

MANN A *in the wilderness*

September 2003

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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Louis Emlund: Former Guest Serves Others

by Julia Occhiogrosso

Louis Emlund never intended to come to Las Vegas, much less become a founding member of the Key Foundation, a Nevada non-profit serving homeless veterans and others. When his truck broke down thirteen years ago, Louis was on his way to Los Angeles. He speaks reflectively about the role divine intervention had in altering his travel plans and leaving him with just enough money to catch a Greyhound to Vegas.

Soon after his arrival in Las Vegas, he found his way to the Catholic Worker morning soupline. I remember having a quiet conversation with Louis. He was standing a distance away from the soupline crowd, sipping a cup of coffee and seemingly staring into what he could see of his future.

I approached him and listened as he shared his plight. We had an opening at the hospitality house, so we invited Louis to come and stay for awhile. He accepted with some reluctance. He was a man accustomed to making his own way, and was suspicious, if not resentful of those who would cause him to deviate from this course by tricking him into accepting something for nothing.

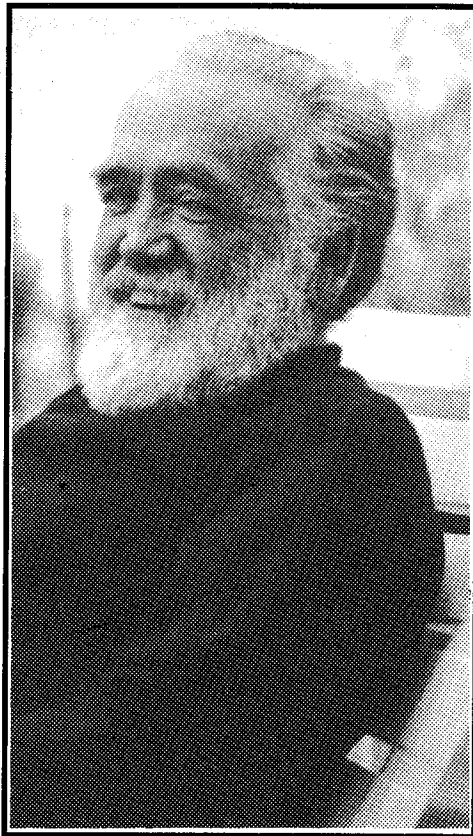
Against some odds, he did come to live with us. Initially, his strong willed, independent attitude felt like sandpaper against the pleasantries of our Catholic Worker hospitality. In time, his gruff exterior was softened by the revelation of his child like heart.

His red wavy hair combed back cleared a space to see the gleam of blue sky in his eyes. His broad shoulders and worn hands tell the story of a man who had learned how to carry heavy burdens with ease and work his way out of the challenges life dealt him.

A Vet for forty years, Louis grew up in the rough South Side section of Chicago. One in a large family of 13, Louis was in and out of trouble in his youth. Military ser-

vice looked like a better alternative than jail time. He served from 1950-1963.

When Louis came to Las Vegas, he was recovering from a stroke. He later underwent bypass surgery. Like so many of the unsung heroes surviving on the edge of what most of us experience as our comfort zone, Louis has managed to accomplish much good with limited material resources and fragile health. In fact, when Louis secured



LOUIS EMLUND

disability and was ready to move out, we asked him to stay on and continue helping us.

Within a few months of his stay at the Catholic Worker house thirteen years ago, Louis joined an AA recovery program. As part of the service component of the program, Louis began to help serve in the morning soupline and to volunteer at the downtown Vet Center. Out of a little back porch at the Vet Center, Louis along with other vets began to coordinate simple services specifically for homeless vets. They provided a place for homeless vets to do laundry and showers.

In February 1991, the Key Foundation was started when Louis and

other vets published a list of resources for the homeless. Soon they began to make job connections for vets at nearby National Parks including Furnace Creek in Death Valley, the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, and Bryce and Zion National Parks. These were good jobs that included room and board. I recall many occasions when Louis would personally drive the vets to these worksites a few hours out of Las Vegas.

Today this small effort has grown to a nonprofit run by an all volunteer staff of vets, two of whom are former clients. The Key Foundation has five houses of hospitality providing housing for thirty veterans. They run a warehouse which collects and distributes donations for homeless services. They have an office and job center on A street.

