he waited a whole year before saying Mass for the guerrillas he was serving as chaplain for.” Elio answered, “Jesus waited three years.” Ever since, EVERY Mass gives me hope!

If hope springs from love, nothing is more shocking, every time I hear it, than the call for mercy. Alexis made this point during the wake of his brother David: “There will be no vengeance. There must be no more violence. For my part, I forgive whoever killed David. And I hope David is forgiven.” Forgiveness does not get a lot of marchers. It’s not a great fundraiser, but it runs through the climate here, even when I resist it myself. Forgiveness does not wait for, “I’m sorry.” That’s why it’s so purely hope.

Schooled by the poor, I experience hope. As Dorothy Day said, “Christ came to make the rich poor, and the poor holy.” ✚



Sunset in Tegucigalpa, Honduras. Photo - Nan Palmero



# ... on hope

To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.

**What we choose to emphasize** in this complex history **will determine our lives.** If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction. And if we do act, in however small a way, we don't have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.  
- Howard Zinn

Hope is essential to any political struggle for radical change when the overall social climate promotes disillusionment and despair.

- bell hooks

People of high levels of hopefulness are very often people with deep experiences of adversity. Yet we see people doing things we admire and think, "I could never do that." But most of us haven't seen all the falls and scrapes and bruises it takes to get there.  
Hope is a function of struggle. - Brene Brown

May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.  
- Nelson Mandela

Yesterday is but a dream,  
Tomorrow is only a vision.  
But today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope. -Kālidāsa

There is a crack  
in everything.  
That's how the  
light gets in.

– Leonard Cohen

Hope is a  
woman who  
has lost her  
fear.

- Alice Walker

It's not the critic in the stands who counts; not the person who points out how the other stumbles, or how the doer of deeds could have done them better.

The credit belongs to the one who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood, who strives valiantly, who errs, and who comes up short again and again. For there is no effort without error and shortcoming.

The credit goes to those striving to do the deeds, who know great enthusiasms and great devotions; who spend themselves in a worthy cause, and who at best know the triumph of high achievement, and at worst, if they fail, at least they fail while daring greatly.

-adapted from  
Theodore Roosevelt

People say, what is the sense of our small effort? They cannot see that we must lay one brick at a time, take one step at a time. A pebble cast into a pond causes ripples that spread in all directions. Each one of our thoughts, words and deeds is like that. No one has a right to sit down and feel hopeless. There is too much work to do. - Dorothy Day

Hope will never be silent. -Harvey Milk

# A Christ Centered Hope

by: Miranda Prince

I experience hope as a positive feeling that something is going to happen. You never know when anything might happen - it can be a sudden desire, or a spike in your future. It's knowing and believing that it will happen one day. It's like a sense that you have inside.

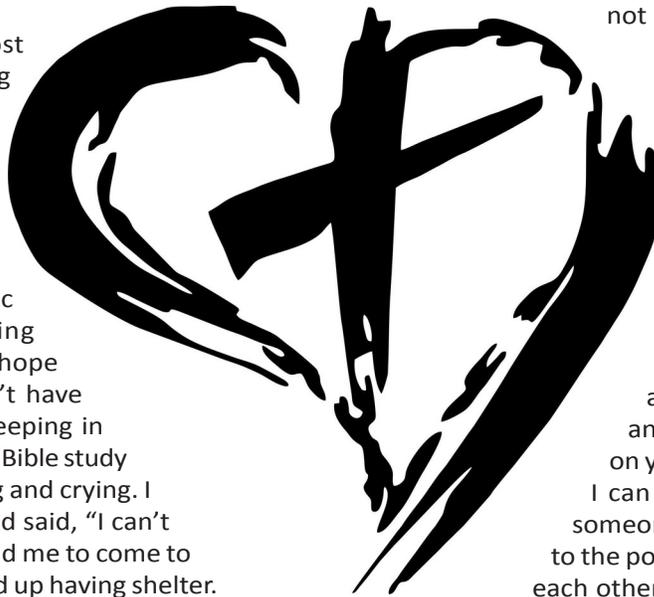
I have felt hope the most when I've had nothing- nothing to look forward to, when I've been feeling down. When I have had a whole bunch of stuff going on my life I would worry, "What about this, and what about that?" Then, I'd start to feel optimistic like, "OK I can stop worrying about what's going on and hope for the future." When I didn't have anywhere to go and I was sleeping in the car with my daughter, I left Bible study one night and I was just crying and crying. I felt like I'd tried all I could, and said, "I can't do it anymore". Something told me to come to Karen House, and then I ended up having shelter. It was like a little sense of hope that pushed me forward.

