

Photography, p. 14

HOMER ASSAULT

and

the Arts

THE WITNESS

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Delighting in December issue!

THANK YOU for sending me a complimentary copy of *The Witness*. The first item that caught my eye as I puzzled over what I had received was the letter from Fred Blanton [December '91]. I knew I had to read on! Though I do not consider myself either pagan or new age nor do I belong to the Episcopal Church, I knew I was probably among friends. The rest of the magazine did not disappoint me. Enclosed is my \$20. My moratorium on purchasing additional periodicals just ended. Finding time to read this one will not be difficult.

Carol E. Roth
Olathe, Kansas

I CAN'T LET one more minute pass without writing to congratulate you on the December issue of *The Witness*. The artwork is exceptionally beautiful -- from the cover to the Judy Chicago pieces inside.

The articles and poems are excellent. Particularly touching is your piece, "Raising Children." My husband and I have attempted to raise our children in a socially responsible manner, but we don't often get an affirmation in print. Like you, we can "... offer our daughters [and sons] the company of people of great courage." So

thank you for your gift of affirmation at a time when our hearts are focused on the birth of a tiny child in the East who would herald a new world order.

Tonight will be the last meeting of a course I teach at the Hartford Seminary on eco-justice. I intend to take the Jerry Mander quote (from *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Rise of the Indian Nations* in "Short Takes" to read to them. It exactly makes the point I've been trying to make that there is no other way to begin to heal God's creation except through the active engagement (politics, direct action, joining in on the side of those negatively affected, etc.), and that pious or new age

spirituality, or distorting Native American spirituality to our consumption, will not do.

Thanks for everything. Just keep it up!

Anne Rowthorn
Salem, CT

THANK YOU for the sample copy of *The Witness*. I really did feel as though I had found a friend in the mailbox after school today.

Your article on "A woman clothed in the sun and stars" also gave me courage as I read, "And within us something is waiting to be born, something God-given and sacred. Something frail and dependent on us for its very blood and growth." The act of writing, whether for the Portland newspaper or for an academic summer course, is always an act of birthing, and what I have to say is so often "small and frail," but it needs still to be said.

In "Raising children," you wrote of "planting and harvesting." One of the hardest lessons of my life is that we can't protect even the children in our care, but we can't stop trying either. And so for my one son still at home [after a daughter's death], I still get out the Jesse tree each Advent and tell the ancient stories; at school I sponsor the Amnesty International group, even when it dwindles to two students; and I keep on asking God which fields I should be sowing.

Thank you for the rich harvest of *The Witness*.

Mary Lee Wile
Yarmouth, ME

THE NEW LOOK of *The Witness* is striking. I love the way you are using art and color in the layout. It is well integrated into the subject matter and leads the eye all the right places.

The last issue was as lovely as I've ever seen *The Witness* look. A real test, as far as content is concerned, is the fact that daughter Beth read every article of that issue and commented to me on how well it was done.

Jim Lewis
Raleigh, NC

WHAT A BEAUTIFUL MAGAZINE to receive just before Christmas! Thank you.

I especially appreciated your article on the

effect Lucy had on the various pained people of the Mideast. (We also did an issue on Women of Israel: Jewish and Arab-Palestinian.) Seems we have values that are congruent.

Helen E. Hughes
Editor, *The Creative Woman*
University Park, IL

MY SUBSCRIPTION, gifted to me this past year, has been *most stimulating and exciting*, with the December issue bringing me, a Quaker lifetime pacifist and social activist, new insights into Christmas *in re*: Motherhood and parenthood for us all!

Charlotte Frantz
Buffalo, NY

WHAT A PRESENT and controlled passion is your December issue. In the language of a grandson, "Awesome!"

Your orchestration of color, grace, agony of torture and birthing leads through each page of this magnificent tribute to the fortitude, courage and wisdom of women. And through these women, a hope in faith for peace in the world. Many, many thanks.

Sara Morrison
Cedar Rapids, IA

THIS IS A NOTE OF APPRECIATION for *The Witness* in general, and the edition we received yesterday in particular. The stories of mothers and children were very moving and much appreciated.

"Facing the dragon in El Salvador" and "Mother and child team" shared important information on El Salvador in a very sensitive manner. Thank you.

Interfaith Task Force Central America
Los Angeles, CA

Disputing the December issue!

I RECEIVED A SAMPLE copy of your magazine. I would never consider subscribing to such an anti-semitic magazine. First you have an article saying that the Palestinians were driven out of their homeland by the Israelis after the creation of Israel, which is

Letters

untrue. The Arab population were told they could stay and have the same rights and privileges as any Jewish citizen but left because their *own* leaders urged them to and because of their fears. Then in another article there were comments about the Israeli "invasion" of Jerusalem in 1967! Look in any history book and you'll read the truth about that! Israel was the country that was invaded by the surrounding Arab countries. It had to fight for its very existence after being invaded without warning on one of the major Jewish holidays, Yom Kippur. Your articles are very inaccurate.

As a Christian, I have never been able to understand the attitude of most churches toward Judaism. It would seem, to me, natural and reasonable that the two religions would be close since the roots of Christianity are in Judaism and the earthly mother of Jesus was Jewish. The religion He was brought up in was Judaism. Yet you have an article in which people write of wearing a goddess pendant and of goddess worship, while you have two anti-Semitic articles. I cannot understand this in a magazine that calls itself Christian.

I don't even want to hear of your magazine again. It's people like you that make it difficult for me to explain why I am a Christian when my friends ask me how I could possibly follow such a bigoted and irrational religion.

**Fiona Bolstod
Brainerd, MN**

[Ed. Note: I'd give a lot for your version of history to be accurate. It has been disappointing and confusing for many of us to learn that Israel is not a blameless, holy nation. Perhaps there was a heresy in imagining any state could be. In any event, it is not an attack on Judaism to criticize the actions of Israel any more than it is an attack on Christianity to criticize the U.S. On the contrary, it is consistent with the prayers of the Hebrew prophets to call on all nations to act on behalf of the stranger, the widow and the orphan. The positions taken in *The Witness* are consistent with those held by several Jewish peace groups, including Peace Now, Yesh G'vul and the Women in Black.]

—J.W-K.