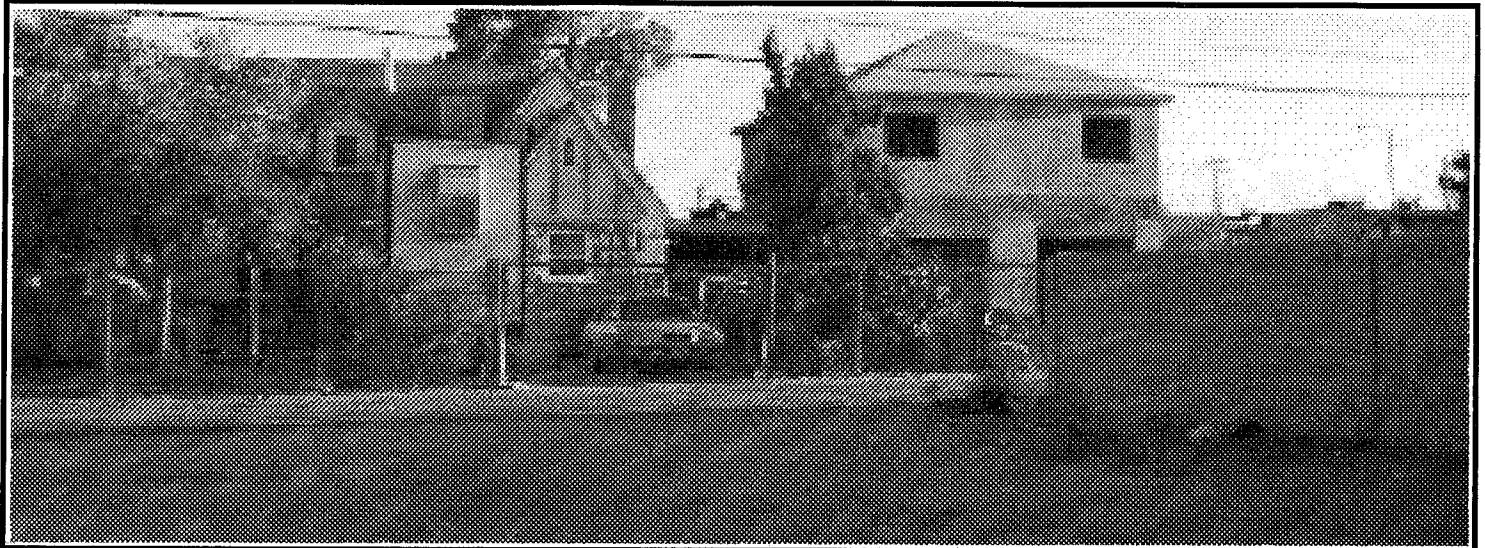
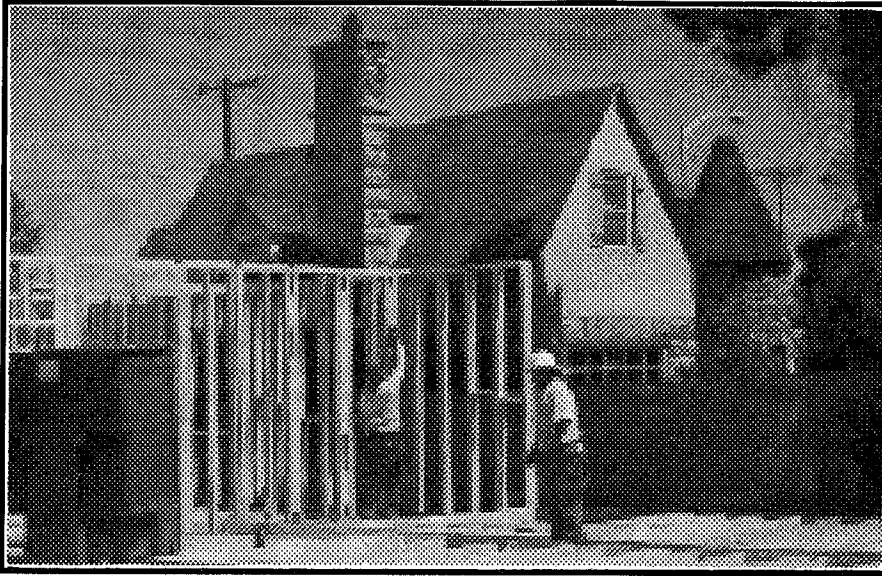
They have provided thousands of jobs to homeless Veterans and they have given over 100,000 blankets away to the homeless.

The Key Foundation also helped start the annual "Stand Down for the Homeless" held every Fall at Cashman Field Convention Center. This Stand Down has grown into one of the largest in the country, providing Judges to clear up old warrants and tickets, health services and screenings, haircuts, and many other services.

Louis attributes two key components of the Key Foundation to ideas he received while staying at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. One was the idea of having an all volunteer staff. Louis, Dennis Larson and Terry Ryder all donate their labor to the Key Foundation, receiving only room and board. The second idea was having small houses of hospitality rather than a large shelter. Louis refers to the benefits of "residential style living", where homeless Veterans are placed in the Key Foundation's five homes throughout the city.

Louis is looking for a vehicle for this ministry, if you have a vehicle to donate, please call 647-0728.

New Building for Homeless Families, Retreats



PHOTOS BY RYAN HALL

PHOTOS: **Top left:** The frame for the new building goes up next to the Catholic Worker house, shown in the background. **Top right:** The new building will be a sign of hope among the vacant lots and boarded up buildings surrounding the Catholic Worker. **Lower photo:** The new building (right) shown from the alley behind the Catholic Worker. The new "house of hospitality" will have retreat space and shelter homeless families. Thank you to Tim Caves, our contractor, for securing donated services and building a place of beauty.

**PRAY
FOR
PEACE
IN OUR
WORLD!**

(FOR
TAB)

*Thanks to all our
Donors who make this
ministry possible!*

*
Join us for Mass with
Fr. John McShane on
Wed., Oct. 1, 5:45 a.m.
at the Catholic Worker
House. After, we will
serve breakfast to the
poor and homeless.
*

Our 18th Year



**We need volunteers
for our morning
soupline, call 647-0728**

Las Vegas Catholic Worker
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PLEASE JOIN US:

Wed., Fri., Sat., 6:00 a.m.:

Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.

Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.:

Breakfast served in Masjid-As-Sabur mosque parking lot (G & McWilliams St.) to the poor and homeless.

Seven Days a Week:

Hospitality (IHN) to 3 to 5 homeless families, call 638-8806 to volunteer.

Last Saturday of month; 8:30 a.m.:

Deliver food to homes in need, gather for reflection & prayer, call for info.

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