I'm a very spiritual person. I talk to the Lord and pray to Jesus. During this time, I was down and empty and he gave me just a little bit extra to move forward. Instead

of worrying about how bad it was, I got a sense of "you can do it" and "I'm not in this world alone."

In terms of the big picture, I am hopeful. If you look back in history, times have changed. I think everything will get better, but it's going to take time - it's not going to happen tomorrow. Having hope today will make tomorrow better, little by little. Having a little hope lets us dream. Everything that we are doing today is going to affect us tomorrow, so I think we're going to be OK as a people. On the other hand, I know that people are going to be people, we can't save everybody, and everybody's not going to always agree.

The daily glimpses I have of hope are when I wake up in the morning and it's a brand new day. I can reflect on yesterday, and if I did anything wrong, I can do better today. I feel hope when someone gives money to the poor or food to the poor. I feel hope when I see people love each other. When I see people do this, it gives me a sense that there are good people in this world. Sometimes you feel like people are full of crap, and wonder "Where the heck is the love?" but then, others give you hope that we're going to be OK. ✝



**Miranda Prince** is finding her way on this narrow path, as a mother, Christian, and a friend. "Hope is all I need."

# The Space Behind the Boulder

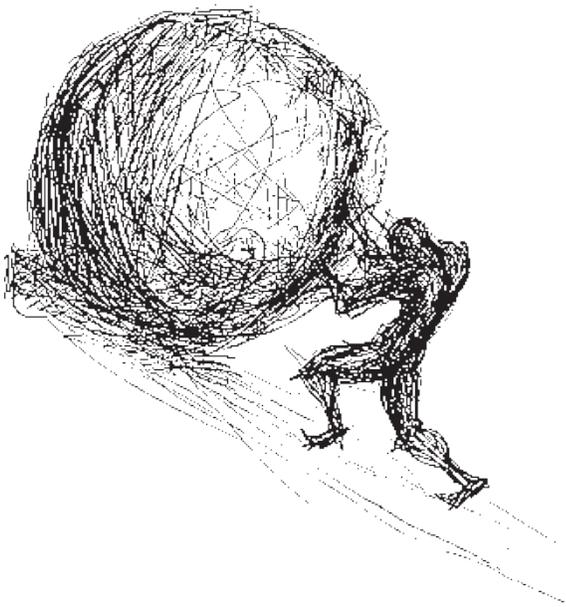
by: Jenny Truax

Seven years ago, my college friend and Dorothy Day Co-Housing member Dan was shot and killed in the Karen House neighborhood. Obviously, that terrible Saturday morning totally altered my life. After Dan was killed (two blocks from where I live today), my wife Annjie and I talked a lot about hope, hopelessness, and living out our values. Dan's death was devastating in and of itself, and it also caused us to question with new intensity, "Why are we living in this neighborhood?" "Is it worth living our Catholic Worker values in this neighborhood if it means one of us is at a great risk of being killed?" and "What is the point of doing this work, knowing that we will never end homelessness, or stop war, and that we might die violently in the process?". The Catholic Worker was and is such a strong

part of both of our identities, and it almost felt as if we had to decide whether to live out these values (aka, die young and violently,) or completely give them up (aka, move to the 'burbs and get a white picket fence). Obviously this was black-and-white thinking and also tinged with white savior elements, but our grief and shock were overwhelming.

As Annjie and I discerned, one of the answers we came up with was that we wanted to spend our lives living, and not spend our time anticipating the safest way not to die. (We also were aware that Dan's death was a one in a million thing, and that people die of car wrecks, sudden cancer, and all kinds of things, no matter where they live or their occupation.) To us, this meant spending whatever energy and time we have on this earth fully living out our values in the way that brought us life and joy, and not in fear of dying.

