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# THE WITNESS

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LA DUKE

*Birthing in the face of a dragon. Rev. 12*

## Detroit

I BEGAN READING *Witness* with the letters to the editor and thoroughly enjoyed them. My, my, what a fuss about homosexuality! You would think, after all we have been through in the 20th century, stretching the rules to encompass fast divorces, abortions, autonomy, "healthy" greed and robust competition amongst canines and hominids, that this trifle about fellow sexes bedding together would present no great challenge. If Christianity is to wink at premarital sex, teen experimentation, single motherhood and kinky married bedgames it can surely put up with the gay community. Myself, though -- I mean, for my part I am rather glad Jesus isn't strolling around our McDonald's parking lots these days. I have a sneaky suspicion he'd give us *all* a good stiff kick in the butt, and go look for another planet. But as long as he's not around, we make of Christ what is comfortable to us...

Your "meeting the challenge" editorial was really superb. It is a poignant, gut-wrenching tribute to the city. It reminded me of the love I conceived, as a preschooler, for Chicago, too. Funny how we fall in love with cities, isn't it? They get into your blood and they stay there.

I very much enjoyed "Standing up to Death" and thought John the Baptist was excellent as a visual accompaniment to it. I think I would challenge, however, his premise that street corruption is largely based in sexual abuse. But it is a well done article. I wish I could find something redeeming in Blaise and Virginia's presentation of the "Swords" gallery, but Eric Mesko's work only reminded me of my worse housekeeping habits...

**Dierdre Luzwick**  
Cambridge, WI

[Dierdre Luzwick's art appeared in the September and October issues of *The Witness*.]

WHILE THE WHOLE [October] issue is excellent, the core of it all is expressed in James Boggs' "Making Over Motown." Boggs says "We have to stop seeing the city as just a place to which you come to make a living. Instead we must start seeing it as the place where our humanity is enriched because we have the opportunity to work and live in harmony with people of many different ethnic and social backgrounds."

The photo of Poletown children is an icon of the agony and the potential of the Detroit neighborhoods.

**Bill Melnyk**  
Sewanee, TN

I'VE READ of your "Confession" issue [Sept. 1991]. I've even finished most of your "Detroit" Issue.

In a few minutes I'll be joining some neighbors in cleaning some empty lots to make a mini-park. We've bought a tractor-lawnmower with rototiller and snowblower attachments. We hope to turn our neighborhood into a garden area while we also try to save some of the sturdy but empty homes in the neighborhood.

But, our efforts will be for naught unless there is a confession on the part of our country that our political system simply does not work. How much can small neighborhood groups like ours save if the political structures of city, state and nation continue to have policies aimed at making matters worse.

**John Kavanaugh**  
Detroit, MI

## Pro-Choice

Operation Blockade Christians are certainly not giving a loving Christian message to intelligent caring by-standers. I could not help but think of that as I was willing to be a Patient Escort at the Planned Parenthood Clinic in Warren, Michigan yesterday. As a follower of Jesus it pains me to see His name used as harassment against women who have appointments for health care which is nobody's business but the woman and anyone SHE wishes to confide in.

*The Witness* has been pro-choice, but cancel my subscription if you care only for

those keeping women dependent.

**Barbara M. Palmer**  
Utica, MI

[Ed. Note: I can only presume that this letter is precipitated by Barbara Palmer's knowledge that, when I edited the Episcopal diocesan paper in Michigan, I published an award-winning article about an Operation Rescue maneuver. That article gave an inside view, allowing participants to speak for themselves. It gave a mixed portrait but was not a condemnation.]

There are other *Witness* readers who are concerned about my personal views on abortion. There have been lengthy discussions among the ECPC board members and the contributing editors about the issue. I understand that the policy of *The Witness* has been to support a woman's legal right to abortion; I think it is also true that *The Witness* could do more to address the myriad of levels on which abortion affects women. It is championed as a right, but can be experienced as an assault, further alienating women from their bodies. There is clearly much more to be said. I look forward to the many conversations which will follow.]

## 'Not religious'

*THE WITNESS IS NOT ANGLICAN!* It is a radical left, pagan, new age, feminist propaganda rag! However, as a conservative, tradition, Bible Episcopalian [sic] I feel this \$20 is well worth it to keep up with the latest lies, non-Christian stances, and other aberrations of the radical left!

**Fred Blanton**  
Fultondale, AL

## 'Too religious'

[After six issues from Ambler and one from Detroit, Danielle LaGrange writes:]

I WOULD LIKE TO CANCEL my subscription to *Witness* magazine. I request a refund for those issues not received. Thank you but I did not realize that religion was the main topic of this magazine. I am not interested.

**Danielle LaGrange**  
Camden, NY  
DECEMBER, 1991

*Letters*



Credit: Taizé, Ateliers et Presses, 71250 Taizé, France

My soul magnifies the Lord,  
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,  
for you have regarded the low estate of  
your handmaiden.  
For behold, henceforth all generations  
will call me blessed;  
for you who are mighty have done  
great things for me,  
and holy is your name.

And your mercy is on those who fear  
you  
from generation to generation.  
You have shown strength with your arm,  
you have scattered the proud in the  
imagination of their hearts,  
you have put down the mighty from  
their thrones,  
and exalted those of low degree

you have filled the hungry with good  
things,  
and the rich you have sent empty away.  
You have helped your servant Israel,  
in remembrance of your mercy,  
as you spoke to our fathers and moth-  
ers,  
to Abraham and Sarah and to their pos-  
terity for ever. *Luke 1:46-55*

## THE WITNESS

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## Table of Contents

Features	Departments
8 <b>Dancing alone (poem)</b> Sting	2 <b>Letters</b>
9 <b>Facing the dragon in El Salvador: an interview with Mirtala Lopez</b> Marianne Arbogast	5 <b>Editorial: A woman clothed in sun</b> Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann
10 <b>Facing the dragon in Palestine, again</b> Katerina Whitley	7 <b>Poetry: The Figure in Clay</b> Mary Tall Mountain
12 <b>Hope against the odds: an interview with Najat Kafity</b>	13 <b>Short Takes</b>
14 <b>Holy women don't experience labor?</b> Sarah Dunant	20 <b>Book Review</b> <i>Past Due</i> Kathy Ragsdale
16 <b>Raising kids</b> Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann	22 <b>Art and Society: Judy Chicago's Birth Project</b>
	23 <b>Witnesses: Josie and Mariana Beecher</b>
	25 <b>1991 Index</b>

**Cover: Black Madonna**, Betty LaDuke. Posters and cards are available through Multicultural Images, 610 Long Way, Ashland, OR, 97520; (503) 482-4562. It is the policy of *The Witness* to use inclusive language whenever possible.

# A woman clothed in the sun and stars

And a great portent appeared in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet, and on her head a crown of 12 stars; she was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery. And another portent appeared in heaven; behold, a great red dragon, with seven heads and ten horns, and seven diadems upon his heads. His tail swept down a third of the stars of heaven, and cast them to the earth. And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child, that he might devour her child when she brought it forth; she brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron, but her child was caught up to God and to the throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness, where she has a place prepared by God, in which to be nourished for 1,260 days.

-- Rev. 12:1-6

**T**o be such a woman. To be clothed in the beauty and power of nature. To be dressed in the symbols of earthly powers and rulers. To be honored by God and with child. Is to be as we were to be. In right order with God. Practicing dominion. Giving birth to a child who likewise is called upon by God to interact with the powers and the rulers of this dark age for our salvation.

The image of Mary has always been -- to my detriment -- one that is too tame and sanitized. She is perpetually virginal. (See page 14.) But this woman in Revelation 12, on the other hand, fascinates me. She is classically understood (by the Catholics at any rate) to be an image of Mary the mother of God. But she is powerful and honored by God. She has dominion. All this while she is in labor, surrendering to the onslaught of life that *will* come, assent or no. And this woman takes this role even though, at her feet, there waits a dragon whose reason for being is to devour her child.

All of us -- whether we are parents or not -- know the ex-

Artist **Robert McGovern** lives and works in the Philadelphia area. **Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann** is the editor/publisher of **The Witness**.



The woman in sunlight

credit: RMcGovern

perience of laboring to deliver some God-infused part of ourselves into a hostile climate. We also know the sometimes paralyzing fear that intrudes on our most heart-felt work when the U.S. precipitates a Gulf War or when we imagine a nuclear holocaust or when we feel the weight of those who starve to death each day in this world of ours.

The dragon *is* real. We can feel his breath. We know the dragon's cruelty and voracious hunger in the movements of imperial power and in personal cold anger and hatred.

And within us is something waiting to be born, something God-given and sacred. Something small and frail and dependent on us for its very blood and growth.

And our lives, of course, are entwined with those whose experience of the dragon may be more immediate -- the mothers of Palestine, of South Africa, of El Salvador.

For that reason this issue is dedicated to women who choose life in the face of maddening terror. Najat Kafity (whose husband is the bishop of Jerusalem) speaks of her experiences in the Holy Land today (page 12). Mirtala Lopez and Sting depict the agony of the mothers of the disappeared (pages 10 and 11). Anne Finger, whose book *Past Due* is reviewed on page 22, writes in excruciating detail about birth and life and disabilities and motherhood. Assata Shakur writes of her disappointment and hope for her African-American child (page 19).

This issue is intended to make graphic some visions of the dragon in our world today. (And it is understood that the dragon is alive and well in *all* nations regardless of their politics.) The issue is also intended to honor the woman who is in travail, who is groaning with creation and maybe even dancing despite the odds.

It is comforting to me, and almost a surprise (which says unfortunate things about Church teachings) that God cares so much about the woman described in Revelations 12. Her child is intended to rule, but it is she who wears the stars and sun and stands upon the moon. It is she, not the child, who at this point in the story stands face to face with the dragon. And it is she for whom God has prepared a place.

I had a chance to lead a workshop on this text recently.

Most people characterized the dragon as the predatory spirit of consumerism and militarism in our culture. They felt a desire to shelter the child from its distorting, death-dealing values. Some even felt relief that the child was snatched away by God.

People felt empty when they imagined arriving in the wasteland. Some argued with God about the usurpation of the child. Although, it was conceded, that the child does in fact belong to God, so perhaps it is not an act of usurping at all.

But it was in discussion of the love

*All of us -- whether we  
are parents or not --  
know the experience of  
laboring to deliver  
some God-infused part  
of ourselves into a  
hostile climate.*

that God had for this woman that I felt particularly challenged.

"Who is this woman?" I asked.

"The Goddess," a white-haired woman responded at once.

A younger woman laughed with relief, saying, "Thank you. Thank you for saying that."

I felt the mixed feelings I always feel when confronting the goddess image. When I was pregnant, I wore a goddess necklace around my neck; it was comforting to have a pendulously pregnant and rounded woman to hold onto as my own body changed.

