

MANNA *in the wilderness*

December 2011

The Newsletter of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker

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FORSAKEN TREASURES:

Prose Poems Honor Forgotten Lives

Tattered Existence

by Julia Occhiogrosso

Von comes through the gate to the back door. He is loaded down with a grocery bag in each hand. Slumped over and moving slow, I walk toward him. He mumbles a few words. I decipher "Here these are for you." Peering inside the bags I see that he is bringing us a gift that he has earned from standing in line at the Salvation Army food pantry. We first met Von at our soup line. Standing off in the distance, keeping an eye on the scene. Coming back shyly, for seconds after the crowd had dispersed. His demeanor was gentle and childlike. His slow dragging speech forced listeners to come in close. His gray dreads hung to his shoulders. Clothes were worn, in layers. His denim jacket was discolored, stained on the sleeves and collar. His jeans were baggy, pulled tight at the waste with a piece of rope. His shoes, work boots today, were always untied, laces dragging on the ground, loose enough to slip off if he walked too fast. Couldn't tie his shoes with swollen feet. They get that way, "Mission Legs", when you sleep sitting up in a chair. At night he travelled the buses, a warm safe place, except if a driver was bothered by his dark disheveled presence. We offered the couch many times. He shook his head from side to side, a look of terror came into his eyes as if we were inviting him to step into a nightmare. Gradually evolved the morning ritual. Von arriving. Treasures he found in dumpsters. A broken shelf, a plastic cup, a chipped dish. His offerings. In exchange, a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, a cup of black coffee with plenty of sugar, a seat at a table in our yard. Conversation. Words that ran together, hard to follow the story. Was he speaking to me, or to a phantom in his head. Then one day he was gone. Called the jails, called the hospitals, called the morgue. Gone. Still I see him, under the shade, tying and untying his bags. Pulling items out, putting them back in, gathering the tattered strings of his existence together.

Yet clear enough to know how to be respectful and kind. Always ready to lift a box, carry trash pails back into the yard, speak a pleasant greeting. Day after day, "Hi Von." "Good morning Miss Julie."

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. -Hebrews 13:2



ARTWORK
BY CHRISTA
OCCHIOGROSSO

Better Than the Hilton

by Julia Occhiogrosso

"Better than the Hilton" Berto* announces with a smile reaching up to his eyes. He looks around from dresser to bed to window. Satisfied. A room in a home. Farewell to sleeping in the bed of a pick-up truck. Twenty years homeless. I first met Berto on our soupline. Looking up from pouring a cup of coffee I scanned at eye level a growth on his neck. Convinced him to go to a clinic, but couldn't convince him to stay. Halfway through the intake form he was certain the secret police were spying on him. Too many questions. He bolted. A few weeks

later he returned to the soupline with a bandage in place of the growth. Upon inquiry, he motioned, his hand swiping across his neck, in a proud Columbian accent he announced, "I take care of it myself." Take care of it myself was his motto. The way that he survived. His short stout stature moved like a bulldog. Graying hair greased back revealing a high forehead. His arms stuck out from his body like a toddler balancing to walk. Once moved into our home his stomach blew up like a balloon, regular, too good meals. He rubs his stumpy fingers in a circle about his belly; "I have a baby inside here", he'd chuckle and shake his head. He speaks emphatically about his palace in Bavaria. Life on other planets and the medicinal attributes of Coca-Cola. He befriends most with his child-like charm. His generous spirit. His strong work ethic. His shadows emerge only when threatened or scared. He scurries quick to his room mumbling about the Nazis and the bad people. In authentic humility he makes his daily greeting, "May I ask permission to say good morning?" I respond likewise with increased volume to remedy his hearing loss. His first year living with us, he celebrated his 69th birthday. Friends from the street and others encircled the guest of honor with song as he blew out the candles and thanked us with tears in his voice for giving him his first birthday cake. He is jubilant when he gets to ride with me to deliver food boxes. I listen as we ride to his nostalgic imagination. The beauty of the people and places in his homeland, the mystery of why he left decades ago; "I will be so happy when I can return." Until then his home is forever with us.

**name changed for privacy*

Thank you for your loyal support, which gives us the privilege and opportunity to provide a place for the lost and forsaken. We need your help to sustain the Catholic Worker witness in Las Vegas. Las Vegas Catholic Worker, 500 W. Van Buren Ave., Las Vegas, NV 89106.