Considering abortion

HOW REFRESHING! I believe that I read correctly in an Editor's Note within the Letters column in the Advent-Christmas, 1991 issue of *The Witness* that one can be a liberal and at the same time not embrace abortion enthusiastically and wholeheartedly.

It is refreshing to read in *The Witness* that one is not dismissed immediately if she or he objects to the oppression of people of color, the pollution of God's good earth, and the restriction of the legal rights of our citizens and at the same time stands for the defense of the unborn.

**W. Frisby Hendricks, III
Binghamton, NY**

Power and abuse

GREAT ISSUE! Especially liked article by Sarah Dunant -- "Holy women don't feel pain?" It fits so well into work I am doing on my D.Min. at Boston University. My focus is on the Church's responsibility to offer ministry to adult female survivors of childhood/adolescent sexual abuse. To date the Church has remained a silent voice -- cautiously denying that some faithful women have been unable to come to the Church for healing because the Church denies the suffering of women.

**Debby Elder
Associate Rector, Christ Church
Alexandria, VA**

Correction

THAT WAS A WONDERFUL ARTICLE you wrote about Josie Beecher in the December, 1991, issue of *The Witness*. It tells a story about her mission that she herself has not been able to express in her newsletters. She is truly a dedicated and courageous young woman, and it is a privilege for me to support her and her work by coordinating the mailing of her newsletters.

I was urged to write you because of an amusing mistake in the article. Josie does come from the State of Washington, but *not*

the Diocese of Washington!! Our Episcopal Diocese in Western Washington is called the Diocese of Olympia, and our Bishop is the Rt. Rev. Vincent W. Warner, Jr.! An easy mistake for those who don't live in the West.

We wish you and your new staff all the best wishes as you pursue your editorial tasks.

**Eleanor T. Hall
Lopez Island, WA**

[Ed. Note: Apologies for the the error. One of our board members found it less than amusing.]

In response to our Advent letter

FOR MOST OF MY LIFE I've been self-employed as a lawyer and writer. Now I find myself a year away from 60, and for the most part "self-unemployed." So when I got your December 6th letter, I expected it to be a request for a contribution, and thought: "Oh, dear!" Imagine my surprise when I found your Hymn to Peace. The bright, cheerful, positive issues of *The Witness* mean a great deal to me, beginning with their art work.

**Edward Ross
Houston, TX**

And in response to our concern in that letter that the U.S. will initiate another war:

You are 100% *nuts*!

[Ed. Note: This was unsigned, but was postmarked Birmingham, AL and came with a pro-life sticker on the envelope.]

***The Witness* welcomes letters to the editor. We are most able to accommodate letters of 200 words or less. Please send comments to *The Witness*, 1249 Washington Blvd., Suite 3115, Detroit, MI 48226-1868.**

THE WITNESS

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THE WITNESS

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Cover: Boxcar pose, Shawn Nixon, 18, *Shooting Back*, 1901 18th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20009; 202-232-5169. (see page 14.)

It is the policy of *The Witness* to use inclusive language whenever possible.

Scattered in imagination: moving beyond guilt

And a ruler asked him, "Good Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone. You know the commandments: 'Do not commit adultery, Do not kill, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.'" And he said, "All these I have observed from my youth." And when Jesus heard it, he said to him, "One thing you still lack. Sell all that you have and distribute to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." But when he heard this he became sad, for he was very rich. Jesus looking at him said, "How hard it is for those who have riches to enter the kingdom of God!" Luke 18:18-24 RSV

I hate this Scripture cite. I don't know what to do with it. I feel smug when applying a social critique to the first world, but when I turn it toward myself, as I must, I feel cornered.

I recently changed my route home to avoid the men who jump in front of cars to wash windshields for money. More and more corners in Detroit have such tenants; some carry signs: "Will work for food." Some are women.

I stare at these people's faces trying to discern if they're addicts, if there is some reason why they suffer and I do not.

The suffering here is increasing, as it seems to be throughout the nation. Michigan's Governor Engler recently eliminated all public assistance to able-

bodied adults without children and coincidentally eliminated a variety of medical benefits to the elderly.

Advocates estimate that 90,000 people are becoming homeless as a result. Single-room occupancy hotels in the Motor City

are closing because the state no longer pays the rent. All sorts of private service agencies (as well as the libraries, the Detroit Institute of Arts and Detroit Science Center) have cut their staffs radically. The governor's sensitivity to his actions is illustrated by the fact that

he recently volunteered his time to star in a series of T.V. commercials making appeals for homeless pets.

Photos of Depression-era food lines

start to haunt me. Visions of today's homeless become nightmarish. They invade the corners of my mind. I do not know these people; I do not want to know them. And I do not know what to do with my sacred text. I can feel guilty. I can

Visions of today's homeless become nightmarish. They invade the corners of my mind. I do not know these people; I do not want to know them. And I do not know what to do with my sacred text.

imagine giving away what we own and landing my family on the street. I can write a check to the local shelter. I can rationalize.

This issue of *The Witness* is offered as an alternative to changing the route home.

Many people are discovering, seemingly simultaneously, that the arts offer a way for the homeless, and those who are not, to meet without the spectre of archetypal nightmare visions and self-recrimi-



credit: Shawn Nixon

Jeanie Wylie-Kellermann is editor/publisher of *The Witness*. Photographer **Shawn Nixon**, 18, is a participant in *Shooting Back*, see article on page 14.

nations.

Parishioners at Cass United Methodist who stand sock-footed in the gymnasium following the directions of a mime who wants them to use their bodies to express hope or pride or desire feel awkward and intent. It does not matter, for that moment, which of them have shelter for the night. (See page 12.)

The lyrics of the 1970s evoke memories for all of us. Participants in the *Credo* program (which was designed for drug-addicted U.S. sailors) have discovered that recovering and articulating fears and hopes through music can generate a spiritual well-being. The experience crosses class lines. (See page 8.)

Meanwhile, a Chicago library where the homeless were congregating opened the space for poetry readings, and the work cuts through our defenses and confusion. (See page 10.)

Jim Hubbard, a UPI photographer who decided to teach homeless kids to shoot photos, says they capture images he could never get. They can cross thresholds that we might not be able to and they carry us with them. (See page 14.)