I know the goddess image holds some antidote to my experience of the Christian faith. Where *do* I fit in a belief system that raises up a male God and His son? Where *do* I fit in a body of the faithful which as recently as 1966 made it possible for Anthony Towne (author and companion of William Stringfellow) to dismiss even the possibility that the Holy Spirit might be female and to write

about God's "stag parties." He, keeping the entirety of God locked into male identity. And me, having to *work* at not regretting my anatomy and my psyche.

I am grateful to the women who are resurrecting Isis, because it gives me a chance to reconfigure my understanding of a woman's body and courage. I am even more grateful to the women who are researching, dreaming and discovering a history of women in the Old and New Testaments. I hesitate and reserve judgement on the images raised in the new inclusive language texts, but I desperately need to hear those words and imagine a sacred female force within God.

But I am uneasy also.

Somehow it seems that people often move very quickly from considering the Goddess to focussing on the Goddess within. In itself, I don't believe this is inappropriate, but something nags at me, reminding me that God is also *other*. God is magnificent in Her/His foreignness as well. Wild and untamed, God intervenes in our lives in ways that can dethrone our internal goddesses and gods. And, in the end, that is a profound relief.

It is humbling to know ourselves as creature not creator. It is the original lesson learned in the Garden of Eden. But there is something wonderful about being formed in love and created by someone *other*, whose responsibility, it ultimately is that we live.

And it is a delight to sing praises to that lively and sometimes unpredictable God who sees so much farther and moves with such freedom through our lives.

William Stringfellow, whom I love (Anthony Towne's limitations notwithstanding), said that the vocation of all creatures is to praise God. It is a joy to praise the Creator who brought us to birth and who cherishes us as we labor in the face of the dragon.

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

# The Figure in Clay

by Mary Randle TallMountain

Climbing the hill  
When it was time,  
Among sunken gravehouses  
I filled my fists with earth  
And coming down took river water,  
Blended it,  
Shaped you, a girl of clay  
Crouched in my palms  
Mute asking  
To be made complete.

Long afterward  
I buried you deep among  
Painted masks.  
Yet you ride my plasma  
Like a platelet,  
Eldest kinswoman.  
You cry to me through smoke  
Of tribal fires.  
I echo the primal voice,  
The drumming blood.

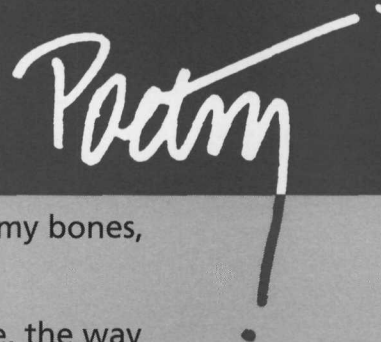
Through decades waiting  
Your small shape remained  
In morning ritual  
You danced through my brain,  
Clear and familiar.  
Telling of dim glacial time,  
Long perilous water-crossings,  
Wolf beasts  
Howling the polar night,  
Snow flowers changing.

Now watching you in lamplight,  
I see scarlet berries  
Ripened,  
Your sunburned fingers plucking them.  
With hesitant words,  
With silence,  
From inmost space  
I call you  
Out of the clay.

It is time at last,  
This dawn.  
Stir. Wake. Rise.  
Glide gentle between my bones,  
Grasp my heart. Now  
Walk beside me. Feel  
How these winds move, the way  
These mornings breathe.  
Let me see you new  
In this light.

You --  
Wrapped in brown,  
Myself repeated  
Out of dark and different time.

*Mary TallMountain is an Athabascan Indian poet, a mystic and a Roman Catholic. From The Sacred Hoop, Paula Gunn Allen, Beacon Press, Boston,*



# They Dance Alone

by Sting

Why are these women here dancing on their own?  
 Why is there this sadness in their eyes?  
 Why are the soldiers here  
 Their faces fixed like stone?  
 I can't see what it is that they despise  
 They're dancing with the missing  
 They're dancing with the dead  
 They dance with the invisible ones  
 Their anguish is unsaid  
 They're dancing with their fathers  
 They're dancing with their sons  
 They're dancing with their husbands  
 They dance alone They dance alone

It's the only form of protest they're allowed  
 I've seen their silent faces scream so loud  
 If they were to speak these words they'd go missing too  
 Another woman on the torture table  
 what else can they do  
 They're dancing with the missing  
 They're dancing with the dead  
 They dance with the invisible ones  
 Their anguish is unsaid  
 They're dancing with their fathers  
 They're dancing with their sons  
 They're dancing with their husbands  
 They dance alone They dance alone

One day we'll dance on their graves  
 One day we'll sing our freedom  
 One day we'll laugh in our joy  
 And we'll dance

**Mother of the disappeared**

*Ella danzan con los desaparecidos  
 Ellas danzan con los muertos  
 Ellas danzan con amores invisibles  
 Ellas danzan con silenciosa angustia  
 Danzan con sus padres  
 Danzan con sus hijos  
 Danzan con sus esposos  
 Ellas danzan solas  
 Danzan solas*

Hey Mr. Pinochet  
 You've sown a bitter crop  
 It's foreign money that supports you

credit: Robert Lentz, Bridge Building Images, Burlington, VT

One day the money's going to stop  
 No wages for your torturers  
 No budget for your guns  
 Can you think of your own mother  
 Dancin' with her invisible son  
 They're dancing with the missing  
 They're dancing with the dead  
 They dance with the invisible ones  
 Their anguish is unsaid  
 They're dancing with their fathers  
 They're dancing with their sons  
 They're dancing with their husbands  
 They dance alone They dance alone



Lyrics from *Nothing like the Sun*, A & M Records

**M**irtala Lopez is 22. Like many women her age, she looks forward to having a home and family of her own. Unlike most, she has faced and accepted the possibility that she may not live long enough.

In El Salvador, it is a risk all women face. During El Salvador's 11-year civil war, 75,000 Salvadorans have been killed by the U.S.-funded military or para-military death squads. Thousands more have been displaced from their homes and villages.

Lopez lost her father and eight brothers and sisters in the war.

At the age of 11, she was forced to flee her village with her seven-months-pregnant mother. Her youngest sister was born in a refugee camp.

Another sister gave birth, surrounded by gunshots and exploding mortars, in the midst of a military attack. That sister was captured, tortured and killed by a death squad in the village of (*Dulce Nombre de Maria* "The Sweet Name of Mary") when her son was two. The child now lives with his grandmother.

For Lopez, the risk is heightened by her commitment to another birthing process: the struggle for justice for her people.

At age 15, she joined with others in her refugee camp to found CRIPDES, the Christian Committee for Displaced Persons in El Salvador. Today, she coordinates its human rights and legal assistance work, and serves as its representative to the Committee for the National Debate for Peace, a Church-led coalition.

CRIPDES has led the repopulation movement in El Salvador, assisting refugees to return home and rebuild their

**Marianne Arbogast** is assistant editor of *The Witness*.

THE WITNESS

communities. In the repopulated villages, the organization has established education programs, health clinics, agricultural training and crafts cooperatives.

"The majority of the people living in the repopulated communities are women and children, because their husbands and partners have been killed or disap-



## Facing the dragon in El Salvador

By Marianne Arbogast

peared," Lopez says. "So there is a special emphasis on the work of women, so women feel able to take on responsibility on all levels."

For her efforts, Lopez has been jailed, tortured, and threatened with death.

In April of 1989, she was arrested at CRIPDES' head office with 63 others, including two mothers with three-day-old babies.

"We were all put in one room," Lopez recalls. "People were beaten; we heard children and women scream as they were hit. They accused us of working for the FMLN [the Salvadoran popular liberation movement]."

Though most were released within three days, Lopez remained in jail for four months.

"Eight times, they put over my head a rubber hood filled with a powder that causes asphyxiation," she said. "I was beaten so badly, all my skin was bruised; you couldn't see my skin color. I still suffer internal injuries from the torture."

Since September 12 of this year, she has received four death threats signed by the Salvadoran Anti-Communist Front. She interprets these as desperate actions by opponents of the September peace accord signed by the government and the FMLN.

"There are people who are against the accord because they profited from the war and want to continue profiting," she says. "There are wealthy landholders who own over 600 hectares of land, and the accord says no more than 240 hectares. There are also sick minds, and [sectors of the military] who want to demonstrate that they're the primary political force in the country."

"The accords are the product of the struggle of the people," Lopez says, "but they're written on a piece of paper. Now we are coming to what may be the most difficult part of the struggle."

Lopez takes the death threats seriously. But, she says, "my commitment to my people is stronger because of the threats. The war has been very cruel, but it hasn't been enough to crush our hope in God and the construction of the kingdom of God we all struggle for."

"I want to have a home and family and children and continue to work for social justice and peace," she says. Risk is "a normal part of our daily lives. I have been living it and I will continue to live it. Fear is normal." But "I work based on faith in God. Our hearts become very strong."

TW

**I** think I have known them all my life -- their gestures of hopelessness, their smiles while tears open grooves on their cheeks, the shrug of the shoulders giving in to Fate--these mothers of pain in the Middle East. Whenever I have seen Palestinian women on television, after a child has been arrested, after a home has been bulldozed, I have wanted to cry out, "Stop it. What you are doing to her, you are doing to me, and I can't stand it." And then I have hidden my face in shame knowing that my faith has never been strong enough to endure the suffering of my children, and I have begged God to look at the agony of these mothers with compassion; the whole time knowing that none of this was enough, and that I was a spiritual coward.

*"She was with child and she cried out in her pangs of birth, in anguish for delivery."*

### East Jerusalem, YMCA building

I stare at a picture of a mother holding the photograph of her daughter. The daughter wears an embroidered dress in the colors of the Palestinian flag -- red, green and black. For those colors she was shot through the heart, Bill Warnock, of World Vision and an Episcopalian, tells me.

Ever since I have known Palestinian women as persons of faith and passion

**Katerina Katsarka Whitley** is editor of *Lifeline* and does media work for the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief. She recently visited Israel/Palestine.

**Lamya Shihadeh** is a Palestinian American who teaches school in Dearborn, MI.

for their children, I have wondered, what gives these mothers the courage to have more children when they know the dangers, when many of them tremble to see them out of their sight? Living in camps, the essence of impermanence, what gives them hope that this child will have a better life?

Abla Nasser, mother of three young



credit: Katerina Katsarka Whitley

## Facing the dragon in Palestine, again

By Katerina Katsarka Whitley

children and principal of the Friends' School in Ramallah, offers as answer: "We say in Arabic that each child born brings his or her own survivability. God will not forsake the child. Children are a gift from God."

*"And the dragon stood before the woman who was about to bear a child,*

*that he might devour her child when she brought it forth."*

### East Jerusalem, Cathedral of St. George

Across the gate from St. George's Cathedral, the children, dressed in clean clothes, their books strapped to their backs in backpacks in the fashion of children everywhere, arrive on foot or accompanied by a grandfather in his flowing *kefiyeh*; some are dropped off by taxi or a private car. They are beautiful children, their dark eyes shining, their mouths ready to break into huge grins. As I photograph them, and they give me the sign of *intifada* defiance, I think of their mothers. When they walk to school alone, how many are fearful that these children may not come back? How many hours before they hear that this exuberant child, doing what his friends do in the manner of children everywhere, has thrown a stone at the IDF, only to be arrested and beaten?