200 Attend National Catholic Worker Gathering in Las Vegas

by Katie Kelso

"Celebration comes from the hearts of the celebrants. It is more than sharing food and drink. It is sharing each other. When there is no community, there is no celebration. To break a dry crust of bread with loved ones is a greater celebration than sharing a banquet with those whose hearts are closed." As I reflect on what our friend Jeff Dietrich once wrote I am pleased to report on the success of our last celebration.

Last October we were able to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Las Vegas Catholic Worker with a National Gathering of friends and Catholic Workers from all over the country.

For three days we shared meals which we prepared together. We broke into smaller groups for round table discussions ranging from parenting to protesting. We listened to poets, singers, story tellers and in true Vegas form, an Elvis impersonator. Lisa Wagner reenacted the life of Dorothy Day. Sue Ferguson Johnson and Wes Howard-Brook gave discussions on empire and enemies and we ended with a day of liturgy and resistance.

It was not a communal experience solely in that we interacted and shared similar ideas, but more of an openness and wantedness for fellowship with our brothers and sisters, a need to be with others whose hearts are open.

While putting the weekend together was at times exhausting and frustrating, the result was a festival filled with friends, new and old, expressing their ability and necessity for what we all know to be the basis of love; community.

NEW HELPING HANDS FENCE

Come and see our new Helping Hands Fence. We now have over 90 colorful hand and foot prints.

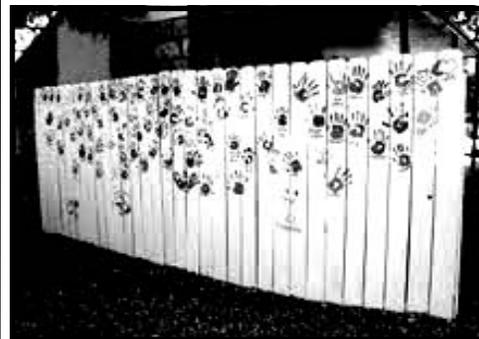
Behind the old house we recently fixed and painted a yellow fence. The fence looked somewhat bare and needed some color. So we recently invited our volunteers to paint their hand prints on the fence. With primary and secondary colors, volunteers choose their tints and hues to paint their hands and make their mark upon the fence. They wash their hands off and then sign their name if they wish.

This seems to be a big hit with our vols and a great way to cap off their time serving our brothers and sisters in the morning soup-line. One of our volunteers, Bill, told his son and daughter about the project and came down the next week to help out and see the fence.

Plenty of colors to choose from or bring your own. No need to limit it to hands – we have foot prints and a fist bump; any body part will work.

**Websites: www.lvcw.org
www.catholicworker.org**

So, please come on down and see the Helping Hands fence at the Las Vegas Catholic Worker.



**Mark your calendars!
The Twelfth Annual
Empty Bowl Benefit
will take place on
Saturday, March 10, 2012
Last year's benefit raised over
\$29,000 for the Catholic Worker
(1/3 of our total income for year)**

**PRAY FOR
PEACE
IN OUR
WORLD!**

(FOR
TAB)

**Thank You to our donors who
make this ministry possible.
2012: Our 26th year!**

Estimated Statistics for 2011:

Soupline:

Bowls of Soup served: 116,000
Cups of Hot & Cold Tea: 103,000
Loaves of Bread used: 2,800

Hospitality Day:

Lunches served: 1,310
Showers given: 920

Monthly Food Box distribution:

Food Boxes given out: 410

Hospitality House guests:

Room for 4-6 guests, average: 5

Morning Soupline Statistics:

Soup: Wednesday: Rice
Thursday: Mac & Cheese
Friday: Spaghetti
Saturday: Rice

Each morning we cook 40 - 60 gallons of soup. Also provided each morning: Hot & Iced Tea, Bread, Sweets and Water. **Monthly:** Christ the King Stew (1st Thurs.) **Quarterly:** Knights of Columbus Pancake, Egg, Sausage and Potato Breakfast.

PLEASE JOIN US:

Wednesday-Saturday*, 6:00 a.m.:
Morning prayer at Catholic Worker.
Wednesday-Saturday*, 6:30 a.m.:
Breakfast served to the poor & homeless.
*closed on fourth Saturday of month
Wednesday, 8:00 a.m. - 2:00 p.m.:
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, 10:30 a.m.:
50 Bag lunches delivered to homeless.
Third Saturday of month, 8:00 a.m.:
Deliver food boxes to homes in need.
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