There is something exciting about the fact that when we reach into the core of who we are to produce a work of art, we speak from a center, from a terrain that is familiar to one another. This recognition

Many people are discovering, seemingly simultaneously, that the arts offer a way for the homeless, and those who are not, to meet without the spectre of archetypal nightmare visions and self-recriminations.

THE FRUITS
OF
PROSPERITY



Those resident on street corners in 1931 in the September 24, 1931 *Witness*. credit: Clive Weed

does not change or simplify Christ's mandate. But, with luck, it may transform the archetypal energy that flows through the crisis.

I went to a service at Cass recently. As has been true for a long time, parishioners were ethnically and economically diverse and perhaps one-quarter developmentally disabled. Now, a large number of homeless people have joined them. They come because the church hosts and supports the *Up and Out of Poverty Campaign* which militantly plants tent cities in Detroit and at the capitol to illustrate the crisis. They are a gutsy, indomitable, irreverent group of people who have been arrested and had their tents destroyed repeatedly by the Detroit police. They are an icon of how one can approach God through anger and disenfranchisement. How one can draw on that terrain we hold in common and

convert addiction and self-abuse into a creative, if hugely confrontational, work.

Marion Kramer, a hard-hitting welfare advocate for years, and her husband General Baker, who helped organize the Black Revolutionary Union Movement in the 1970s, arrived late and sat with their two children in the pew in front of us. When Kramer responded to an altar call and knelt in her military fatigues for prayer, my expectations, the imagination of my heart, somersaulted. *God is at work*. I knew suddenly that Christ presents us with more than a philosophical conundrum. I don't have answers, but I am more able to meet the eyes of the people resident on street corners. There is a tiny well-spring of hope emerging in me and a confidence that God is on the move. By the grace of God, drawing on that deep terrain within, we will be as well.

— J.W-K.

Laid Off

by Michele Gibbs

empty-handed
they hurry from habit
that assembly-line years
have geared them to
but now,
no job in sight
they fight
for dimes from passing strangers
hunt
for a piece of wood to whittle,
a body to beat
till it succumbs
taking on the shape
that mates us in defeat.
anything that comes in reach.
even yesterday's news, rolled up,
will do for battle.
something known, at least
to mold and hold
to distinguish us from cattle.
for hands unused to rest
toil's test is easy
compared to this festering frustration
foisted on them by the factory's production freeze.

Michele Gibbs is a Chicago-born artist, politically active in Detroit and overseas, who now lives in Mexico.

"Not much movin' now," says one
already missing a thumb
lost in happier days
when the line he worked would always run.
"If this was war
they'd send us home with more than this."

No lie.
some record that we fought and did not die;
a discharge with honor meritorious service
above and beyond all call --

something, minimally,
for the blankness of the wall we stare at now.
"We could even celebrate that kind of peace."

As it is, our blood, our sweat,
the pieces of ourselves that we exchanged for bread
mean nothing.

"Might as well be dead."

or, as another brother said,
"Just count us among the missing."

Bag Woman

by Dudley Randall

Wearing an overcoat in August heat,
Shawls and scarves, a torn and dirty dress,
Newspaper shoes, she squats in the Greyhound terminal
And rummages through two bags, her lifetime treasure.

She mines waste baskets for her food and clothes,
Scavenges in the streets with sparrows, pigeons --
Isolate, with fewer friends than beggars have --
Another stray cat or abandoned dog,
She sleeps where cats and dogs sleep, in the streets.

Sister, once did you suck your mother's milk,
And laugh as she fondled you? Did Daddy
Call you his Dumpling, Baby Girl, his Princess?
And did you flirt with him, bending your head,
And, giggling, kiss his eyes through your long lashes?
Did some boy love you once, and hold you tight?
And hotly know you through a summer night?

Or were you gang-raped, violated early,
And from that trauma drifted down to this?
Or, born defective, abandoned to the streets?

Sister, I do not know. But I know that I am you.
I touch your rags, clasp your dumb eyes,
Talk with you, and drink your fetid breath.

*Dudley Randall is
poet laureate of
Detroit and founder of
Broadside Press, Detroit.
A Litany of Friends Lotus Press, 1983.*

Poetry

Over troubled waters

by Sarah T. Moore

Isn't it a pity, isn't it a shame, How we take each other's love/ And cause each other pain. Forgetting to give back/ The love we have received/ Isn't it a pity?

George Harrison

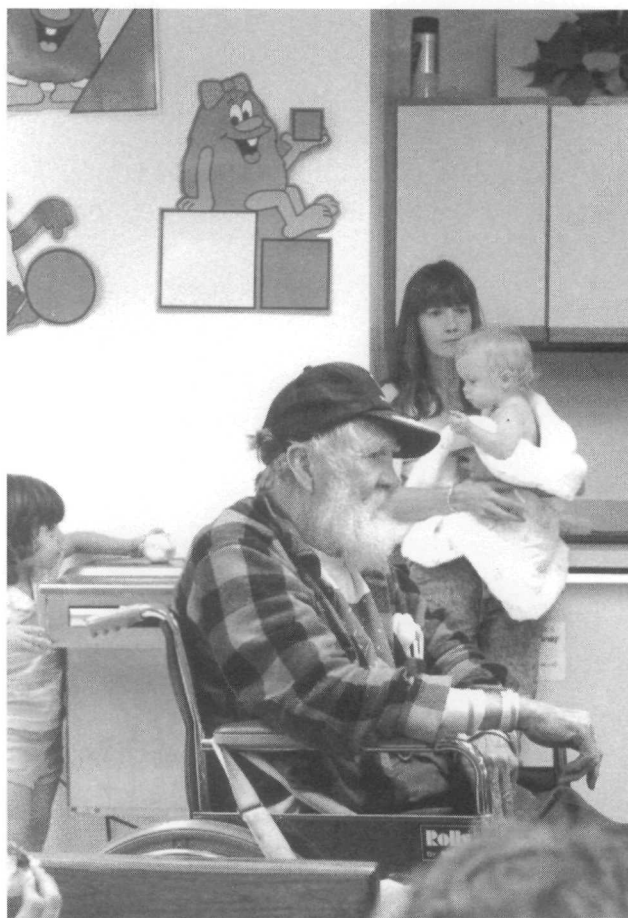
For two-and-a-half months wheelchair-bound Steve Powell slept on a cot alongside hundreds of homeless men in the downtown Salt Lake City shelter. On the other side of the warehouse-size room slept Jim Hunt.