Living in community can be hard. Doing hospitality can be incredibly draining. Fighting oppression and injustice can feel overwhelming and hopeless. Why fight back and get engaged, knowing that it is such an uphill battle? As Annjie and I continued to heal and discern after Dan's death, a metaphor about hope popped up. It goes like this: All those who fight oppression are at the edge of a cliff, holding onto a huge boulder which, if we let go, will go over the edge of the cliff and destroy all of humanity. Maybe our group is called the "Beloved Community" (a term coined by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) or maybe we're part of what Joanna Macy calls "The Great Turning". Regardless, we all know that the boulder is probably too big for us to get safely away from the edge of that cliff, at least in our lifetimes; we aren't going to get to utopia, end oppression, and stop racism and greed. But we do know that we can hold the boulder in place and prevent it from crushing humanity. We may not be doing any active good, but we are helping avoid the terrible end and further suffering. We do this haltingly and in all kinds of flawed ways, working



Jenny Truax recently built a new bed, something she didn't have the skill to do until she did it.

together, building relationships, and sowing love wherever we are. We may tag in and out when one of us needs a break, and there are a million different ways that each of us contributes to keeping that boulder from going over the edge. We get to choose whether we want to help hold that boulder, in both our big life decisions and in our everyday decisions too. This is not a Sisyphus story where someone is doomed to roll a boulder uphill for all time. It's more a metaphor of choosing our place.

This visual of the boulder has been really helpful to me over the years. It helps me think about where I want to be and how I want to participate, knowing that there are so many ways to work for peace, justice and equality. It's nice to be reminded that there are as many ways as there are people to make the world better. We can work together to change the world in intersectional, collaborative ways. Intersectional, in that we are aware of the overlapping nature of oppression - that sexism is related to racism, that classism is related to homophobia; all are systems of domination. Collaborative, in that we don't need to compete with each other and compare ourselves to each other. Part of my discernment after Dan's death was a re-commitment that I do want to be part of the Great Turning, participating according to both the need in front of me, and as my skills and creativity encourage me.

These days, I'm thinking more about *how* I want to be with others in that Beloved Community. It's easy for that space behind the boulder to feel cold, isolating, and nearly impossible. For many years at Karen House, I had a strong sense of scarcity. Because of the intensity there, it's easy to fall into a mindset of "I'm in the trenches," and "You can't possibly understand," a sort of Savior/martyr feeling. In some ways, after Dan died, it was with a grim determination that I decided to stay in this neighborhood, a sense of "it's just going to be really hard and I need to suck it up and fight the good fight." I didn't see this boulder metaphor as hopeful, just pragmatic. Nowadays, I am thinking more about wanting that space behind the boulder to be joyful - for myself, and those standing next to me.

Thinking about this recently, I realized that I've been giving hope a bad rep in the past many years. Little by little, I had bought into the definition of hope coined by the media and certain experiences and decided that hope was naive, trite, and dismissive. The truth is, I've heard hope invoked too many times as a way to dismiss pain and suffering: "Well death sucks, but I can have hope in the young people!" People also frequently invoke hope in religion or the afterlife, in order to avoid acknowledging the magnitude of suffering that happens in the world. We're all doing our best, and people do this for a lot of reasons - it's hard to absorb the amount of suffering in our own lives, much less the rest of the world. We often don't have the tools to deal with our personal experiences of isolation, broken relationships, cancer, abuse, etc. Add in the

world's dying rainforests, war, and global poverty, and that is a lot of pain and suffering to take in. Our response may be to numb the pain (through busy-ness, a saccharine face, Netflix or booze,) or sometimes we rely on a Pollyanna way of thinking that employs hope as a device to deflect the pain. And so, without me realizing it, the idea of hope became equated in my head with naïveté and dismissiveness. I unwittingly adopted the general attitude that everything is hopeless, and we just need to do the work anyway - kind of a "let's all suffer together" thing. The boulder visual had morphed into a metaphor for hopelessness with resilience and determination.

As it turns out, therapy can be amazingly helpful in learning our own patterns, figuring out what assumptions are controlling our behavior, and brainstorming ways through. My therapist pointed out that the boulder metaphor is actually a really hopeful one. The truth is this: we don't know if we can save our species from climate change, end white supremacy, or stop militarization in our lifetimes. Our goals are lofty because our problems are lofty. But I'd rather be there than anywhere else, holding that boulder back, with others, in amazing and life giving ways. I try my best (failing, and getting back up,) to bring joy, generosity, and love into that space, rather than separation, better-than thinking, and desperation. The attitude of hope - that we can do something together- is an asset that may help us succeed more than we thought possible. At its best, this space behind the boulder can be a real dwelling of togetherness, common struggle, and trust. There's nowhere else I'd rather be. ✦



Beauty in the Peony, Photo - Annjie Schiefelbein

# Encouragement and Hope

by: Paulna Valbrun

During my work within the social service field, I quickly gravitated towards working with children due to my own puerile nature--I guess. But mainly I preferred working with children because they are fast learners and display improvement easily. I first witnessed this working with children on the West side of Chicago at a school that was failing academically in math and reading.