"When I send them off to school, I know anything can happen," a mother tells me. "I need to accept this. So I say to them, 'Be careful! God be with you!' Their course is filled with danger. But we have to have courage when we see *their* fear, because we cannot eliminate

the cause." One of her sons threw a stone after the *intifada* had begun. She sat him down and told him of the danger. But he didn't seem worried. How much can a nine-year old understand of danger?

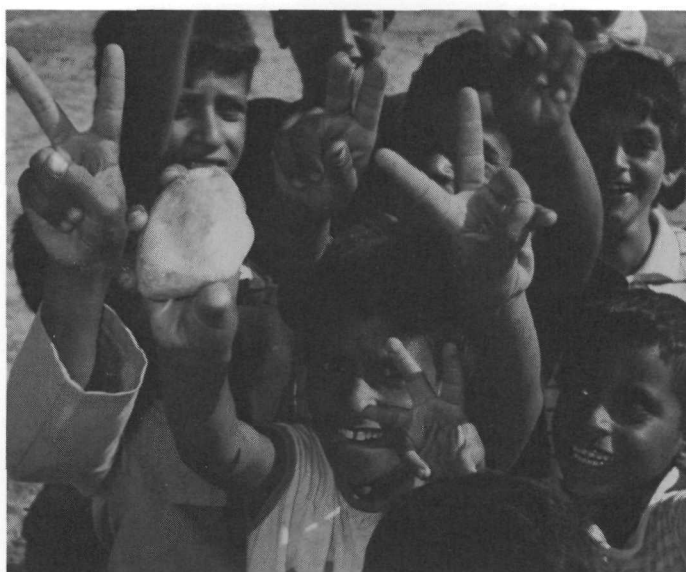
I asked Nasser, who is currently studying at Harvard, to tell me about the mothers who have lost children since the *intifada*. What sustains them?

"What can I say," she begins, her voice full of awe. "I don't know where they get this courage. We go to offer our condolences to the mother, and she comforts *us*! You feel they must be full of grief but they comfort *us*. You see, the Moslems believe in fate and in martyrs. The mother is happy that her child is in heaven." "Do you see a difference in Christian mothers then?" I ask her. "Christian mothers have a different approach altogether," she says. "They too are proud that the child gave himself for the land, but they show deep grief."

*"She brought forth a male child...but her child was caught up to God and to God's throne, and the woman fled into the wilderness..."*

Grandmother Fadayel of Ramallah, remembering English she learned in missionary school over 40 years ago speaks: "Fayek, my grandson was walking on the main street and the IDF caught him, smacked him, bent his head, twisted his hand over his shoulders. They caught him about 11 and till 1:00 they have been running on the street with him. They took him to the tents and put him in. They moved him in five different prisons. The boy was just walking down the street. They said he threw stones from afar but that he didn't hit anybody." The priest interrupts with a bitter laugh, "That's what they always say; that's the reason for the arrest." The family were fined 1,000 shekels (\$200). "If we don't pay, they keep him another two months." Many children, knowing of their families' great financial difficulties, ask the parents not to pay the fine. But how can parents stand that? The grandmother continues:

"Rizek," that is, her own son, the boy's father, "did not eat for days. He sat and cried. The mother and father, they ran here and there saying help me, help me. The boy, he was so thin when he came out. His clothes were on him 20 days. (Even though) we gave clean clothes to the lawyer for him."



Palestinian youth with stones

credit: Lamya Shihadeh

Pastor Fanous explains: "These people are not used to asking for help. I have to find out from others. They are proud, they are not used to this." So I ask the grandmother about those early days, in 1948 when Israel was created, when they were told to leave their homes in Jaffa. "We left without nothing. They told us it was only for two weeks..." But it was permanent.

I try to imagine being thrown out of my home with babies in my arms and nothing else. "How did you survive?" The memories show on her eloquent face: "I had very hard time. My husband without work and I had six children and all so small, and I was pregnant. I couldn't find a cup of milk to drink, I had to sleep on a mat on the floor. The children wanted to eat, we

had no money." A kindly woman opened a milk center and when this young mother of six children went to drink one cup of milk and bring one back for the children, they offered her a job cleaning up. "Until I die, I'll never forget 1948. We had such a hard time."

*"She brought forth a male child, one who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron."*

Nasser explains how difficult it is to be honest and protective of the children at the same time. These are the children who learn courage when they are conceived, she says simply. Their childhood is without enjoyment and their adolescence has the additional burden of their claiming the right to be liberators of their land. The Palestinian mothers have to have courage to deal with this, because the children blame the parents for having acquiesced to the situation. The additional burden of the mother is that almost every family has a male jailed, shot, dead or exiled.

Then I ask her, hating myself for doing so: "You know, the Israelis accuse Palestinian mothers of hiding behind your children, of endangering their lives." I hear her sharp intake of breath, and for a while she is unable to speak. "Oh, how can they say such a terrible thing. How can any mother inflict pain on her child? The Israelis too are human beings, they must feel the same way."

And there lies the crux. In this terrible conflict, in order to hate the enemy, the other side sees him as less than human. Once you dehumanize the enemy, you can do anything you please. "I don't want them to hate," Ablā says of her children.

TW

# Hope against the odds

**N**ajat Kafity considers herself a sheltered Palestinian woman. With her husband, the Bishop of Jerusalem, she has lived in international compounds where her two daughters could play with children from around the world - they did not have to face the austerity and the repression that is common for Palestinian families in the occupied territories.

But between the births of her first and second child, she lost the security she thought foundational. She had grown up in Nablus. Although it was officially Jordanian, she understood it to be Palestinian. She attended an integrated school which was primarily Muslim but included Christian Palestinians and one Samaritan Jew. Students shared their traditions. Her father was an Anglican shop owner. Her extended family was close by.

Yet, in 1967, Kafity was suddenly unable to nurse her second child. She was living in Beirut where her husband was serving an All Saints' Church. The Israelis had invaded the West Bank and Jerusalem. For three weeks they did not know if their family members were alive or dead.

"I couldn't nurse my child. I was so upset I got stomach aches. It was part of the tension that we had.

"In 1968 my parents decided to emigrate to the States taking six children with them. I only had a little of one day to say goodbye to my mother. I didn't even want to kiss them. I was very mad. I just said goodbye from far away and

**Najat Kafity** participated in a recent telephone interview from Jerusalem with **Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann**.

ran to the car."

Seven years later, Kafity says they noticed troubling signs in Lebanon. The civil war broke out with a vengeance in 1976. She and her family lived on the "so-called Muslim side" of Beirut and were subject to the Maronite attacks.



**Jewish "women in black" in Israel vigil weekly against Israel's continued occupation of Gaza and the West Bank**

credit: Andrew Levin

"In March they began shelling indiscriminantly. We had two bombs in our area -- one on the first floor, the other next door. My husband was at a conference in America. I was alone with two kids. I remember the two children sleeping with me and hearing the shells and not knowing where they would hit."

Kafity and her family returned to Jerusalem when her husband became

Executive Secretary.

Although Jerusalem had been familiar, "it was a new environment for us; Jerusalem was occupied," Kafity explained. "Military by different power, different culture, different language. It was painful to ask for a permit to be allowed to visit Jordan or to go abroad.

"There were lots of moments when it occurred to my mind to leave. This is not the quality of life I want for myself and my children. But it is not easy to uproot

yourself. There is always this hope that things have got to change.

"The Israeli soldiers cannot be happy to do this. They probably would like to get rid of the gun and live normally. I would look the soldiers in the eye and it's as if they would be saying, 'We are as captive as you are.' You see the hearts and arrows on their guns and you know they are young people.

"I have watched those [Palestinians] who are out of prison. They are angry, angry that there is no jobs, no opportunity and people will not understand them. They are asking about just things that any human being ought to have. They keep asking, 'What have we done? We didn't cause the holocaust.'"

But even in the face of anger, unremitting arrests, home destructions and new Jewish settlements on increasingly sparse Palestinian land, Kafity says women have continued to bear children.

"During *intifada* time, lots of women bore children at the age of 40. It replaces the ones that are gone. It roots us in this land. Let's give these kids a foundation. Let them stand on a land which is their own land -- not having soldiers coming at any moment to detain them or threaten them or search their homes or go into their schools."

Recently when Kafity and her husband visited Haifa, they stopped at the home in which he had been raised, but which his parents had been forced to forfeit in 1948 when Israel was created. Samir Kafity moved out at the age of 13, suddenly a refugee. A 13-year-old Hungarian Jewish boy moved in with his family and remains there.

"There are no words to describe that the house is his [her husband's]. It's painful to have to forget that those things were ours. We must convince ourselves that that is final."

Kafity referred to the then-upcoming peace conference as a baby.

"With every birth, people ask will the child be healthy or handicapped? Will the birth bring joy and peace or will we be saddened by this baby? We are waiting -- very soon we are going to get the baby and we want to see it.

"We don't want the children to be sucked up by this dragon and go through what their parents went through. We will be supportive of this new birth and somehow there is a seriousness." **TV**

THE WITNESS

## Native Spirituality/Politics

Thousands of people identify with the "New Age," or the "human potential movement," which have ushered in a renaissance of awareness about Indian spiritual practices.

While using Indian spirituality to break out of the strictures of our contemporary lifestyles is clearly beneficial, it also causes serious problems. For although the New Age gleans the ancient wisdoms and practices, it has assiduously avoided directly engaging in the actual lives and political struggles of the millions of descendants who carry these ancient traditions, of those who are still alive on the planet today, and who want to continue living in a traditional manner.

...In fact, if we ever became more personally engaged and let into our hearts and minds the full spectrum of horrors that Indian people have faced, and still face -- if we ever accepted that American corporate and military interests and surely American commodity and technological visions drive the juggernaut -- the pain of these realizations would be overwhelming.

...It is a fundamental tenet of Indian perception that the spiritual aspect of life is inseparable from the economic and the political. No Indian person could ever make the kind of split we wish to make for them. So why do we?

**Jerry Mander, *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Rise of the Indian Nations*, 1991, Sierra Club Books**

## Confronting Stereotypes

The Rural Southern Voice for Peace in Burnsville, North Carolina is looking for people around the country to take part in their Armed Forces Listening Project.

The Project began with interviews with 36 active-duty Marines based at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. They discussed topics ranging from conscientious objection, to solving international conflicts without violence,

to their own reasons for joining the military.

Volunteer Candace Powlick said, "One of the most important aspects of the project was the humanization that takes place when you talk to someone face-to-face. It was a real breakthrough in confronting stereotypes."

For more information, contact: Armed Forces Listening Project, Rural Southern Voice for Peace, 1898 Hannah Branch Rd., Burnsville, NC 28714, (704) 675-5933.