Both saw signs tacked on the shelter walls: "Do you want to spend a weekend listening to music? If so, call this number to attend *Credo*."

Independently, each responded. That fall weekend Powell found himself carried up inaccessible steps by groups of strangers. They created a pallet from concrete blocks and wood so he could easily slip off his wheelchair onto a waist-high sleeping platform. In two days, both men found friends and began their first steps out of the homeless shelter.

Credo is a weekend of community-building, spiritual discovery,

and self-renewal. Using contemporary music as a springboard for discussion, people of varied backgrounds, known by first name only, develop relationships that resemble a healthy family.



credit: Jeffrey Turner, 9

Credo is "acquainting people with the reality of the love of God through people," said Donald Harris, an Episcopal priest and director of *Credo Institute* in Williamsburg, Va.

As a U.S. Navy chaplain, Harris developed the "people to people" program in 1971 to help young drug and alcohol abusing sailors construct a value system and find direction in life in the chaos of the Vietnam era. Now a well-established Navy chaplaincy program, *Credo* has branched out to help others deal with issues of alienation, displacement, loneliness and spiritual hunger.

Students at the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va., explore issues at *Credo* weekends. In April, *Credo* will be used as a spiritual component of a nationwide health care program for "burned out" executives. This winter Grace Cathedral, San Francisco is exploring ways *Credo* can help that city's destitute. Last spring *Credo* launched a pilot program to the homeless in Utah.

Peter Chase, vicar of a church in Bountiful, Utah, suggested to Harris the idea of offering the program to homeless people.

"As good a program as a shelter or food pantry is, it's only a part of the solution," Chase said. "People need a sense of empowerment and self-worth. The *Credo* weekend is a time to capture that sense of dignity.

"Music is a powerful medium," he said. "People listen and say, 'Gee, I really relate'— whether it's a motherless child, a dysfunctional adult, a pregnant mom in poverty. It breaks barriers, inhibitions, and you talk about things you wouldn't usually talk about, because you hear performers talk about it in the lyrics. It generates a common denominator."

"Music enables inarticulate people to articulate," Harris said. "It goes underneath and touches emotions and memories and enables people to talk and be in touch with that experience."

Sarah Moore is editor of the *Diocesan Dialogue*, Utah's diocesan paper. Photographer Jeffrey Turner, 9, is a participant in *Shooting Back* (see page 14) and took this photo at a shelter in Reston, VA.

Opening with messages of interior pain and despair, the weekend begins with music like Leonard Cohen's *Bird on a Wire*, Janis Joplin's *Ball and Chain*, Kris Kristofferson's *Sunday Morning*, and John Lennon's *Nobody Loves You*.

Saturday morning tunes include *Captain Jack* by Billy Joel and *Eleanor Rigby*. By afternoon, selections by the Doors, Harry Chapin, Judy Collins and the Beatles evoke discussions on interpersonal pain. By nightfall social pain is addressed through songs by Simon and Garfunkel, Tracy Chapman and Cohen.

Sunday includes a meditative walk, a eucharist, and music by George Harrison, Bob Dylan, and Jefferson Airplane. By afternoon, the group turns to James Taylor's *You've Got a Friend* and *Bridge Over Troubled Waters* sung by Willie Nelson. Closing is a celebrative atmosphere, with music such as *Circle Be Unbroken* by Joan Baez and *All You Need is Love* by the Beatles.

"It's not a concert," said Chase. "It's very painful and first creates a mood of alienation and anger. But as the weekend progresses the music unravels alienation, despair and unkindness to others and people realize there is a common humanity."

The first Salt Lake City weekend drew a small response from homeless people, but brought together a lawyer, a student, an accountant, an inventor, a sculptor, a day-care director, a psychologist, three priests and a banker. This group helped plan a second weekend in October, which drew 15 people, among them Powell and Hunt.

"Credo weekend provides two principle elements of Christian practice," Carole Merrill, an actress and food bank coordinator who participates in *Credo*, said. "Table and music. You eat together at table and listen to songs, like psalms in church."

"I really believe the Holy Spirit is the ultimate group leader of *Credo*," said Merrill. "You wouldn't sit down and choose those [people] with extreme educational backgrounds unless the Spirit entered in and there was a willingness of people who come from the establishment to be real, honest and repentant."

Powell, paralyzed from the waist down eight years ago from a roll-over car accident during a ski trip in Utah's canyons, found that *Credo* helped him gain focus on life. In the Salt Lake City men's shelter while searching for affordable wheelchair accessible housing,

Powell had been divorced, admitted to four nursing homes over 18 months, maintained little contact with his family in New York and felt abandoned.

"I had a goal while I was at the shelter," Powell stressed. "I wanted to find a place to live. But I made 600 calls and went to 400 places and couldn't find anything."

Hunt, a former professional wallpa-

perer and tile layer, had been through a divorce, lost a job, and moved from Maine to Florida to Las Vegas to Utah. He sought out Salt Lake because of suggestions from a person he'd admired from the Mormon Church.

After *Credo*, Hunt and Powell joined forces to move out of the homeless shelter and find an apartment. Hunt has a job at a local department store and is returning to commu-

nity college in January to study radiology. Powell moved his furniture out of storage where it had been for two-and-a-half years. Having worked in medical support in Vietnam, he hopes to certify as a nurse/anesthetist. Both men will help put on the third *Credo* for homeless people in mid-January.

"It amazes me," said Hunt with calm assurance. "*Credo* works." **TW**

Music enables inarticulate people to articulate. It goes underneath and touches emotions and memories and enables people to talk and be in touch with that experience.

— Donald Harris

Credo is not a concert. It's very painful and first creates a mood of alienation and anger. It breaks down barriers and you talk about things you wouldn't usually talk about.

— Peter Chase



Utah's shelter Benefit

The Diocese of Utah recently sponsored an art show to benefit homeless shelters. Some of the art exhibited was created by homeless artists. (See Witness profile on page 26.)

by Edward Lifson

In recent years, public libraries have often become unofficial shelters for the homeless, sometimes to the chagrin of library staff and readers. But in Chicago, one librarian began offering coffee and cake to the homeless who found refuge among the books. Then she issued them library cards, accepting their shelters as home addresses. For Thanksgiving, the Chicago Public Library main branch provided a forum for the voices of a previously unacknowledged source of new literature.