My job was to help instruct a second grade class on math and reading literacy with the assistance of a computer program. All of the students started improving almost immediately except one student who also happened to be the class clown. Most adults--teachers, custodians, principal, secretary and his parents--were beyond frustrated with his silliness and inability to pay attention to anything for more than ten seconds. I quickly realized that the only way I could get him to do work was to sit next to him during the entire class; it was a strategy that would prevent him from distracting other students and force him to actually do his own work. He was far behind on his work, which discouraged him since all of his classmates were so ahead.

I remember during the third week of our after school program, he suddenly burst into tears. I had to stop helping one of the students to ask him what was wrong. He told me that he had taken one of the mini quizzes and failed it. "I'm so stupid," he cried. It was so upsetting to see such a young child start to give up on themselves. I offered him words of encouragement and assured him that he could succeed in math and reading just like his classmates.

At the time all I could do was feel terrible about a child feeling so discouraged and I wasn't sure if I had said all the right things to properly console him. But he quickly surprised me. Every day he worked hard to catch up. Eventually the boy who was the class clown and disrupting everything and anything in the classroom began to understand and catch up to his peers--he even surpassed some.

By the end of the school year he had improved tremendously. I was so impressed and shocked that all he needed was words of encouragement to improve. After that experience I didn't want to go back to working with adults. Although all people possess the ability to change and improve, I learned first-hand what Frederick

Douglas meant when he said that, "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."

Eventually I went on to work with kids in NYC in various math, English and art programs at Henry Street Settlement. During this time I continued to witness more children improve within a short time-span. Children who were disruptive quickly turned into promising artists with amazing academic performances. These children felt discouraged when it came to academics and the arts before attending these after-school programs.

Living in St. Louis I've met children who are also discouraged and looking for something to do--or to at least have something constructive to look forward to. I began working as a teaching artist with Shakespeare Festival St. Louis and Central Print for children in the neighborhood. Over time I--along with other

community members-- begin constructing an idea to bring an after school program to our neighborhood. I begin working with the Yeyo Arts Collective and started applying for grants. I received a grant from The Pollination Project and the Regional Arts Commission to do after school programming with kids. The project entitled Old North Rockin After-School (named by children in the neighborhood) program even made it into the Huffington Post.

I am excited to be doing what I love and to witness more light brought to children. I believe that children are a great way to measure where a society stands; they are a reflection of us. If our children are failing at math and science, but capable of reciting the words to every vulgar song and committing acts of violence, then it is our fault.

What gives me hope is watching children learn and be empowered in whatever endeavor they pursue. And I think that we should all view our relationship with children as similar to the relationship of Ruth and Naomi in [The Book of Ruth](#). The story of Ruth and Naomi serve to represent an example of hesed; meaning "loyalty and commitment that go beyond the bounds of law or duty." If we are truly loving, then we will go beyond the bounds of law or duty, and extend a hand to children who need to be nurtured whether they are our blood family or not; whether or not they resemble our culture, religion, race or ethnicity. ✦



"I see you!" Photo - Afrodad



Paulna "Ajala" Valbrun loves the season of fall, mostly because she can have pumpkin spice in any food.

# Ten-year-olds Answer: What Brings Me Hope?

by: Carolyn Griffeth

*When asked what gives him hope, my ten-year-old son replied, "Why hope if you're already happy?" If I didn't know better, I'd have thought he was channeling Buddhist teacher, Pema Chodron, who writes: "Hope and fear come from feeling that we lack something; they come from a sense of poverty. We can't simply relax with ourselves. We hold on to hope, and hope robs us of the present moment." My son and our ten-year-old neighbors bring me hope by the way they embrace the present--reaching out in friendship to seemingly everyone around them, and persistently making fun happen. They remind me to not only focus on the type of world I want in the future, but to draw close to those I share this moment with as a way of claiming that future. Their words also remind me how deeply children "get" what is going on in the world: They know they deserve better.*

Traveling gives me hope--seeing new places and meeting new people. I hope one day the City of St. Louis will have bigger buildings and less abandoned houses. Someday I hope to create my own circus. I hope we can find a way of building stuff without hurting the earth and that there will be no more wars. I hope we can stop making big landfills and that we preserve our planet for future generations. I hope I can make a positive impact in the world. I hope we can be treated the same if we're poor or wealthy or if our skin color is different. I hope we can all get along. I wonder if I will see these changes in the world. — Finn