**Nonviolent Activist 9/91**

## Jesus & Church Investments

The General Synod of the Church of England has taken the Church's commissioners to court for refusing to divest holdings in businesses with holdings in South Africa.

In defending the commissioners before the British High Court, attorney Robert Walker contended that Jesus' advice in the Sermon on the Mount is an example of "Christian fecklessness... all very well for those seeking personal sanctity," but neither "permissible nor admirable" in a bureaucratic situation involving stewardship of the salaries, pensions and housing of present and future generations of clergy.

**The Christian Century, 10/30/91**

## The Rich Got Richer

Between 1980 and 1989, the combined salaries of Americans in the \$20,000-\$50,000 income group rose 44 percent. The combined salaries of people earning \$1 million or more rose 2,184 percent. The average wage of those in the under-\$20,000 income category rose just 1.4 percent.

**Detroit Free Press 11/1/91**

DECEMBER 1991

13

*short takes*

# Birthing Women

Beth S. Bailey

I sit with you as you  
labour  
in the ancient meaning of the work.

You shift and pant  
the baby's oceanic bath water dripping  
moistening the air with the powerful beckonings of  
the sea  
smells of spring soil  
odors that trail through my brain  
invariably awakening vague primordial echoes of  
coming to life.

You kneel, and groan deeply with gravity's pull  
You squat. You pace swaying your body  
swollen with child  
the way a bush bows to the ground with its heavy  
burden of fragrant blooms.

I perch on the birthing stool you've restlessly  
abandoned  
near your kneeling breathing blowing breathing  
figure.

My bottom sags loose my mouth forms an O  
and a deep resonant exhale involuntarily vibrates  
downward  
as I am rocked in the wake of these birthing currents  
I suddenly long to be with you in drama, if not  
patience.

To squat low  
Opening our pelvises to the earth  
And then to howl with labour's effort  
to Roll & Rumble with the force  
To sing the babies home  
with that deep bass sound  
of women opening their bodies to another being  
like the crashing of the midnight surf like the encores  
of Sweet Honey in the Rock  
like the mammas of millenniums past.



## Holy women don't

**I** am preparing to spend Christmas Day in pain. This is not some extreme aesthetic response to over-commercialization, but rather a simple acknowledgement of the laws of nature. Because, according to the doctors, 25 December is the date that I am due to give birth to my second baby.

But once you start giving it some thought, the whole question of the birth of Jesus is a fascinating one. I mean, there Mary was, alone with Joseph in this meager little stable full of animals, with no midwife, no help of any sort -- not even any hot water around. How did she do it? Did God really give her an easy ride (a true miracle), allowing her to recline on the straw muttering a few hallelujahs before the baby popped painlessly out, or was it altogether a more convincing arrival? Did she perhaps take the stoic's way out, stepping out into the night, saying she would be gone for some time, only to arrive back with a mewling, puking little bundle, the placenta neatly buried under a fig tree? Or did she simply squat in the corner amid the cow dung with her blue and white robes tucked up around her stomach, howling her pain while Joseph stood helplessly by watching and wondering?

In many circles, of course, such images are considered blasphemous. Early on, the Church plumped for the miracle version of Sarah Dunant wrote a longer version of this article for a magazine of the BBC. Artist **Judy Chicago** coordinated *The Birth Project* (See page 22). The original is in full color. **Beth Bailey** works with midwifery in Alb., NM.



credit: Judy Chicago

## Feel pain? by Sarah Dunant

ements, with no mess or naked loins but instead a neat and pain-free virgin birth. Only two of the four Canonical Gospels bother to mention the actual event at all and even then it hardly gets headline treatment: "The time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son" (Luke Ch. 2, v. 6,7) followed by a swift gallop on to the shepherds, the Wise Men and general rejoicing and wonder. In contrast, the Apocryphal or Gnostic Gospels, written some time early AD, go into more detail, introducing the idea of the unbroken hymen as proof of a virgin birth. By the eighth and ninth centuries, this had been fabulated into a wonderfully vivid tale about the sassy midwife, Salome, who dared to question the miracle and approached Mary to check, but whose hand withered as soon as she came within a breath of the holy vagina. The message was clear. The birth was God's and not Mary's work, and from then on art dutifully followed orthodoxy.

In short, anything which connected the Nativity to the idea of real birth, full of blood and mess and agony, had been whitewashed out. Which, if you come to think of it, is interesting. Because in every other respect, when it comes to pain and suffering, Christianity is not exactly a squeamish religion. On the contrary, as any good Christian

will tell you, through suffering comes redemption. Martyrdom makes great copy, and in the final chapter of the death and resurrection, the agony of Christ is essential. In a million statues and Stations of the Cross, we are asked to immerse ourselves in it. The more blood, sweat and pain, the better. It is, after all, his suffering that gives life. So how about a little recognition of Mary's suffering in giving *him* life? Does that count for nothing?

Of course, I'm aware the question is naive. The exclusion of childbirth from the story of the Nativity hardly comes as any surprise. Christianity has always had trouble with the power (and especially the sexuality) of women, and to accept the suffering of Mary's labor as an act worthy of contemplation would be to make her a very powerful figure indeed. In theological terms, the Church soon formulated what it considered to be a convincing explanation for the notion of Mary's pain-free birth. Since the agony of labor was viewed as God's punishment of Eve's rebellion, so the release of Mary from such torment was seen as a mark of her exceptional obedience. (The whole association of labor and sin was later given form in the Church of England

ceremony of churching, whereby a woman who has given birth has to kneel at the church entrance to be made clean; a service that for centuries was common practice.)

And yet, this refusal to acknowledge Mary's pain is still remarkable. Because as anyone (man or woman) who has ever been

present can testify, childbirth is one of the few times -- for many of us, perhaps the only time -- in human existence when the connection between suffering and life is so meaningfully and exquisitely drawn. If there wasn't a birth at the end of it, labor would be quite literally an unbearable torture. But as it is, all the agony, all the mess, the blood and indignity are supremely worthwhile. That is

exactly what makes it a transcendental experience, one where, against all the odds, the physical gives way to the spiritual. And that is exactly why it is tragic that it should have been so assiduously expunged from the story of the Nativity.

Either way, the result was the same. Unto us a child was born. So this Christmas Eve, as you stand in the pew ready for Midnight Mass, or cram the last of the presents into the children's stockings, spare a thought for Mary, intent on God's work, in excruciating contractions and desperately trying to breathe her way over the mounting tidal waves of pain. Because, as any woman will tell you, it couldn't have been done without her.

TW

*Anything which connected the Nativity to the idea of blood and mess and agony was whitewashed out. Which is interesting, because in every other respect, when it comes to pain and suffering, Christianity is not exactly a squeamish religion.*

# Raising children

By Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann

**S**ometimes we worry about the way we are raising our children.

Our marriage is grounded in a belief, both political and religious, that we are called to throw our weight and our voices behind those whose voices are seldom heard.

For that reason, we are both writers. For that reason, we have both spent time in jail, in war-torn countries and in Detroit.

Our five-year-old joins Detroit grand-

mothers chanting "Pack up your crack and don't come back!" She knows four houses on our block are burned out because drug dealers act crazy. She has stepped over the line twice with us when we were protesting the presence of nuclear weapons at a local air force base.

Lydia travelled in utero to Nicaragua when we joined a Witness for Peace delegation. Her presence within me pitted my motherly desire to protect her at all costs in seeming tension with the cries of the mothers we met who spoke

of the deaths of their children and husbands who had been abducted by the Contra.

Part of me wanted to run, run from their unrelenting pain. I dreamed of a place to live where we could shut out the reality of our fractured world.

Children offer us such a bittersweet relationship to life. We'd like to buy any insurance to protect them from harm, from pain, from ugly hatred. Yet even as we try to draw blinds between us and the world, attempting to lock the joy of our family within our own walls, we're suddenly in tears over a headline that announces that someone else's child is in trouble. It was only when I got pregnant that I began to cry regularly when I read



Lydia, then 3, waves goodbye to her father after he's arrested for prayerfully trespassing at Williams International, a local manufacturer of engines for nuclear missiles.

credit: Rebecca Cook

the newspaper. All that I love and the love that others hold seems so fragile.

But if being human means knowing that we are connected to one another and if joy revolves around our ability to recognize each other's pain and delight as our own, then I'd like our daughter to meet Dorothy Garner and hear her yell "Thank you, Jesus" when a crack house is dismantled by the hands of people who live nearby. I want Lydia to learn to play with the children of the Mothers of the Heroes and Martyrs, dancing out a child's hope in the face of war.

In the summer of 1990, Bill and I were invited by Stew Wood, Bishop of Michigan, to Israel and the occupied territories.

We agonized, finally deciding to leave our then 4-year-old home with her grandmother, aunt and cousins, while we took her baby sister with us to the Middle East.

The interfaith delegation we travelled with was receptive to Lucy's presence, although a few people gently asked why we'd subject a baby to the rigors of a human rights tour in a hot, arid country where pain is a staple.

We added a portable crib, diapers and dehydrated vegetables to our luggage. And in no time, Lucy won the hearts of everyone on the delegation. When a Palestinian American complained that Israel's holocaust memorial is built on land confiscated from the Palestinians and that therefore she could not visit it, Jewish members of our delegation winced with pain. The history of deep wounds and land rights, the deaths of people's family members flamed before us. Just then, Lucy would call out or pull herself up against someone's leg. She would

Photographer **Rebecca Cook** works in Detroit. Photographer **Andrew Levin** is the Midwest Coordinator of the Jewish Peace Lobby and lives in Ann Arbor, MI. **Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann** is the editor/publisher of *The Witness*.



Lucy is held by Palestinian women in Gaza City.

credit: Andrew Levin

look to us for recognition. She was a living counterpoint to the pain and a reminder of the kind of world we seek.

Lucy was passed from lap to lap. She became a refuge for people who were either overwhelmed emotionally or too fatigued. Periodically, someone in our group would scoop Lucy up and carry her out of a meeting and onto the street where she would crow with delight at children playing or the approach of a donkey wagon.

As we struggled with justice issues and fought the parameters in our own psyches which call one people victim or oppressor, Lucy showed an equanimity that was stunning. Anyone who jingled keys or clicked their tongues spoke her language and she beamed.

When we visited refugee camps, Lucy

would shriek with joy before the van came to a stop. She would cry out to the children and they in turn would surround her, reaching out to touch her blonde hair, her hands, her face. Mothers would look at me from behind their veils; we could sense the difference in our cultures and

our lifestyles, but we also knew in our bones what it felt like to hold and nurse your child and that knowledge travelled between us like an electric shock.

We had been forewarned that people in the camps in Gaza and the West Bank were weary of westerners who come to stare at the squalor

in which they must live. But Lucy broke down that dynamic, offering the residents an eager, upturned face and hands that reached for theirs. In many ways she became a way of offering our hearts to those we visited in that disputed land.