Authors belong in the public library," Ingrid Leslie of the Chicago Public Library, says. "Regardless of your condition, of how you are living, with a home or without a home, your work as an author belongs in the library and the library is that venue for you to read that which you write."

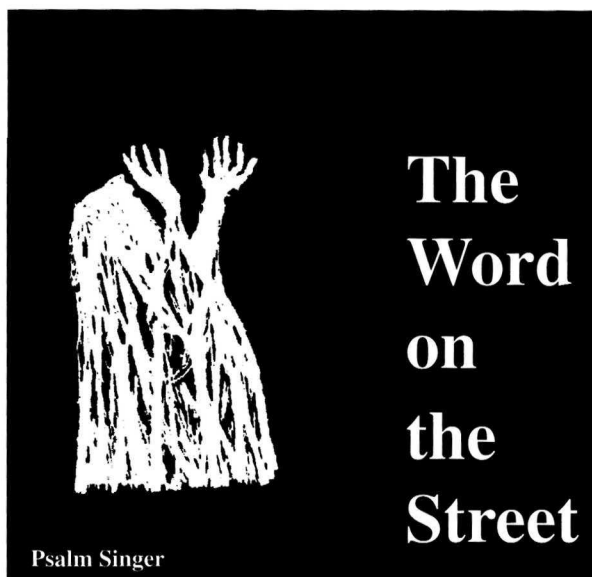
Eileen Winters, who is homeless, offered this poem, called Hickory Street:

*Oh I'd like to live on Hickory Street,
where the end of the rainbow and the garbage meet.
I'd love to live where necessities are free,
dumped in mountainous piles, conveniently.
I'd like to live just a dream away
from the heart of Chicago at the break of day.*

Jackie Townsend, a homeless poet, talks easily about her days with boyfriend and poet, Dino. They lived for a year on the streets of Los Angeles, sleeping in cardboard boxes.

"We'd be in the box and he'd say, 'Jackie, don't throw the box away, because I've got a poem on it.' You know, he'd even scratched out a poem on the box. I'd have to be careful to get the poem off of there and then when we'd get some paper . . . then the typewriter came."

The old Royal manual typewriter ended up in a shopping cart, being shared with other



Psalm Singer

The Word on the Street

homeless writers whom Townsend and Dino tried to convince to share their voices.

"An artist has the edge over most homeless people because they have somebody to appreciate their work," Townsend said. "They get this wind back in their sails that's been taken away for a long time and it's hard to take this away from them, you know. Once they, they get on a roll and people start appreciating their art work, whether they're visual artists or they're poets or writers or even actors, it starts a new person out of them. They want to do more."

Dino, who is now a member of the prestigious writer's organization PEN, Poets, Essayists and Novelists wrote the following poem for Townsend when they got their first hotel room:

*We've come a long way through the pain and the stress,
heartaches, loneliness, sadness and all that other mess.
Yet we walked hand in hand, caring all the way,
understanding and trusting and loving more each day.
I lived a fast life and thought I knew all about love,
but this time I found an angel straight from heaven above.
God had to have sent her. She couldn't have come on her own,
for I'm a man of the world and I mostly walk alone.
But now there's two of us sharing a life meant for one.
Loving, caring and sharing, and making life lots of fun.
Tomorrow's not promised to me, so today is as precious as gold,
for this night I know in my arms an angel I will hold.*

Joe Galler, a counselor for homeless people, who spent time

in prison for grand theft and once slept on the streets of Nashville, TN, suggests that homelessness may intensify poetry.

"Being in that environment created certain emotions which allowed me to pen some of this stuff, you know. Depressions, loneliness and the feeling of

being lost, rejected, angry. It brought to the surface a lot of emotions which probably, if you have a normal life, aren't as intense. I'm sure there's a lot of shoeboxes in different places filled with poetry."

"An artist has the edge over most homeless people because they have somebody to appreciate their work. They get this wind in their sails that's been taken away for a long time."

— Jackie Townsend

This article was adapted from a National Public Radio report from Chicago. Artist **Robert Hodgell** lives in Bradenton, FL.

TW

Vigil for the Environment

Episcopal women's groups are planning a nationwide prayer vigil to coincide with a United Nations committee session which will decide the UN agenda on the environment. The UN committee will meet from March 3 to April 5 in preparation for the UNCED conference to be held in Rio de Janeiro this June.

The vigil will begin on March 8, International Women's Day. Its intent is to pray for the inclusion of the issues raised in the Women's Agenda which emerged from the World Women's Congress for a Healthy Planet, held in Miami last November. The women's agenda addresses issues of women's empowerment, debt and trade, land rights and food security, biotechnology, militarism, consumer ethics, reproductive freedom, and worldwide commitment to respect and care for the environment.

Different organizations have agreed to sponsor each week of the vigil, and to invite local congregations to participate.

Gulf War C.O.'s Face Racism

"[The Pentagon's policy on conscientious objection is] rife with bias, racism and violation of due process . . . Perhaps the most eloquent testimony comes from Tahan Jones, a 21-year-old Marine reservist from Oakland now awaiting trial at Camp Lejeune for refusing Persian Gulf orders while his C.O. application was pending. As a African-American with little formal education, Jones came up on the short end of the C.O. application process. Like all C.O. applicants, Jones was assigned an investigating officer: a superior from the same military base. After a single interview Jones's investigating officer, who was white, concluded that Jones was 'of marginal intelligence . . . incapable of articulating any discerning thoughts or perceptions concerning such subjective matters as conscientious objection to war.' Experiences like those of Jones — the presumption that legitimate C.O.s are, as

he says, "white and well-to-do, educated and intellectual" — are common among imprisoned Gulf War resisters. Indeed, much of the political significance of Gulf War objectors resides in their ethnic and class identities. Many, like Jones, are African-Americans. A startling number of the most visible and outspoken objectors, including [Erik] Larsen, [Yolanda] Huet-Vaughn and Sam Lwin . . . are either immigrants or have immigrant parents, from nations like El Salvador, Burma and Poland. For them, the Gulf War evoked historical, family or cultural resonances easily ignored by more insular Americans."