Life is not fair but I wish it was. At school it seems like black kids are treated unfair. And outside of school things are not fair either. All I am trying to say is the world is not fair. I feel sad that back in the time of slavery blacks were treated wrong. If the cops will stop killing blacks, all the killing will stop. In the future, I think people should get along. And plus, come back together and say, "Black Lives Matter." For my future I want to be a BMX star. — Brandon

My name is Tiffany and this is what I want for my future. I want all cultures, black, white, Chinese and all to get along and communicate together. I am hopeful about my school, Kipp, I'm getting to communicate with other kids and teachers. I used to not have a dad but now I do and I love him really bad. He makes me hopeful. Thank you for reading my hopes. — Tiffany



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People that support me give me hope. Like people that would send me to the hospital if I broke my hand or something or send me cards when I'm sick. I like nice people. I want to have lots of friends, around the world. That is why I want to travel, so I can meet people and learn what they know. If someone speaks a foreign language, I want to learn their language.

I hope that people in St. Louis stop getting hurt and stop shooting other people and robbing stores. I hope it is a little safer and happier in our community. So I can live in a safer environment. — Junior

I feel like the world today is a little out of hand as I write this paragraph. Traveling with the circus gives me hope. I get to see the world like no other kid and no other kid can see what I see. I'm in circus, I get hope from the little kids who say I wanna be just like you and I tell them you can do it, but if you wanna do circus, you must commit to it.

In the future, I see myself being a smart grad going to circus college. I hope in the future everybody won't be judged by their skin color and I hope we all can be a big happy family. — Malik

I like football and am good at it. I hope to be a football player. The things I want to see different in St. Louis is that black humans should stop dying and should get to go to school and learn and get an education to be smart. — Jeffery ✦



**Carolyn Griffeth** started "Kids Club" in her neighborhood several years ago and it has evolved into a community of friends who love and support each other.

# Hope in Resistance

by: Theodore Kayser

*“To be hopeful in bad times is not just foolishly romantic. It is based on the fact that human history is a history not only of cruelty, but also of compassion, sacrifice, courage, kindness.*

*What we choose to emphasize in this complex history will determine our lives. If we see only the worst, it destroys our capacity to do something. If we remember those times and places—and there are so many—where people have behaved magnificently, this gives us the energy to act, and at least the possibility of sending this spinning top of a world in a different direction.*

*And if we do act, in however small a way, we don’t have to wait for some grand utopian future. The future is an infinite succession of presents, and to live now as we think human beings should live, in defiance of all that is bad around us, is itself a marvelous victory.”*

— Howard Zinn

When we learn history in school we are taught a specific narrative. This story is the same regardless of what epoch we study, a tale that centers on those in power. From the Roman Empire to the United States of America we hear about the gradual progression towards perfection that sprouted from the brilliance of, most often, white men. This account of history leaves out those who suffer most at the hands of those about whom we are taught in our schools.

What did the great achievements of empires mean to those on the bottom of the society? What did Athenian democracy mean to chattel slaves who had no say in how the city state was run, despite the fact that they outnumbered the “citizens” of Athens? What did the Egyptian pyramids represent for those who built them? What did the Roman Republic stand for to those who saw their home lands occupied and were then forced to financially support the occupation?

And what of our own country, The United States of

America? Was the war for independence about liberty? Or was it about wealthy white men who did not want to pay taxes or lose their “right” to own slaves? What did it mean to live in the land of the free for Aiyana Jones or Freddie Gray or countless other people of color who live in America today? We learn only a history of triumphalism and exceptionalism at the expense of truth.

If we seldom hear the stories that would deflate the grand narrative of those in power it is probably less often that we get to learn about those who resist oppression in their day. But it is from these people throughout history that I draw hope.

It gives me hope that there have always been those who defy the powers in an unjust world. Sometimes this resistance has been large, involving millions of people on every continent and sometimes it has been as small as a single fifteen year-old girl refusing to give up her seat for a white person on the bus. There have always been those who refuse to be carried along by the current of the empire for a moment, or for a lifetime.

And none of these people are doing anything brand new! They all come from a tradition of resistance that has always existed! I find it incredibly exciting and in a way kind of liberating. Obviously there have always been changes in strategies—a crack in the wall lets the light in at one moment or another—and so that resistance has looked different at different times. Sometimes it has meant slave revolts, sometimes it has meant sitting in jail and sometimes it has just meant simply surviving in a system that hopes to crush your soul if it hasn’t yet taken your life. Continuing in a tradition of resistance, and knowing that this tradition will exist long after me gives me hope.

