

The Spirit of the Worker

by Becky Hassler

It's hard to say when Grace House came into being. No doubt it was officially christened by John Kavanaugh, SJ with a living room full of people in September 2003. But it really started back on N. 18th street. I was praying in front of my wood burning stove on Good Friday, 2002, when I just knew I needed to move on Helen St., not only move there, but buy a house there. What? Me buy a house—and on Helen?!? Helen was the street where our co-housing families lived—and I wanted to be right in the midst of them...

My journey with the Catholic Worker started at Cass House in 1984 when I volunteered there for a year. I came back to St. Louis in 1989 and started Nursing School at St. Louis University. During that time, I started volunteering at Karen House, taking house, and going to Tuesday liturgy. I joined the community in 1992, living at Karen House (KH) and also working in Regional hospital's ER.

It was when I went back to grad school—still working at Regional and still part of the community—that I decided to move to the apartment on N 18th st.—a stone's throw from Karen House. We'd have our community meetings there, and at some time I started having some of the children of the guests of KH live with me for short periods of time.

Ariana, Shannon, Shameka, pregnant Olivia, Christen and Christopher in their first three months of life, all called the three-room apt at 1827A N. 18th St. home at one time or another.

In July, 2003, I, along with Olivia and her 3 month-old twins moved onto Helen Street. Elizabeth joined us in September. Such a sweet, sweet time...

I never actually chose the house I was to buy, just asked if there was one available, a shell of one was, rehabbed by neighbors, volunteers, community and novice contractors.

We'd have our co-housing meetings here in the living room, six former guests of KH and their children, eight or so of community and friends of KH, trying to share our lives together...

Olivia stayed 2 1/2 yrs, then Christen, Andy (Katie), Lauren X2, Susannah, Rob, Shannon, Pallavi, Blen... Never an "official" Catholic Worker, but certainly one in spirit.

I stopped being an official community member about five or six years ago - while I was in Midwifery School, working at Grace Hill and offering hospitality at Grace House. It was a very difficult decision for me, and I felt bad that I couldn't take a regular house shift at that point, or help out in other ways with the work of the house, nothing much more than show up at our weekly community meeting.

I'll be honest and tell you that though I sometimes fantasize of living close enough to Tower Grove Park to make that

my yard, I could never really imagine my life anywhere but surrounded by these people I now depend on to help me continually become who I am called to be. To eat, pray, love with this community of my nearest and dearest make me part of who I am. The principles of the Catholic Worker are a challenge to all of us, and it looks different in some ways to all of us, but for me there is an ongoing pull to the core of these values, to continually become the core of who I am. It is imperfect, no doubt, but my desire to live in a way that I believe is right and just, beautiful and sustainable, keeps me connected like it's my very oxygen. I count on it to keep me

alive—alive in the way I so want to live.

The reunion was such a gift to me, to see multiple generations of people all desiring the same. I want to forever remain a Catholic Worker; there is always room for me and I am so grateful.

I feel that my life as a Catholic Worker continues on—with each decade of my life, ever growing, ever changing, but always full of gratitude for this little space in north St. Louis I've called home for almost half my life. I am continually inspired, challenged, and loved for who I am. ✦



Becky Hassler is delighted to be starting a midwifery practice at St. Mary's Hospital as a faculty member for St. Louis University!