*As we struggled (in Israel/Palestine) with justice issues and fought the parameters in our own psyches which call one people victim or oppressor, Lucy showed an equanimity that was stunning.*

When soldiers fired a tear gas canister at boys throwing stones, we had to flee. We had been told that tear gas could be very harmful if not lethal to a baby. Our driver threw the van into reverse and drove to the other side of the camp. We had wet washcloths ready to put over her face if she was affected by the tear gas. In our air conditioned van, she was safe. But even on the other side of the market, women shopping raised their veils over their noses to protect themselves. I found myself weeping for the concerns they must have for their children.

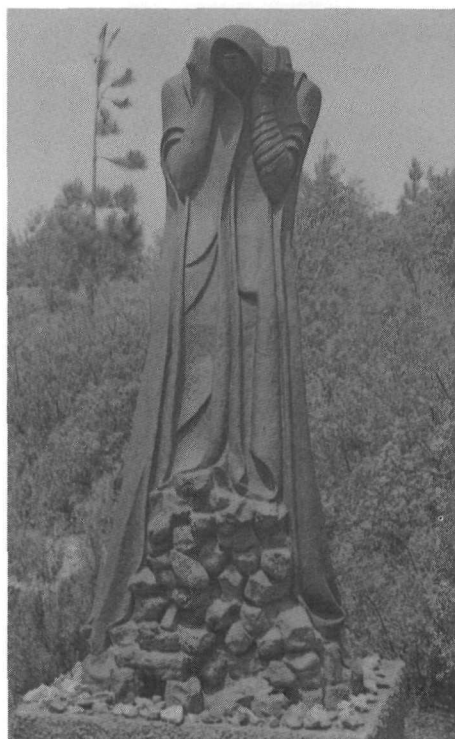
We did visit Yad Vashem, the Jewish holocaust memorial in Israel. I was awed by the silence and the space. I was disoriented in the dark, high hall lit with pinpoint lights -- one for each child killed in the concentration camps.

But when I walked through the display of children's art, I became unable to breathe. Holding Lucy against my chest, I looked at drawings of a mother dead on the floor and soldiers standing above her. I looked at a self-portrait of a young boy, mouth open screaming "Where is mommy?" And neatly, next to each drawing, is printed the date when the child artist was executed.

Staggering through the historical section of the museum and its enormous photographs of starved children and corpses piled in wagons, I felt overwhelmed with horror. I was abruptly brought back to reality when I realized an older Jewish couple was holding hands with my little daughter. "Nice child," they were saying, "How old is she?" For that one minute, Lucy offered a respite from the horror. She was a tiny bit of sanity in that hall; a tiny piece of humanity that makes us willing to work to preserve life.

Bill has a copy of a newspaper article posted in the Dachau camp. In it, the gestapo warn townspeople that a couple was caught peering over the

fence. They were made to stay the night and warned that anyone else with the same curiosity would be made a permanent resident. And yet for decades we have all wondered what difference might have been made, which lives might have been saved, had those townspeople torn down the walls brick by brick.



**At the Jewish holocaust memorial in Israel, this faceless mother stands weeping over the stones commemorating her children.**

I cannot promise my children prosperity. I cannot promise them health or a lifetime of privilege in a first world country. I can't even promise them that the random gunfire between cars on the freeway or in fast food restaurants won't someday touch our lives. Too many other lives have been rent with loss and unspeakable pain for me to practice denial in the face of it.

Elias Chakour, a Palestinian priest, wrote of the trauma his village suffered in 1948 when the men were arrested by Israeli soldiers and taken away. No one

knew if those taken were alive or dead. The only thing that kept the women sane, Chakour wrote, was that the children still needed food. Someone must plant and harvest and prepare food. For these little ones, whose loss did not translate into vacant stares and madness, for these little ones who still asked to eat, the mothers maintained life.

For our daughters and the children and parents of the world, we are attempting to continue planting and harvesting, writing and travelling, living and protesting in a way that offers hope.

I worry that our five-year-old knows too much about the world. I wanted to cry when I curled next to her on the floor of our bedroom where she had chosen to nap below the window, and Lydia said, "It's nice here Mommy. No one can shoot you." She carries issues of justice in her heart which are too heavy for the grownups in this world.

Yet we can offer our daughters the company of people of great courage. The Mothers of the Disappeared, the elderly Jewish couple at Yad Vashem, the mothers in Palestinian refugee camps, the grandmothers challenging Crack, a couple in Germany vigilling for peace outside the military installations which surround them, and a host of friends who have prayerfully resisted nuclear weapons and U.S. military interventions around the world.

There is in the eyes of these people a joy and a promise. They do not pretend that there is no pain. They are lifting themselves over the walls of the concentration camps of this decade and they may pay a price for that, but they are doing it in the name of freedom and they are doing it for the children.

If I cannot eradicate the pain of the world or insulate my family from it, at least I can offer them the company of people such as these. They are our best security.

**TW**

# To My Daughter Kakuya

## by Assata Shakur

i have shabby dreams for you  
of some vague freedom  
i have never known.

Baby,  
i don't want you hungry or thirsty  
or out in the cold.  
And i don't want the frost  
to kill your fruit  
before it ripens.

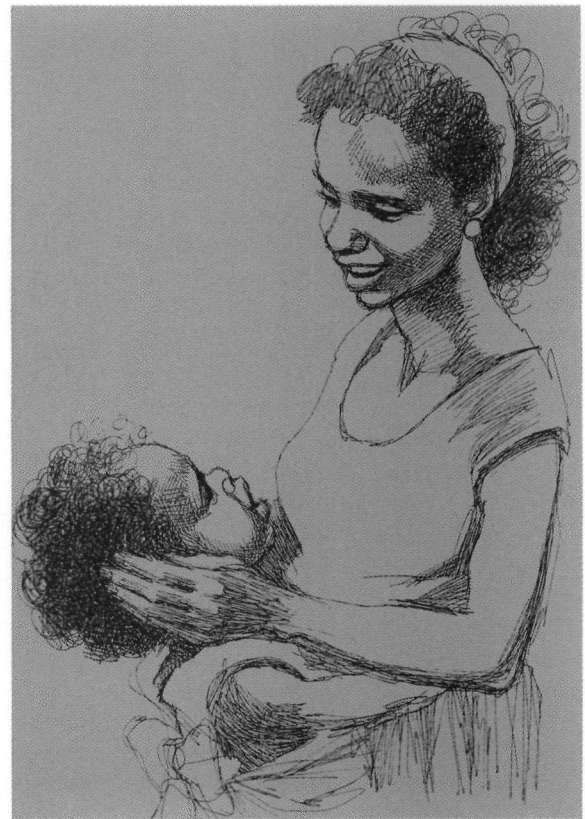
i can see a sunny place--  
Life exploding green.  
i can see your bright, bronze skin  
at ease with all the flowers  
and the centipedes.

i can hear laughter,  
not grown from ridicule.  
And words, not prompted  
by ego or greed or jealousy.

i see a world where hatred  
has been replaced by love.  
and ME replaced by WE.

And i can see a world  
where you,  
building and exploring,  
strong and fulfilled,  
will understand.  
and go beyond  
my little shabby dreams.

*Assata: An Autobiography*, Lawrence & Co., Westport, CN, 1987  
Assata Shakur, a Black Panther, gave birth to her child in prison.



credit: Eleanor Mills

# Advent's invitation

by Penelope Duckworth

Not long ago at the Catholic Worker Infant House in Redwood City, a shelter for battered children, a small boy of about five was to be placed in a foster home. The woman who runs the house was walking him out to the car to meet his new foster parents when the boy, who had grown to feel very secure in his time at the shelter, said to her, "Will you carry me?" The woman reached down to reassure him and said she thought he was getting a little too big to be carried. The boy responded by saying, "I mean in your heart." The woman was surprised that the small child spoke so figuratively and told him that she certainly would. As he got nearer the car he said, "Will you remember to kiss me

goodnight?" This time she said she would; she would remember him each night, and she would carry him in her heart.

This story illustrates what is being asked of us this Advent.

Christ is once more coming into the world. But he does not come into a Christmas-card world of gentle beasts and hovering angels. He comes into a world as war-torn and as unjust as the one he originally entered almost 21 centuries ago.

But Christ will come because there are some courageous enough to look death in the eye and still push for new life. Like a child, Christ looks for us to help. "Will you carry me?" he asks, and

we look out and see imprinted on the world the face of a dragon that will try to devour us and any new life we may bring. But there are other powers that, in the wild logic of God, come to our aid; powers of love and hope and gentleness.

The Christ child asks us, again and again, "Will you carry me? Will you carry me in your heart? Will you carry me and remember to kiss me goodnight?" Let us respond with Mary and pray that our souls will also magnify the Lord and carry Christ, bringing him into the world in even these dark and troubled times.

*Adapted from a sermon by Penelope Duckworth, Episcopal chaplain, Stanford University, CA.*

# Living in hard places

by Katherine Hancock Ragsdale

*Past Due: A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth* by Anne Finger. Seal Press, Seattle, WA, March, 1990.

*I like living in hard places. Well, I'm not so sure I like it: I just seem to find myself there a lot* (p. 59)

**A**nne Finger knows something about dragons. As a woman with a physical disability, a worker in an abortion clinic, and a writer and activist, Finger has seen the dragon's faces in her own life, in the lives of other individuals, and in society at large. In *Past Due* the reader sees those faces through Finger's eyes. *Past Due* is a deeply personal chronicle of one woman's decision to bear a child in a dangerous world, of her pregnancy

plex, and cruel irony is a regular companion. One gets the feeling that in coming to terms with that reality early in her life, Finger has obtained some wisdom about the world.

At age three Finger had polio. As a child she used crutches and braces and had "surgery so many times that when someone asks me how often, I always have to count the thick caterpillar scars that crawl up my legs to figure it out" (pp. 11-12). As a teen she walked home from high-school every day, pushing herself to the edge of collapse in order to force her legs to do more. At age 29 she first read about post-polio respiratory problems and premature aging. She read that the aggressive rehabilitative techniques of a quarter century earlier may have damaged already weakened nerves, leading to a host of problems in middle age.

At the Feminist Women's Health Center, where she works on Saturdays, she regularly makes her way past protesters who harass already vulnerable clients and accuse Finger of killing babies. She checks to make sure UPS packages are expected before accepting

delivery, hoping to screen out bombs sent by "right-to-lifers" (read: domestic terrorists). She helps the teenager who showed up late (apparently because she was caring for a house full of siblings) and the woman who is only pretending

to get an abortion she doesn't want but her boyfriend is trying to force her to have.

*Every day at the clinic I confronted what it meant to have some control over our wombs and less control over our social circumstances. You can decide to no longer be pregnant... but you can't decide not to be poor anymore, or to have support so you can finish school, or to have a partner who wants to raise a child with you.* (p. 55)

And she remembers, and is reminded, how much worse it used to be and could be again.