The tradition I most associate myself with is the Catholic Worker Movement. We are this whole group of people who has tried to resist in different ways. Most often it has meant simple acts that challenge the way we are told the world works.



**Theodore Kayser** one of the favorite cooks at KH, has more Catholic Worker shirts than there are days of the week.

Society tells us everything is for either buying or selling but the Catholic Worker does things differently. We say “So you’re hungry? Let me GIVE you something to eat. You’re Homeless? Stay with us for a while. No we aren’t going to charge you rent.”

What makes us, Catholic Workers, a little different from those big non-profit folks, is that we see these works of mercy as acts of resistance, and we draw the connections to resistance movements. When we see so many people in need and we even live with them, we start to know them. We only start to know them because most of us will never know what it means to be destitute. We realize that it’s not these people who are broken, it’s the whole system, and it is our responsibility to challenge and change this system, just as it is our responsibility to care for those most adversely affected by it.

Those big name people who were there at the Catholic Worker early on didn’t just stumble upon this idea of resistance. Our foundress Dorothy Day was taught it by women suffragists and by communists and anarchists and Peter Maurin found it in philosophical personalism and in a different interpretation of scripture.

This brings me to Christianity. . . I find hope there too. Not some pie in the sky—I hope I go to heaven when I die—kind of hope. I get hope from it the same way I get hope when I learn about the Stonewall uprising or about socialists standing against World War I. In the Bible, I find a long history of resistance. Jesus was a resistor and that’s why he was killed. I learned in Catholic school that blasphemy was the reason they killed him, but blasphemy is easily forgiven unless what’s being taught is a threat to those in power. When I read the Christian scriptures I read about a guy who hung out with people you aren’t supposed to hang out with and capped off his growing popular movement

by occupying the temple interrupting business as usual. (It just goes to show those Occupy Wall Street people weren’t that original either).

But even Jesus wasn’t really original. His people’s movement only started after the arrest of John the Baptist, a guy who Jesus threw in with when he got baptized by him, and whose teachings, included things like, “Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same,” and “The axe is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire.” But it’s not just John whom Jesus follows, he also draws from the Hebrew prophets.

Now in Catholic grade school theology class I was taught that the prophets were just quaint guys who liked to predict that Jesus was going to come save us from our sins but when you read them as a part of a history of resistance you realize that they were really about challenging systemic injustice. They call out those in power, saying stuff like, “They sell the innocent for silver, and the needy for a pair of sandals. They trample on the heads of the poor as on the dust of the ground and deny justice to the oppressed.” They speak for God who challenges traditional piety saying, “Is this not the fast which I choose, to loosen the bonds of wickedness, to undo the bands of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free and break every yoke?”

But guess what—the prophets didn’t come up with resistance either. The whole Hebrew tradition stems from the story of a group of escaped slaves. And I think this is why I find so much hope in this book. When it comes down to it, the central theme of the whole book is that God is on the side of the oppressed. Not the government, not those in power, but those who suffer most, and who hope much. While the Bible does at times give

us the histories of kings (though subjectively reading about them you see they’re pretty greedy and generally messed up), it is the story of everyday people resisting injustice, whether it be a shepherd named Amos, a carpenter named Jesus, or a group of mostly unnamed slaves with God on their side, the side of a resistance that has always existed.

And so I get a new dose of hope every time I hear about someone else resisting injustice. Every freeway that’s shut down, campaign stop interrupted, or shareholder meeting that’s sat in on, gives me hope that the reign of God is at hand. ✝



In June, 2015, Bree Newsome removed the Confederate flag from the state capitol building in South Carolina: “I removed the flag...in defiance of the oppression that continues against black people globally in 2015...I did it for all the fierce black women on the front lines of the movement and for all the little black girls who are watching us... I did it because I am free.”