Bruce Shapiro
The Nation, 1/20/92

Boycott Continues

Neighbor to Neighbor, the San Francisco-based peace group which called for the boycott of coffee containing Salvadoran beans, notes that even as negotiators in New York reached an agreement on a cease-fire in El Salvador's civil war, there were signs that many forces within the Central American nation have not yet resigned themselves to peace. El Salvador's National Council of Churches, a strong supporter of the peace process, said an Episcopalian priest captured on January 3 by the National Guard had been pressured by interrogators to implicate the Council's leadership in "subversive" activities. On January 6, the National Council of Churches again came under fire when the "Secret Army of National Salvation," a right-wing death squad, released a letter "condemning to death members of the board of directors of the National Council of Churches."

Neighbor to Neighbor asks Americans to continue the coffee boycott.

In These Times
1/15-21/92

Episcopalians United

Todd Wetzel, priest and publisher of the magazine for *Episcopalians United*, finds hope in the financial problems of the

National Church and commends financial boycotts: "The national church offices now feel pressure as numerous dioceses begin to cut back their support. As that pressure increases, it will have a dramatic effect."

In a ten point plan, he says: "Withhold from your parish the percentage of your financial support sent to the national church office through the diocese. This is an issue of conscience that you should pursue only after seeking God's will through prayer.

"Hold the funds in escrow to show you are not decreasing your giving to the Lord's work. Notify the parish that you will contribute the money as circumstances in the church change."

United Voice
November, 1991

Short takes

Sound Familiar?

In an article titled "Freedom of Speech in the Household of Faith," J. Frederick Voros, Jr. laments a trend toward monolithic thinking in the Mormon Church. "Unfortunately, in Mormonism there seems to have emerged a false dichotomy: there are loyal members, who avoid difficult issues and express only praise of the Church, and there are its enemies." In support of open thinking and debate, Veros points out that Jesus "sat daily teaching in the temple (Matthew 26:55). And as he sat there, he fielded subtle, difficult, even insincere questions. And while the hypocrisy of critics angered him, he never intimated that they should not question or even argue with him. He answered all, and sometimes thunderously."

Sunstone
October, 1991

Theater and homelessness

by Nichole M. Christian

That's not right," Gregory "Robo" Jackson says as he paces up and down the aisles of Detroit's Cass

United Methodist Church, in his tattered sweatshirt, army fatigues and white tube socks. His steps are quick; his eyes are intense.

Only two hours remain before people will file into the church for the premiere of *Dreamlight*, a mime drama about the homeless. Jackson is the lighting and audio technician and he knows that if he fails, so does *Dreamlight*. So he checks the speakers one last time and calls to his assistant to cue the music.

"Perfect," he says as a blast of music shoots out of one of three speakers surrounding the sanctuary. Jackson isn't a trained light or sound expert. "It's just something I learned in high school."

Jackson may not be one of the 15 characters in the 50-minute play, but he knows the story by heart. It is the story of his life, he says. Jackson has been homeless since last summer, when he lost his General Assistance welfare benefits. At least 90,000 Michigan residents have lost similar benefits since Governor John Engler abolished the program in Michigan last fall.

Nichole Christian is a Wayne State University student and intern at *Newsweek*. Photographer **Greg Reynolds** lives in Ann Arbor, MI

While *Dreamlight* juxtaposes the nation's homeless epidemic with the story of Mary and Joseph, and the difficulty they faced trying to secure housing, author

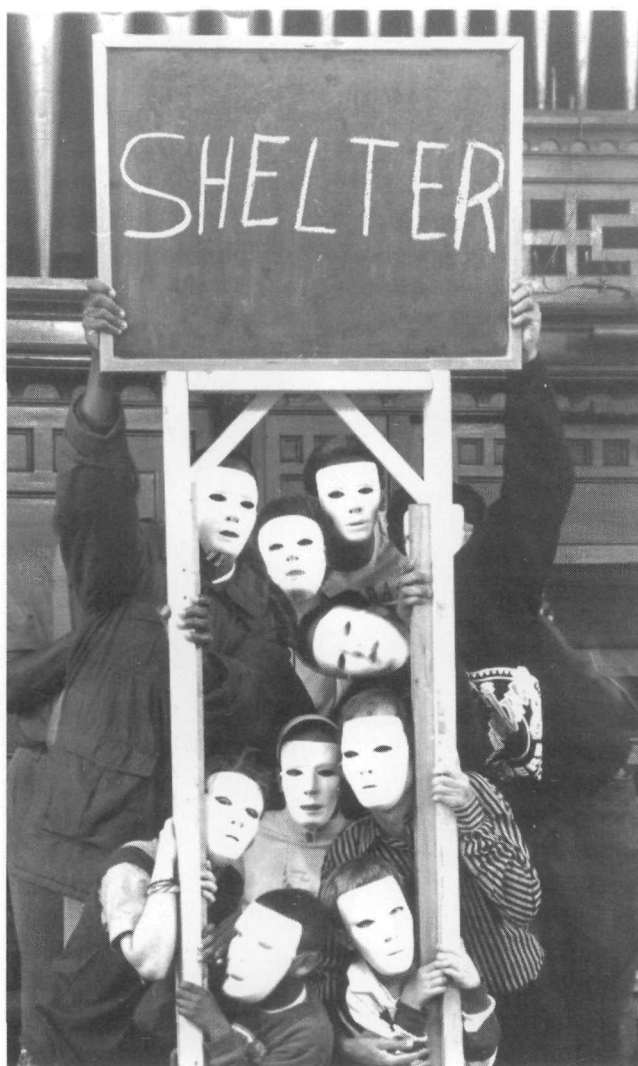
and director Michael Lee says his play doesn't just compare stories, but also questions whether things are any different than they were 2,000 years ago. "There is a question of faith in both instances. The things that are happening to people are forcing us to ask if there is a God and why so many people are suffering."

Jackson agrees. "Mary and Joseph's situation wasn't that different from what I go through."

When a homeless character saunters up the aisle collecting pop cans and half-smoked cigarettes, Jackson says he sees a part of himself. When two beggars search for food and money, again Jackson sees himself. And when Mary and Joseph can no longer afford to pay their rent and are forced from their home into a stable, Jackson says that feeling is all too familiar. Except his stable is a modern-day shelter, or any other place he can find on the streets of Detroit.

