

From Kabat House

by Carolyn Griffeth

Five years ago, my husband, Terry, son, Ghana, and I moved from the Catholic Worker in Chicago to St. Louis to participate in the work of Karen House and the Dorothy Day Co-housing community. With the help of the community we rehabbed a house in the neighborhood, which we lived in and shared with many others over the last five years. Our guests included a man from Mongolia and two Latino women with newborn babies. After adopting our second child, we were ready, for the first time in our married lives, to try living alone as a family. We thus decided to move across the street to a smaller home which we had also bought and rehabbed.

From our own experience and through talking with service providers to the immigrant and Spanish speaking community, we recognized the need for a place of refuge and support for immigrants and Spanish speaking individuals who are temporarily homeless. Therefore, we decided to use our former home to create a Catholic Worker community with this focus. We affectionately call our community Carl Kabat Catholic Worker house after our dear friend and former live-in at Karen House, who is now in prison for his witness against nuclear weapons. Having both been part of the Catholic Worker movement for over eight years, my husband and I very much believe in the Catholic Worker model of hospitality and community. The Catholic Worker is an anarchistic network of communities which live simply with the poor, sharing what we have, and spending our time building relationships and a better world, or just plain enjoying life—and *not* filling out paperwork. For this reason, we are not a non-profit organization—a decision which cost us a grant that would have been our primary source of funding. But why would we fill out a bunch of legal papers simply to live well and love well? As radical as it may be in this day, this is essentially all we are attempting. As a community we strive to nurture one another and create a shared life that is truly life-giving—

that empowers us to do the good we long to do or, as Peter Maurin is often quoted, "A society where it is easier to be good." What sets the Catholic Worker apart from most other experiments in community, even religious, is that we don't leave the poor behind in our search for "the good life." Rather, we believe the good life is struggling with the poor, for the good of all.

Kabat House has grown to include six community members and several supportive "extended community" members. Our live-in community members include Sarah Sunseri, who is teaching at Vincent Gray alternative school in East St. Louis, Mary Hargadon, a member of New Roots Urban Farm, Leilani Castleman, who is working nights as a medical technician but really should be a dance instructor, and Jorj Arteaga, who is an electrician by day and revolutionary by night. Since beginning hospitality in July we have had about 16 guests. Our guests have included women from Finland, Mongolia, and Guatemala, a Mexican family, a Cuban man, and several St. Louisans. We currently have two babies on the way: a boy due in December and girl due in February. Many who have come our way have been mentally ill. One schizophrenic man I suspect will be with us long term.

So far, I believe our experiment in community is going well. When I asked the Kabat House community what it is like to live there, Jorj replied, "It's all sunshine and rainbows and shit," and he was serious. What more could I ask? Aren't sunshine, rain, and shit the primary things that nurture life and growth? I believe I am growing, both in my capacity to love and in a hopeful vision for the world. I also believe that by surrounding my children with community, I am fostering their growth and investing in their future. It is counter-intuitive really; many would argue that my children would be better off with more privilege and more financial security. To this I can only attest

Carolyn Griffeth has been busy homeschooling Ghana and chasing toddler Finn around.

that loving, authentic relationships (i.e. community) are the greatest privilege of all, the only true security, and the thing, that perhaps more than any other, empowers anyone to do good. This, it seems to me, is what we all want for our children, that they know love, and seek to do good.

If you are interested in visiting Kabat house or becoming involved, drop by, call, or email us. We'd love to share our lives with you.

Also, Jorj is looking for odd electrical jobs if you are interested in such help.

We are dreaming of experimenting with biodiesel and are thus seeking a donated diesel van or truck.



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