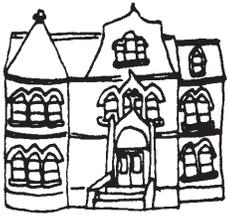
# Hope

A Poem by: Sylvester Thomas Brown III

I was taught at an age near my earliest days  
That I was less than the rest because of my ebony shade  
Targeted, at the heart of it it's simple and plain  
I'd have to fight to live a life less than others have gained  
These are different kinds of times deadly to all those at play  
But we've got a different set of rules you don't hear what we say  
We say we're trapped in a machine designed to keep us at bay  
And all you silly fools can say is that we're blinded by rage  
But how can you relate?  
You can't fathom our faction? You don't eat the free lunch we eat or endure our actions  
You don't go to school with metal detectors or pee in decrepit bathrooms, like us  
Yet you've got the nerve to tell me "be calm" while you haul off and lash us  
Resist arrest and risk death is an acceptable chasm?  
Yet you target us, arrest us, and take our money and scatter.  
We're supposed to be OK with this and pretend we still matter?  
And the minute we show protest you shoot tear gas at our asses?  
What are we worth to you?  
What miracle will it take to get you to embrace the fact that you're hurting you  
What more can we give back? What do we have to do to get you to stop slaughtering our youth?  
Treat our wounds  
Walk in our shoes and see why we choose to fear who's sworn to protect and serve  
To feel so scared when a siren blurs  
To feel so hopeless in a world of hope  
To suppress your gifts and just learn to coast  
I was raised on a plane of confusion and hate its pillars made of jealousy its beams of distaste  
I was molded by the cold that would darken your soul  
Yet still I stand before you with a sliver of hope ✦



**Sylvester Thomas Brown III** is a founding member of *dangerously smart*, a local tech podcast & also the occasional writer.



# From Karen House

by: Annjie Schiefelbein

On paper, the big lunches we serve at Karen House during the week seem like a fantastic idea. And in practice it has been an amazing experiment! It is one of the things I really enjoy explaining to folks new to the house--how we use donated food to offer a hot meal to whoever wants it, and offer a respite to those who come. The majority of the folks who join us for these lunches are homeless neighbors who may not have utilities or a particularly comfortable place to live. For three hours five days a week, they can eat and hang out, use our bathroom and get hygiene supplies and extra food. Other folks work near our house and come for a quick bite in the middle of their work day. Many people have been coming for years and have gotten to know us (and us them) very well. And some come every day for weeks or months and then disappear, except in our telling of the stories. Now, the story of our big lunches has come to an end.

It has been about ten years since we started doing these open lunches. Initially they were three times a week. We increased the lunches per week for the same reason we started doing them at all, because we started getting 'spoils' (food nearing the expiration date or slightly damaged in some way) from Trader Joe's. It is good food, and we started the lunches because we had so much of it, and it was a delight to offer such good pickings to our guests and neighbors (prime rib, anyone?). We have had to narrow the scope of the lunches over the years because of the effect it had on our guests. It can be uncomfortable for the people who live at Karen House to have 30 near strangers in their home every day. This is one of the primary reasons we are stopping. Over several formal and informal conversations, our community has agreed that the comfort of our guests is paramount to us. As much as possible, we want the women and kids who live with us to feel like they are living in a home that is their space. Having 10 to 50 people in one's home every day does not lend itself to the feeling of



Cooking lunch in 2006

comfort we are trying to foster.

Another primary motivation behind this change involves our continued desire to confront the hierarchical systems that hold up patriarchy and sustain racism, classism, etc. Our lunches can, at their worst, look like a poster for the not-for-profit industrial complex: mostly white, middle or upper class volunteers handing out basic goods to a 'needy' group of people. There can be a fine line between doing the works of mercy and living out the Savior Complex trap (a trap in which so many of us in this work can become ensnared.) We believe that our lunches have taken on (if not always had) more characteristics of the latter instead of the former. Those characteristics in practice can be ugly, and have a great power to wear down everyone who participates in it.

And the final reason I'll mention for stopping lunches is that it is wearing us down as a community. Keeping Karen House going takes a phenomenal amount of work. And in our recent discussions, our community is coming to realize a lesson vital for everyone to learn--you can't do everything. And if you try, everything you do suffers. We are at a crucial point in our history. One of the essential pieces of our work now is to identify what is needed, what we are drawn to, and how to do those things well and with equal respect to all participants. We don't know exactly what this will look like, but at least for now it will look quieter around lunchtime; a group of people who live together sharing a meal together. It is more than enough, it is good.

It is the end of an era we don't leave lightly. It is a time for nostalgia and gratitude, and we have lots of both as we remember all of those who have made these lunches possible for a decade. It has been so good so often. We have relationships we otherwise would not have had, and learned things about ourselves that we otherwise wouldn't have known. So we don't close this era with bitterness, but love. Always with love. ✦



**Annjie Schiefelbein** is spending more time at the clinic where she works as a Family Nurse Practitioner and stalking every stray dog that passes through the neighborhood (and even rescuing a few of them.)