"Dogs are living better than humans these days," says Jackson, a 40-year-old Vietnam veteran. "People think that just because the city offers shelters that things aren't so bad for us. They're wrong. Those shelters are set up like farms. At 7 a.m. they kick you out until 7 p.m. That's just like sending a bunch of cows out to pasture. Even a chicken has its own coop. He can come in and go out whenever he wants."

Lee, a professional mime who studied under Marcel Marceau, first created and produced *Dreamlight* last year with a church youth group in Allen Park, MI. This year, he recruited his cast and crew from the warming center and tent city near Cass Church. Besides Jackson, four



The cast of *Dreamlight*, a drama that re-creates the nativity.
credit: Greg Reynolds

other homeless persons are currently involved with the play. The rest of the cast consists of parishioners with homes. Some have dropped out and others have joined in. Lee double-cast some roles to avoid disaster.

Working with homeless people is “a lot less predictable,” Lee acknowledged. “Just getting people to rehearsals was tough — rehearsals are not the top priority in a homeless person’s life.”

But the struggles were worth it, he said. “The natural abilities in people were incredible. I was doing more coaching than teaching.”

Cast member Marcus Johnson thought he understood the plight of the homeless. He had seen their faces splattered across the pages of newspapers and he heard their tales of despair on the evening news.

But still, he says, “I thought it was their fault. I thought most of them were using drugs or lazy. I couldn’t feel sorry for them.”

When Lee asked him to portray a beggar, to dress in ragged clothes, to act as if he were eating a discarded piece of bread, Johnson says, “I got a chance to feel what it’s like. I really tried to get into it, so that I could know the feeling. The play gives people who don’t have to be homeless a chance to see that they’re human.”

Johnson is not alone. Lee, who lives about 40 minutes outside of Detroit in Ann Arbor, says he also has had to change his mind about a few things. He credits Jackson. “There is a misconception that homeless people are retarded or ignorant. I shared it,” says the 30-year-old. “I was really impressed with the way Robo thinks things through. I’m not sure why I bought into the misconception.”

The play can be educational for both audience and participants, Lee says. “We want to raise consciousness. We want to reach people from the suburbs who don’t think very much about the issue.”

Lee says three more performances of



The angel Gabriel (an Ann Arbor mime) offers the gift of light to Joseph (Dennis Davis, a homeless Detroit) and to Mary (Evelyn Gray) in a dream.

credit: Greg Reynolds

Dreamlight are scheduled in local suburbs, and a tentative fourth in Chicago this spring.

Cast member Dennis Davis says he’s praying that the show will go on. “It’s a lot more fun playing like I’m homeless than it is being out there,” says Davis, who portrays Joseph and is homeless himself.

Jackson continues to pace the floor. This time he is offering to make last minute adjustments to the props. “Everything is fine,” Lee responds. Jackson

goes back to his makeshift command post.

“This play is a work of art; it’s going to make a difference,” Jackson says of the play. Originally, he said, “I was committed to it because I’m committed to God. I

didn’t care if no one showed up to see it. Then I realized that I can touch people through this play and if I touch just one person, that person will touch another and the truth about what’s really going on out there will begin to spread.” **TW**

This play is a work of art; it’s going to make a difference. If I touch just one person, that person will touch another and the truth about what’s really going on out there will begin to spread. — Gregory Jackson



Man and woman in room, Carpenter's Shelter, Alexandria, VA credit: Marvin Edwards, II.



Shooting back

by Jim Hubbard

In the early 1980s, while a staff photographer at UPI in Washington, D.C., I began documenting the life of the homeless. After a few years, I focused on homeless families. Increasing numbers were forced to live in cars, parks and hotels and motels for temporary shelter, and among these shelters was the Capitol City Inn, a Washington welfare motel and hell-hole in the power center of the world. Whenever I took pictures of families there, the children wanted to hold and look through my camera.

Many of my visits to the motel included Dion Johnson's family. In their room, I was struck by the drawings and colorings and other art forms that had been created by the four Johnson children and hung by their mother, Vanessa. Besides the bright spirit coming from within each child, the art was the brightest light in the room.

On one particular afternoon, as I sat with Dion and his mother, he showed me some snapshots he had taken of his family and friends. I offered Dion an opportunity to take pictures and learn more about photography. He accepted and his powerful smile stretched from ear to ear.

Once the idea was born, Dion and I spent several hours each week strolling through the shelter, working to discover and train this child's creative side. As Dion and I walked around looking for pictures, several hundred others who lived at the Capitol City Inn ran up and asked to take pictures with the big professional camera Dion was holding.

Dion and I looked at each other as the little hands grabbed for the camera and knew we needed help. The next week I started a campaign of recruiting staff and freelance photographers.

Jim Hubbard created the *Shooting Back* project. This article is adapted from text in *Shooting Back*, Chronicle Books, San Francisco, 1991. Photographers **Marvin Edwards, Chris Heflin, Calvin Stewart, and Charlene Williams** work with *Shooting Back*.

My favorite picture that I took: that's me and my brother and my sister with a pigeon. My brother had found a pigeon, and the pigeon had been shot in the wing. My brother was trying to fix it, so I just told my brother to look at it, and I just put the timer on, focused it and I ran over there to get into the picture. I want to be a photographer. Comment to Charlene from a schoolchild: I saw your picture. I saw it from across the room and I felt drawn to it. The girl on the left, her teeth show, like she understood the pain in that instant, experienced it for the bird.



Bird, Washington, D.C.

— Charlene Williams, 11

When I go back into the shelters, you know, I understand what they're feeling. I don't talk to them a lot about the environment because I know it's a low-life situation. They become your friends, so they open up to you more if you talk to them with the sense, like, I've been there before.



Fred, General Scott Hotel, Washington, D.C.

— Calvin Stewart, 17

Shelter life is a journey into despair. It is life on the edge. Many of the shelters I visited were the scenes of round-the-clock violence, drug dealing, abuse and cases of parental neglect, and widespread chaos. They were places not fit for a child. At the Capitol City Inn these horrors to children occurred on a regular basis. This dingy and dilapidated two-story former tourist motel, situated on a major six-lane road, became home for nearly 700 children and their parents. Between 1987 and 1989, five children died there. Two were stabbed to death by their over-burdened father. One was hit by a train behind the shelter while playing the shelter children's favorite game of tag with the train. There wasn't even a playground for these children except on worn-out mattresses that they pulled from the trash. Another child died from a mysterious illness, and yet another burned to death when the mother left the room to find food.