When encountering big dragons face-to-face human instinct is not so different from puppy instinct; roll over -- belly up, neck exposed -- and hope, by surrendering, to be allowed to live. Finger has seen that instinct in action, too:

*A few women told me, when it was over, that they understood how the "right to life" felt, or that abortion shouldn't be legal. (Save me from my power, save me from control over my life. Give me a father-state to tell me what I must do and can't do. Give me answers cast in stone.)* (p. 52)

Finger, however, refuses to surrender her power to the state, to the medical

*"I wasn't born disabled but had polio when I was three years old. I believe very strongly that we have to protect the lives of disabled infants. [Yet] when I was a child in the hospital I was subjected to things that were inhumane . . ."*

*Barbara says, "If you had been my child, I would have killed you before I let that happen . . ."*

*My heart stops.* (p. 33)

book review

and her dreams, of a difficult birth and her child's precarious start in life. Precisely because it is so personal it is also profoundly political. Finger refuses to accept easy outs -- consequently, her readers are required to search for something more than easy answers.

In this book the answers are never easy, the problems never less than com-

**Katherine Ragsdale** is the advocacy coordinator in the Women in Mission and Ministry Office at the Episcopal Church Center and vice president of the Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights.

establishment, to her own disability, or to politically correct, but not adequately thought out, answers. As she allows us to see what that refusal to surrender means in her own life, we are forcefully reminded how much is at stake for us all.

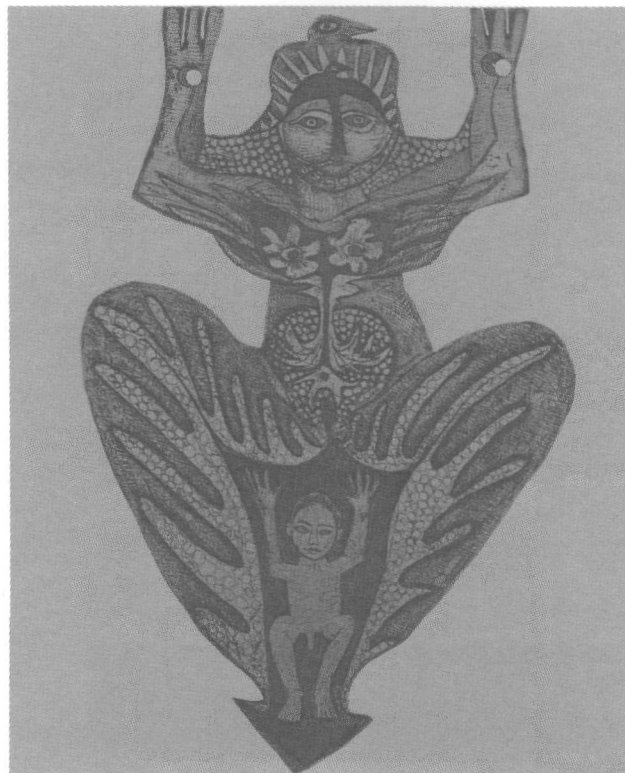
Perhaps the most daunting aspect of each of the issues raised in this book, the thing that most feeds the temptation to roll over and whimper for easy answers, is the complexity of the questions.

*Thinking about reproductive technology is hard for feminists... If we believe in the right of women not to have children, then do we have to support the right of women to have children?... What about the fact that the unequal distribution of resources within our society often means that middle-class women will have sophisticated medical techniques available to them, while poor women will struggle to get basic medical care? Can we get access to these technologies without increasing medical domination over women's bodies?* (p. 44)

And what about choosing not to have a child because it would be born disabled? Especially if you're disabled yourself. Which disabilities are too much to cope with? Have you sufficient humility to allow another to draw her line elsewhere?

Thinking about health care is hard, too. The medical establishment is often (even usually) arrogant and unresponsive, seeing patients as diseases to cure or injuries to fix rather than as people to care for. Unnecessary surgery is the norm, especially for women, e.g. hysterectomies and Caesareans. Yet Finger, who

has more reason than most to distrust doctors and medical technology, finds that she doesn't really believe what her body has told her -- that she is pregnant -- until a medical laboratory confirms it. Thinking about having a baby is hard.



credit: Betty LaDuke

If she really believes what she says about the value of disabled persons' lives, why does she want so badly to have a "perfect" baby? And what about the effects of the pregnancy on her?

*Being post-polio and pregnant was somewhat like dealing with the discomforts of pregnancy and the discomforts of old age at the same time. This must be how the biblical Sarah felt, pregnant at ninety with Isaac.* (p. 81)

Making the hard decisions doesn't necessarily remove the dragons. After a long and difficult labor, Finger's plans for a midwife assisted home birth are abandoned and she is rushed to the hospital where her large (and late) son is delivered in critical condition with the

threat of brain damage and subsequent disability. The tempting surrender to easy answers now involves blame. Is the possible brain damage due to the way the doctors handled the delivery after she arrived in the hospital? Or is it because the midwife missed her cues and waited until too late to move them to the hospital? Or perhaps it's Finger's fault for trying a home delivery in the first place.

There are no easy answers here. No easy outs in making decisions or assigning blame. There is solidarity in the struggle, acceptance of ambiguity and uncertainty, and reaffirmation of the need for vigilant and thoughtful participation in the political life of our communities. There is also courage, resolve, and humor in the face of dragons.

*Past Due* is a good read. It made me laugh often.

*We have to be trained in CPR, so we can resuscitate Max if he stops breathing. They can't find the English version of the CPR videotape, so they show us the Spanish one, even though neither of us knows Spanish. If Max's alarm goes off we are to shout Ayuda! Ayuda!*

It made me cry often.

*[As a child] I had five more operations. I didn't walk any better after all of them than I had before. Yet the surgeon had done a "beautiful job" I heard often... He used seven clumsy stitches to suture up a five inch long incision... It was as if he wrote on my body: 'Ugly. Piece of junk. Ruined. Doesn't matter.'* (p. 68)

But most of all, it made me think -- always.

TW

# Judy Chicago: birthing art

by Blaise Tobia & Virginia Maksymowicz

**J**udy Chicago's approach to art challenges conventional notions not just of the artwork, but of the artist as well. Rather than working alone, in isolation from society, and cultivating an identity as a "genius" or an "eccentric," she is very much part of the world and prides herself on her ability to organize hundreds of women to collaborate on monumental art installations about issues that affect their lives. She sees the artist as someone who can

work within a community to help that community give powerful expression to its vital beliefs and concerns.

Chicago's first large-scale project, *The Dinner Party*, completed in the late 1970s, required the assistance of a large group of women in many capacities, including researchers, expert ceramists, embroiderers, and others. Its scale (39 large ceramic plates and embroidered place settings on a massive triangular table) and boldness in seeking to symbolize the enormous contribution of women to our civilization drew a great amount of attention. *The Dinner Party* still evokes a mixture of responses from admiration to outright disdain for its blatantly female imagery.

Even more controversial has been Chicago's second large-scale work, *The*

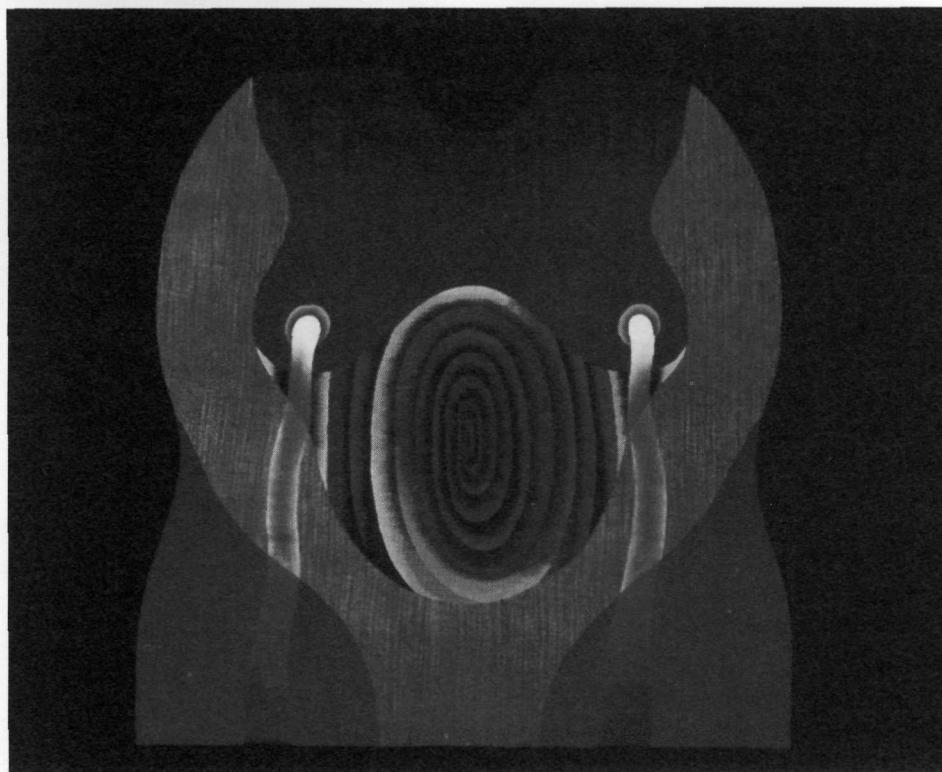
*Birth Project*, a series of approximately 100 needlework images about childbirth created by over 150 women from the United States, Canada and New Zealand. While Western art has a healthy share of madonna-and-child images, there have been virtually no representations of birth itself. By her design of an artwork that describes not only the joy of childbirth, but also its violence, its pain, and the conflicting emotions the process can engender, she hopes to challenge the prevailing creation myths that led to such an omission. "The idea that a male god created man is such a reversal of the reality of how life comes forth!" she said in an interview with the *New York Times*.

