

# MANNA *in the wilderness*

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The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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## A TIME OF REST AND FAMILY HEALING

by Gary Cavalier

“If you’re not man enough to discipline your son, I’ll hold him while you do it,” a Henderson policewoman told me three years ago when my twelve-year-old son was causing major problems in the neighborhood. Other well-meaning police officers had advice too. One Henderson officer who responded to a runaway call, seemed calmer than the rest, asked if he could talk to our sons on the front porch, and we agreed. I later found out that he had threatened them, that if they didn’t behave, they would go back to Child Haven (the county home for children removed from their parents), the home where we had picked them up as foster parents when they were 2 1/2 and 3 1/2 years old.

It has been close to four years since arrests and other incidents precipitated our sons being treated at the Institute for Attachment and Child Development in Colorado ([www.instituteforattachment.org](http://www.instituteforattachment.org)). There they were diagnosed and treated for Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD) and Bipolar Disorder.

RAD can manifest in children who experience the trauma of abuse and neglect during the first two years of life. This trauma causes a disruption in the attachment to a primary caregiver. One can imagine how a baby learns to trust adults, when 10,000 times they are hungry and cry, and 10,000 times they are fed. But imagine if 100 of those 10,000 times they are hungry and cry for two hours and no one feeds them. Of course they learn that they can’t trust adults and must take care of things themselves.

Because the child has learned early on that he cannot trust adults to meet his needs, he depends on his own ability to control his environment. His inability to trust adults or authority figures yields

oppositional and defiant behaviors. In turn, these children by their teenage years are often in trouble with the law. And because there is a serious deficit in understanding the root cause and affective responses to these behaviors by the persons who work with these youth, the situation worsens and these abused and neglected children find themselves incarcerated or living on the margins of society into their

adult years.

Bipolar Disorder or mood disturbance is a medical condition caused by an imbalance of naturally occurring chemicals in the brain. It is characterized by mood episodes of depression and mania. It is treatable through medication. There is a high correlation between children who experience early neglect and who develop bipolar (*continued on back page*)



PHOTO BY MIKE WISNIEWSKI

At the Los Angeles Catholic Worker 40th Anniversary Party: from left to right, John Yevtich, Gary Cavalier, Julia Occhiogrosso, Katie Kelso and Mark Kelso. We wish to thank Jeff Dietrich and Catherine Morris and the Los Angeles Catholic Worker community for their 40 years of service. Without their training, guidance and support the Las Vegas Catholic Worker would not exist.

### Katie & John Join Las Vegas Catholic Worker

We are happy to welcome John Yevtich and Katie Kelso to the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. They arrived in June and will be running the Catholic Worker while Julia Occhiogrosso and Gary Cavalier take a sabbatical in Colorado (see main article).

Katie is the son of our friend and extraordinary volunteer Mark Kelso. Katie went through the Los Angeles Catholic Worker’s summer program last year and stayed on in L.A. for the year. She wanted to return to Las Vegas to be with her family here. She also spent time in Italy the year before finishing her English Degree

from UNR (University of Nevada in Reno).

We also welcome John Yevtich. John is a former engineer who later had a successful financial planning business. Through a long process of spiritual discernment he decided to spend his life serving the poor and homeless, and so he is in Las Vegas to help us and learn and experience how we do things here at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker. We are deeply grateful for their support and the support of our volunteers and residents and donors in helping make the Catholic Worker thrive during Gary and Julia’s sabbatical.

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 disorder. The assumption is that since bipolar disorder is genetically transmitted that often parents suffering from untreated bipolar disorder will neglect or abuse their children.

After our family went through intensive attachment therapy in Colorado, three years ago, our family life was much improved. We spent the subsequent three years practicing what we were learning about therapeutic parenting for children with their diagnosis. Julia and I learned so much from our therapist Bill Sudduth, who had very similar experiences as a parent of seven adopted children. We learned from Bill new parenting techniques, which avoided confrontation and encouraged connection and made the home environment psychologically safer which in turn fosters attachment. If they come in at midnight, most parents would say: "Where the hell have you been, etc.!" but we were taught to say: "I am glad to see you're safe, we were so worried about you!" We started using these techniques even prior to Colorado and within a month of using these techniques, our oldest son, who was gone 30 of the previous 60 days, started coming in every night, because he began to feel safe.

These many months of out-patient care have yielded remarkable shifts in attachment that are confirmed by our therapists. Unfortunately, the bipolar disorder and medication management is very challenging, especially for teenagers whose bodies are changing. The mood disturbance swings make bipolar

patients vulnerable to substance abuse as they attempt to self-medicate. In October, our youngest son was admitted to a Las Vegas psychiatric hospital for medication adjustment. A doctor in charge at the hospital made medication decisions that only worsened the situation. During the month or so of addressing medication needs his behaviors deteriorated and for the first time in three years we were seeing behaviors reminiscent of pre-Colorado treatment. Our youngest son got in serious trouble with the juvenile justice system. With the courts, a decision was made to readmit him to the Institute for Attachment in Colorado in January of 2010. At the same time our older son who had been doing well also began to struggle with drinking, drugs, school and negative peers.

Within a few weeks in Colorado, Nick was doing very well. It was clear to the professionals that Nick's primary troubles were mood driven and were managed with medication adjustments. We visited Nick in Colorado during spring break. He

was doing very well and expressed high anxiety about returning to Las Vegas. Julia and I were also concerned about bringing him back to an environment that would set him up for more troubles.

This circumstance combined with our own need for more support and a rest from the intensity of raising special-needs-youth in Las Vegas

prompted a plan for Julia and I to take a semi-sabbatical. We live in a small town in Colorado, near the Institute and the support of other treatment families. The boys will attend a small school with staff versed in handling kids from the treatment homes. Medication management will be provided by an experienced psychiatrist associated with the Institute.

Miraculously, at the same time as we began to discern a move to Colorado, John Yevtich and Katie Kelso from the Los Angeles Catholic Worker wanted to come out in June and spend a year at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker.

We will still be doing the volunteer coordinating and paperwork and bookkeeping from Colorado, and I will be coming to Las Vegas monthly.

The work we do with our family is making us stronger as Catholic Workers to sustain us in the healing practices of the Works of Mercy; deepening our understanding of the suffering of so many on the street and at our soup line.

A family that moved here from Tucson to work with the Institute for Attachment said it was the best thing they ever did for their sons. So far, being here six weeks, we have to agree.

While we realize that we are certain to face more challenges ahead, we are poised to address these challenges in a highly effective manner. Please keep us in your prayers; we hope to come back a renewed and stronger family.

**Website: [www.lvcw.org](http://www.lvcw.org)**

**PLEASE JOIN US:**

- Wednesday-Saturday, 6:00 a.m.:**  
Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.
  - Wednesday-Saturday, 6:30 a.m.:**  
Breakfast served at G & McWilliams to the poor & homeless (about 150 people).
  - Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. - noon:**  
Hospitality Day, we invite 20 homeless men home for showers, to wash clothes, and to have a great lunch.
  - Thursday, 8:30 a.m. - 9:30 a.m.:**  
Vigil for Peace in front of Federal Courthouse, 333 Las Vegas Blvd. S.
  - Thursday, 11:30 a.m.:**  
50 Bag lunches delivered to homeless.
  - Last Saturday of month, 8:00 a.m.:**  
Deliver food boxes to homes in need.
- PRINTING DONATED BY AccuPRINT**

<b>PRAY FOR PEACE IN OUR WORLD!</b>	(FOR TAB)	<i>Our donors make this ministry possible.</i>
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