# Catholic Worker Thought and Action

by: Tim Pekarek

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)

A few days ago while I was trying to decide on a subject to write about, I was listening to the N.P.R. magazine "To the Best of Our Knowledge" and the hour was on the writer David Foster Wallace, who committed suicide several years ago. Near the end of the program, they had a short interview with Amy Wallace-Havens, David's younger sister. It was good. One thing that I recall is that she said after her brother's death, there was never a moment when she was angry with him because she knew how much suffering he had been through. Just as the show ended, I needed to walk over to Karen House to take a house shift. The first thing that happened as I entered the house was that one of the guests asked me if I knew the phone number for the suicide hotline because someone she knew was in a crisis. This was easy for me to answer because I have taken up the habit of sharing on FaceBook posts every time I see the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255) on my timeline. All I needed to do was look it up on my phone. Anyways, I sensed the kismet of this course of events and knew what to write on...

One of the saddest facts of my life is that I have known so many people who have committed suicide. When I was in high school, there was a boy whose name I guess I long ago have forgotten and he and I were in a painting class together. We had only started to become friends when I heard that he had wrecked his mother's car. I think the next day he took his own life. There was also my friend Shem. We ran into each other on the street near Lafayette Square and I remember standing there and talking for almost two hours. He had just become a dad for the first time and wanted to tell me all about it. About a week later, he committed suicide. Then there was my close friend Mark who lived in community with me at Karen House for several years. During that time, we became camping buddies and I had the thrill of taking him to quite a few spots in the Ozarks for the first time. Later he married, and when that didn't work out, he ultimately ended his life. For the sake of brevity I will not mention the many other suicides that have ended the lives other people that I have known.

It is obvious that a teenage boy killing himself over a crashed car is only a waste. A few months later, that car would have been mostly forgotten and forgiven, even by a single mother, struggling to get by with her son—her only child. (I do recall that much about the situation 40 years later.) I often think that in all of the lives of the people whom I have known to commit suicide, that if they had only made it through their time of crisis, then with enough hours and days and weeks, they would have lived through that experience. Do we not all carry some scars?

It really gives me life to know that there are so many people doing work to raise awareness for crisis management and suicide prevention. In addition to the National Lifeline that I mentioned before, there's another group called the Trevor Project (866-488-7386 or [trevorproject.org](http://trevorproject.org)) that is doing outreach to LGBTQ youth in crisis, a group with historically high numbers of suicides.

It is important for all of us to become aware of those around us who might be feeling the impact of life or who might be suffering from depression. One does not need to be a trained mental health professional to ask questions. If you want to further develop your awareness, a quick web search on the topic of suicide prevention will show many resources...too many to list here. ✚



Print by artist Mikaela Jane for 2012's World Suicide Prevention Day.



Tim Pekarek, affectionately known as T-Dawg at Karen House, is a fantastic cook, gardener, and biker.

# The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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[www.KarenHouseCW.org](http://www.KarenHouseCW.org)

### **Karen House Updates**

Thank you so much to all who responded to our appeal letter! We are so humbled by the response and your continued support. For information about Christmas at Karen House, check our website!

### **Next Steps at KH**

The KH Community is engaging in a time of discernment and discussion about revamping some of our structures - how the community functions and how the house operates. Noticing that our hospitality over the past few years has looked like women staying longer, we're exploring ideas to make the house more of a "home" environment. We're seeking to apply anti-racism principles to how we operate the house, and to address the ways we inadvertently manifest white supremacy. We're looking at different ways to do power sharing. We realize that while we can't be "everything to everyone," we definitely can provide a loving and supportive environment to all the people who live at Karen House. It's both a scary and exciting time, and we ask you to keep us in your thoughts and prayers.

We will have a very small community living in the house in early 2016, and so by necessity, will be narrowing our "open" times to accommodate the smaller number of workers. This means we'll be accepting donations on certain days of the week. Call or check our website for the details! We also encourage you to sign up for our monthly KH emails, so that you can keep updated on our progress! To do this, send your email to [karenhousecw@gmail.com](mailto:karenhousecw@gmail.com).

Again, we thank you for your continued support. This work is only possible because the greater community believes in it.

...LOVE

IS

THE

ANSWER...

Check [www.KarenHouseCW.org](http://www.KarenHouseCW.org) for updates on Karen House, a "needs list", information on the Catholic Worker, resources on racism, an archive of past Round Tables, and more!