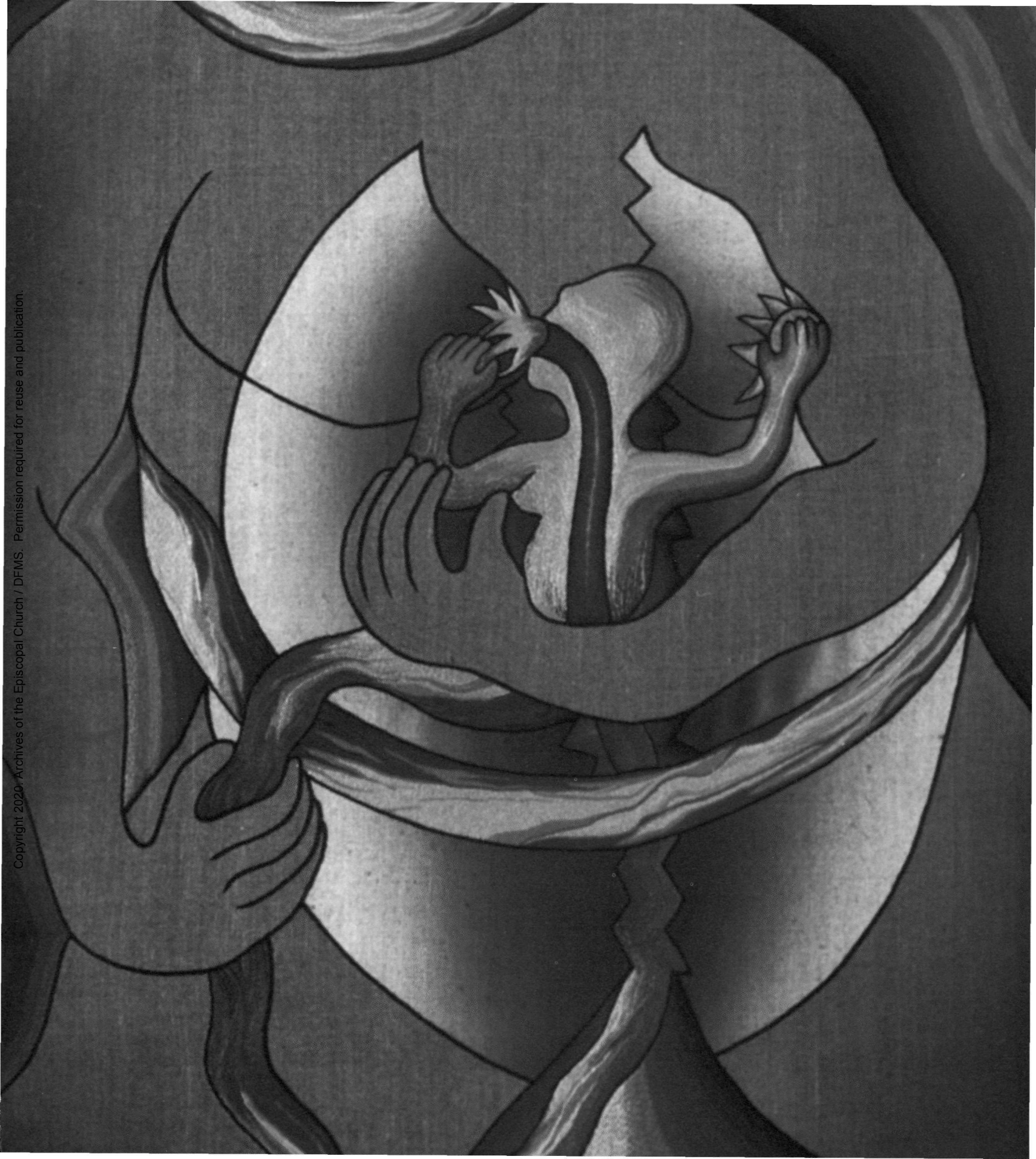
Men are often put off by the graphic images that Chicago and her co-workers have created. The husband of one needleworker called it pornography. But many of the women who see *The Birth Project* are impressed with its beauty and its pain, and, more importantly, with the essential truth of its imagery. The women who donated their time and their skills (not always without conflict -- artistic collaboration, with its clashes of vision, can be a tough process) appreciate the way in which their traditional "women's" crafts, like needlework, can be made to function as a powerful form of communication.

Judy Chicago's next exhibit is scheduled to open at the Spertus Museum in Chicago, Illinois in 1993. Called the *Holocaust Project*, it is another grand installation combining tapestry, stained glass, painting and photography, designed in conjunction with her husband, photographer Donald Woodman. Chicago and Woodman hope to extend the concept of the Jewish holocaust to include a consideration of all those who have been victimized by historic events.

More information about Judy Chicago's work can be obtained by contacting the Through the Flower Foundation, P.O. Box 8138, Santa Fe, NM, 87504.

art and society





# Mother and child team

**M**ariana Beecher was four-years-old when she and her mother were arrested by the Salvadoran military. Her mother, Josie, was working for Venture in Mission, serving an Episcopal parish in San Salvador. They still live in El Salvador, although Josie Beecher now works for the Lutherans because the Episcopal Church considered the work too dangerous for a mother and child.

"I'd do everything possible to keep my child safe," Beecher said. "But because she's important to me, I want her to understand about the issues of justice that are so fundamental. I don't want to send her off to boarding school so that she doesn't see anything ugly or unpleasant. I want her to see the beauty and things that can go wrong."

*Witnesses,  
the quick and the dead*

Mariana, now 7, attends a Roman Catholic school for Salvadoran kids in San Salvador. She's completely bilingual. Last Ash Wednesday, Josie Beecher wondered what her daughter would be taught about sin.

Mariana came home with a cross on her forehead and explained to her mother that it is wrong that people don't have houses and don't have enough to eat. Mariana added that we have to work so that will change.

**Josie Beecher** participated in a phone interview with **Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann** (editor/publisher of *The Witness*) while in the Diocese of Washington this Fall.

"I had expected her to say something about sin and she did although she never mentioned the word," Beecher said.

Mariana said something about sin when she was a four-year-old under arrest too. When the soldiers attempted to segregate the Beechers from five of their



Josie and Mariana Beecher during their recent visit to the U.S. "I want her to see the beauty and the things that can go wrong," Josie Beecher says.

Salvadoran neighbors, "Mariana started screaming, 'You can't separate me from my friends,'" Beecher says. Later when the soldiers were interrogating one of the mothers and yelling at her, "Mariana climbed up on Martha's lap and they stopped. That came about because she loved and cared about those people too," Beecher said.

It has not been easy deciding how best to live with her daughter and her faith.

Beecher says when she was first in El Salvador she was asked to relieve Church workers helping a community that had

just weathered a military attack.

"I debated whether to take Mariana with me. But she had always gone with me and the people there loved her. She would come into the camp and have 100 little kids running after her. I knew that if I came without Mariana the people in the camp would know that I was scared. On the other hand, I was real nervous about bringing my kid into that situation. I ultimately decided to take her because we're kind of a team.

"As I drove in, they were saying mass and a refugee was reading the story of Abraham and Isaac. The point to me was that God asks us for everything, for that which is most dear to us. If we give completely and trust completely then we're going to be okay. That lesson has come back to me over and over again. I'm not whole without my daughter, so if I'm there to be God's servant and to witness to my faith then it has to be the whole of me."

Mariana and Josie Beecher spent six months in the U.S. in 1990, recovering from Josie Beecher's second arrest during which her life was threatened and she was accused of aiding the popular resistance to the U.S.-supported government in

El Salvador.

(On that occasion, since Beecher was able to anticipate the arrest -- it followed on the heels of the murder of the Jesuits -- Mariana was safely housed with the Baptists.)

When Josie Beecher decided to return to El Salvador, the Episcopal Church refused to send her back.

"They were very concerned about my daughter and about me," Beecher explained. But feeling a calling from God to return, she did so under the auspices of the Lutherans. She now works for the

Christian Committee for the Displaced.

Josie Beecher says her work with Mendardo Gomez, the Lutheran bishop in El Salvador, is deepened by the fact that she is a parent. He also has children and weighs their safety against his commitment.

"He has five kids and he is somebody that is under constant surveillance and death threats. He's in many ways the successor to Archbishop Romero. One of the reasons he and I have come to be close is that we both have children. We worry about the consequences of the decisions that we make.

"The people I work with are generally women with kids. It's back to that story of Abraham and Isaac. I couldn't do my work at my best if I didn't have my child there. I couldn't be the best possible mother if I weren't doing the work that's so important to me."

Josie Beecher, who grew up in Seattle, was raised an Episcopalian and remains one, she says, despite the fact that she attended an Episcopal boarding school in La Jolla, California. She adds that her bishop, Ronald Haines, in the Diocese of Olympia, continues to be extremely supportive.

Mariana Beecher was adopted by Josie Beecher five years ago in Guatemala. Her birth mother was a Salvadoran refugee who delivered her in a refugee camp.

Asked whether women in El Salvador ever try to avoid birth because conditions are too awful, Beecher said, "No. I've listened to so many stories of women, on the move from the military, dropping out of the line to give birth and joining back at the end of the line to keep moving. They tell those stories over and over again because it is a story for life. It is such a constant battle against death -- be it starvation or bombings. Death is so present that women there are constantly exercising forcefully that option for life."

THE WITNESS

## 1991 Index

### Ambidge, Chris

Exiles of the 'crying room' 2/91 p. 20-21

### Arbogast, Marianne

Civilian-based defense [Gene Sharp] 11/91 pp. 22-23

Facing the dragon in El Salvador [Mirtala Lopez] 12/91 p. 10

A nonviolent approach to personal defense 11/91 p. 6

Restored to community: A short history of sacramental confession 9/91 p. 13

### Backiel, Linda

No time for neutrality [poem] 2/91 p. 11

### Barnett, Victoria J.

Pastor outrages Nazis and Confessing Church [Ilse Harter] 9/91 p. 27

Germany's confession 9/91 pp. 24-25

### Barnhart, Virginia

Lullaby [poem] 4/91 p. 26

### Beecher, Josie

Salvadoran election 7-8/91 p. 10

### Blaxton, Reginald G.

Community church or state church? 4/91 pp. 16-19

### Boggs, Grace Lee

Book review: *The Living City and The Living Economy: A New Economics in the Making* 10/91 p. 26

### Boggs, James

Making over Motown 10/91 pp. 22-24

### Boyd, Malcolm

The sexuality of Jesus 7-8/91 pp. 14-16

### Bozarth, Alla Renee

Pillar of salt [poem] 2/91 p. 19

### Browning, Edmond L. et al.

War is not the answer 2/91 pp. 14-15

### Bucklee, Sally M.

Australian church oppresses women 5/91 pp. 14-17

### Cartledge-Hayes, Mary Jo

Etiquette [poem] 4/91 p. 13

### Chung, Hyun-Kyung

Transform the 'culture of death' 4/91 p. 5

### Cobbey, Nan

Inauguration is *kairos* moment in Haiti 4/91 p. 6-8

### Cox, Anne E.

Breathing in the spirit 4/91 pp. 22-23

### Darling, Pamela W.

Sexism, racism and Phoenix: A painful struggle around change 6/91 pp. 6-8

### Day, Sam

On becoming blind 7-8/91 p. 5

The view from jail 5/91 p. 5

### Dewitt, Bob, Peg Ferry, Harry Strharsky

Mary Lou Suhor: Past, present, future 7-8/91 pp. 12-13

### Dietrich, Jeff

Opting out of the 'New World Order' 5/91 pp. 18-19, 24

### Duckworth, Penelope

'Carry me in your heart' 12/91 p. 19

### Dunant, Sarah

Do holy women feel pain? 12/91 pp. 14-15

### Erdey, Susan

1991 General Convention in Arizona 7-8/91 pp. 22-24, 26

Daniels icon dedicated at EDS 1/91 p. 13

A pre-Convention rundown on the Right 6/91 pp. 14-17

Of mad dogs and Anglicans...? 7-8/91 p. 25

### Ferry, Peg [See Bob DeWitt]

### Gallagher, J.P.

My father was a hero in the war [poem] 3/91 p. 16

### Gallup, Grant M.

Communion in conflict 1/91 pp. 14-16

### Garza, Jose

War whoops 10/91 p. 25

### Gessell, John M.

Bishops should 'come out' for gays 2/91 pp. 18-19

### Haughton, Rosemary

Wellspring House 4/91 pp. 24-26

### Hiatt, Sue

Thou shalt not kick butt 4/91 pp. 12-13

### Hirschfield, Robert

A meeting in a Belfast cemetery 2/91 p. 27

### Holder, Leonora

Sleep [poem] 1/91 p. 22

### House, Gloria

Calling All Brothers [poem] 11/91 p. 10  
South Africa Poem 9/91 p. 7

### Hubbard, Ruth

Commentary on 'Cells, souls and people' 5/91 pp. 10-11

### Hunt, Mary E.

Ecumenical encounters of a feminist kind

1/91 pp. 18-19  
 Medals on our blouses? 3/91 p. 20  
**Imai, Judy**  
 Racism is America's **real** enemy 4/91 p. 21  
**Kairos U.S.A., 1991**, 9/91 p. 18  
**Levertov, Denise**  
 May our right hands lose their cunning  
 [poem] 11/91 p. 7  
**Madgett, Naomi Long**  
 City Nights [poem] 10/91 p. 20  
**Maksymowicz, Virginia and Blaise Tobia**  
 Christian art [Maksymowicz, Tobia] 9/91  
 pp. 20-21  
 Judy Chicago: Birthing art, 12/91 pp. 20-21  
 Sisters of Survival 11/91 pp. 20-21  
 Swords into Plowshares, [Eric Mesko]  
 10/91 p. 21  
**Marable, Manning**  
 Fight against apartheid not finished 4/91 pp.  
 10-11  
 Smoke and Mirrors [Detroit] 10/91  
 pp. 14-16  
 The bitter fruits of war 3/91 pp. 6-8  
**Marler, Penny Long**  
 Churches must 'make family' 7-8/91  
 pp. 6-9, 16  
**Mason, Raz**  
 The price we pay for homophobia 5/91  
 p. 26  
**Matthew, Antonia**  
 Daughters of Jerusalem [poem] 6/91 p. 27  
**McGowan, Jo**  
 Life in India, 2/91 pp. 22-23  
**McLaughlin, Andree Nicola**  
 US Gulf strategy fueled by racism 2/91  
 pp. 12-13  
**Meyer, Charles**  
 Church after death 5/91 pp. 20-21  
 Hastening the inevitable 2/91 pp. 6-9  
**Meyer, John**  
 Standing up to Death 10/91 pp. 8-9  
**Morrison, Melanie**  
 Telling the truth about our lives 9/91  
 pp. 22-23  
**Munro, Joyce Clemmer**  
 Protesting the Gulf War with Becca 3/91  
 pp. 14-16  
**Murphy, James M.**  
 Cells, souls, and people 5/91 pp. 6-9  
**Myers, Ched**  
 Unmasking our pain; Therapeutic politics  
 9/91 pp. 14-17  
**Nelson-Pallmeyer, Jack**

The Department of Defense 11/91 pp. 11-  
 13  
**Pacosz, Christina**  
 The Diego Rivera Mural, DIA, 1953-1959  
 [poem] 10/91 p. 7  
**Parachin, Victor M.**  
 How to survive the sorrow of suicide 5/91  
 pp. 22-23  
**Pierce, Susan E.**  
 Church needs new sexual ethic [Intv with  
 Carter Heyward and Virginia Mollenkott]  
 6/91 pp. 20-23  
 Farewell to a feisty woman of letters [Abby  
 Jane Wells] 5/91 p. 25, 27  
 Interview with activist Mary Frances Berry  
 1/91 pp. 6-9  
 New editor/publisher lauds magazine's  
 'prophetic tradition' 3/91 pp. 9, 23  
 Edward R. Welles: A man of fierce faith  
 6/91 pp. 24-25  
**Portaro, Sam**  
 Homosexuality as vocation 6/91 pp. 18-19,  
 25  
**Ragsdale, Katherine**  
 Book review: *Past Due* by Anne Finger  
 12/91 pp. 22-23  
**Rankin, William W.**  
 ECPC responds 9/91 p. 3  
 Jonathan Daniels: Civil rights martyr 1/91  
 pp. 10-12  
**Rossman, Parker**  
 Vacations with a conscience 2/91 pp. 24-26  
**Schaper, Donna**  
 The blessings of sexuality 5/91 p. 12  
 Things you can't do alone 11/91 p. 9  
**Schwarzentraub, Betty**  
 Neighborhood defense 11/91 pp. 8-9  
**Seymour, Ruth**  
 'Rain your spirit in my heart' 10/91  
 pp. 17-20  
**Shakur, Assata**  
 To My Daughter Kakuya [poem] 12/91 p. 19  
**Slaughter, Jane**  
 The Unions: from Motown to Mexico 10/91  
 pp. 12-13  
**Solle, Dorothee**  
 Remembrance, pain and hope 3/91  
 pp. 24-27  
 Resisting civil religion 9/91 pp. 8-9  
**Sting**  
 Dancing alone [poem] 12/91 p. 11  
**Strharsky, Harry [see Bob DeWitt]**  
**Suhor, Mary Lou**

Adieu to Ambler: A 17-year tapestry of  
 advocacy 7-8/91 pp. 18-21  
 Attorney Linda Backiel's sentence 1/91  
 p. 23  
 The Consultation: gearing up for Phoenix  
 '91 6/91 pp. 10-13, 27  
 Demons of conflict 2/91 pp. 5, 15  
 Episcopal Peace Fellowship flooded by war  
 queries 3/91 pp. 10-12  
 Herstory from Persian Gulf war zone 4/91  
 pp. 14-15, 19  
**TallMountain, Mary**  
 Figure of Clay (poem) 12/91 p. 7  
**Tobia, Blaise [see Virginia Maksymowicz]**  
**West, Mary**  
 Witness: Dorothy Garner 10/91 p. 27  
 SOSAD: Save Our Sons and Daughters  
 10/91 pp. 10-11  
**Whitley, Katerina**  
 Facing the dragon in Palestine 12/91  
 pp. 8-9  
**Wilson, Godfrey**  
 Hart Island [poem] 3/91 p. 23  
**Windal, Claudia L.**  
 A Way of the Cross for the lesbian and gay  
 community 3/91 pp. 18-19  
**Wink, Walter**  
 Loving our enemies: the litmus test 11/91  
 pp. 14-17  
  
**Witness Staff**  
 Archbishop Tutu calls for continued  
 sanctions 4/91 p. 11  
 Christian lesbians organize new group 4/91  
 pp. 26-27  
 Confessing in Japan [George Gish] 9/91  
 p. 25  
 ECPC Board moves *Witness* to Detroit 6/91  
 p. 5  
 Grand jury resister 2/91 p. 10  
 Heterosexual questionnaire 5/91 p. 27  
 Minority groups to present progressive agenda  
 6/91 p. 27  
 No business as usual 2/91 p. 16  
*Witness* staff to boycott convention 6/91  
 p. 13  
*Witness* wins again 7-8/91 p. 17  
*Witness* wins three ACP awards 6/91 p. 26  
 What they're saying about the war 3/91  
 p. 5  
 Wylie-Kellermann new *Witness* editor 2/91  
 p. 10  
**Wong, Shelley**

Carrying the Peace Flame 4/91  
pp. 20-21, 27  
**Wylie-Kellermann, Bill**  
Book review: *Building the Beloved Community* and *Witness*: Maurice McCrackin  
11/91 pp. 26-27  
Book review: *Resident Aliens* 9/91  
pp. 26  
**Wylie-Kellermann, Jeanie**  
A woman clothed in the sun 12/91  
pp. 5-6  
Confessing sin, confessing faith 9/91  
pp. 5-6  
Free by grace: experiences of confession pp.  
10-12  
Hope against the odds: an intv with Najat  
Kafity 12/91 p. 19  
Love of enemies: an invitation to the abused  
[an intv with Virginia Ramey Mollenkott]  
11/91 pp. 24-25  
Meeting the Challenge [Detroit] 10/91 pp.  
5-6  
The PB and the President 11/91 pp. 18  
Raising children 12/91 pp. 16-18  
Self-Defense 11/91 p. 5  
Witness: Josie Beecher 12/91 p. 24  
**Yann, Renee**  
Lessons from street prophets 1/91 p. 20

## ARTISTS

**Adams, David** 1/91  
**Andrews, Charlotte J.** 10/91  
**Baum, Lin** 9/91  
**Booth, Franklin** 10/91  
**Bragin, David** 1,6/91  
**Brancato, Sr. Helen David, IHM**  
2,4,5,9,11,12/91  
**Brulc, Lillian** 7-8/91  
**Chicago, Judy** 12/91  
**Day, Bill** 10/91  
**Drovin, Nicole** 9/91  
**Greger, Carol** 5/91  
**Gunn, Herb** 10/91  
**Harris, George** 3/91  
**Hodgell, Robert** 6,11/91  
**LaDuke, Betty** 11/91,12/91  
**Lentz, Robert** 12/91  
**Levin, Andrew** 12/91  
**Longdon, Margaret** 2,4,5,7-8, 12/91  
**Luzwick, Dierdre** 9,10/91  
**Maksymowicz, Virginia** 9/91  
**Mark, Gloria** 9/91  
**Martin, Dana** 7-8/91

THE WITNESS

**McGovern, Robert** 3,6,9/91, 12/91  
**McGuire, Laura** 10/91  
**Mesko, Eric** 10/91  
**Mill, Eleanor** 1,2,3,4, 11/91, 12/91  
**Morris, John** 1/91  
**Munnik, Len** 3/91  
**Patterson, Lenorah** 9/91  
**Plympton, Bill** 6/91  
**Rivera, Diego** 10/91  
**Rogers, Liz** 10/91  
**Ruth, Sheila** 11/91  
**Sadao, Watanabe** 9/91  
**Taize** 12/91  
**Tobia, Blaise** 9/91  
**Turnley, David** 10/91  
**Ward, Lynd** 10/91  
**West, Jim** 10,11/91  
**Whitley, Katerina** 12/91  
**Wuerker, M.** 11/91

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have had many requests for that issue.

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We've sent this issue to you because it deals with the courage and creativity of women. *The Witness* has a long history of writing about women's issues with passion and intelligence.

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The use of four-color art in this issue is exceptional. Ordinarily we publish two color covers and art.

And at night we win to the ancient inn  
Where the child in the frost is furled,  
We follow the feet where all souls meet  
At the inn at the end of the world.

The gods lie dead where the leaves lie red,  
for the flame of the sun is flown,  
The gods lie cold where the leaves lie gold,  
And a child comes forth alone.

G.K. Chesterton  
*A Child of the Snows*  
Burns & Oates



Merry Christmas from *The Witness* staff!



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*See page 27*