These children were hungry for attention and someone who would help channel their powerful and creative energy. Even though they reside in the U.S., these children had the same look of abandonment in their eyes that we have seen in the Romanian orphans and starving children in Asia and Africa.

Part of the intent in working with the children was to convey to them that they are important, as important as my own children.

There were few rules in this photographic project. The idea was simple: the children would document their world inside the shelter or within one block of the shelter. They used the professional camera after a photographer taught them the basic use of it.

The pictures are as diverse as the children who took them. They are both simple and elegant; they are honest beyond imagination. They capture moments impossible for an outsider to have ever perceived or experienced.



Playing by the tracks, Alexandria, VA

— Chris Heflin, 9

This is the kids on the train tracks, jumping. They are at the shelter. The best part of the shelter is the train track.

We learned firsthand not only of the violence the children must cope with but the enormous strengths used to keep families together under some of the most adverse conditions possible.

The title of the project came from the lips of a nine-year-old boy who, while holding a camera almost as big as himself, said, "We're shooting back." This young prophet made the remark while walking past used syringes along the curb

in a neighborhood where shootings are a regular occurrence. I told him he was a genius and he had given us our name.

In 1989, the nonprofit Shooting Back Education and Media Center was established in Washington, D.C. The first media center within a shelter was created at The Carpenter's Shelter in Alexandria, VA. Jim Hubbard is now in Minnesota, beginning the same work among the homeless in the Midwest.

TW

The **WITNESS**

CHICAGO, ILL., SEPTEMBER 24, 1931



THE MACHINE AGE
Can the Church Meet the Challenge?

In the early 1920s *The Witness* changed to an 8 x 11" magazine format. This 1931 issue, titled "The Church And The Present Crisis," was dedicated to the economy and the Church League for Industrial Democracy.

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Choose Your God

By

PROFESSOR F. WARD

Professor at Union Seminary

IF WE are to get to the root of our difficulties, and remove the inequality which is the underlying cause of the business cycle we must adopt a method and plan for distributing national income according to the needs of human beings and the need for a continuing economic order. This means that we have not only to build up at the bottom, but also to cut down at the top. It is the unwillingness to face this necessity which is leading us into all the partial plans which are being proposed for the prevention of unemployment. There is no way out until we deflate the fictitious claims on income, which are in reality claims on the lives of others, that are now concentrated in this country in the hands of a few people. We must lower the income of those at the top, and raise the income of those at the bottom. That is the only way to the permanent prevention of our present situation.

But, as religious people, we have a bigger job ahead of us than that. By now we should be well aware of the nature of that god behind our commercial machine, the god whom the poor worker could not understand, a god terribly cruel and altogether false, yet a god who is more worshipped and obeyed in the work and life of the American people, than is the God of their churches and synagogues. The name of that god is Mammon. He has no redeeming quality. He does not require from his worshippers the generosity, the courage, the sacrifice which are at least the redeeming feature of the cult of Mars. It is time now to turn our worship to a God who will not let us throw workers aside, whether technicians or daily laborers, because they cannot keep pace with the belt, a God who will not dwell with any people unless they continually work out justice and righteousness, as well as intelligence. He is the God we must set up. But to set Him up, we must kill this false god who is leading us to destruction. Kill him with the weapons of facts; kill him by analyzing situations and exploding the false beliefs that otherwise will sustain

his power, long after the time when he should have been destroyed; kill him you must if you hope to find a way out of this situation.

A Lesson In Economics

By

UPTON SINCLAIR

THERE is nothing about the world we live in so important for us to understand clearly as the secret of the kink in the capitalistic system, which throws people out of jobs and makes unemployment and hard times. It is the cause of poverty; it is the cause of crime; it is the cause of competition for foreign markets, and therefore of armaments, and therefore of war — and if there is anything more horrible than modern war as we saw it some twelve years ago, I don't know what can be. . . .

We have today in America every means and opportunity for the production of plenty and comfort for every person in the country who is willing to work. . . . Only one thing is needed, and that is that we should break the profit system, that we should change our system of production for the benefit of private individuals into a system of production for use and for the common welfare of all. That is the program which lies before the American people at the present day. There is no other program because there is no possible thing that you can do with the machines. You can either keep them for profit and let the great masses of the workers starve, or else you can take them and use them for the benefit of all.

This system of producing the world's goods for private profit cannot continue indefinitely. The crises become more severe, and the only reason why they don't become completely unendurable is because of the fact that in between we have wars. It must be made as plain as possible that the peoples' salvation, their peace, their happiness, their chance in life depend upon understanding the system under which we live and acting in concert, politically, industrially and through educational channels to change from a senseless, dog-eat-dog scramble for private gain into planned production for the social good.

Issues of changing neighborhoods, skyrocketing rents and the subsequent increase in homelessness are ones that are of special concern to many artists — especially those in urban areas like New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, where it has become almost impossible to walk down a street without having to maneuver around someone sleeping on a steam grate or huddled in a cardboard box. In addition, as neighborhoods like NYC's SoHo and East Village show, artists often wind up as pawns in the gentrification game. The scenario goes like this: soon after the artists move into a neighborhood they can afford, art galleries and trendy boutiques follow. Local bodegas close. Apartments go condo. Long-term residents find themselves with no place to go. And the artists move on, searching for another affordable area.

During the last ten years, many artists have been struggling to use their visual skills to put a face on homelessness. Some have become involved with community groups like the “Not For Sale” poster project in 1984; some have organized exhibits around the topic such as the Detroit Institute of Arts Art Foundation's show in 1989; some have designed posters for New York's Coalition for the Homeless (Peter Cohen's image of Jesus appeared on one with the text “How can you worship a homeless man on Sunday and ignore one on Monday?”); and a few, like LA performance artist John Malpede and NYC painter Annie Q., have worked directly with the homeless — making art in a collaborative process.

Still others have felt the need to put their messages out loudly and clearly, and to the broadest audience possible, by using venues usually dedicated to commercial advertising. In 1988, artist Sandy Straus created considerable controversy with a New York City billboard depicting the city's most notorious “street person,”

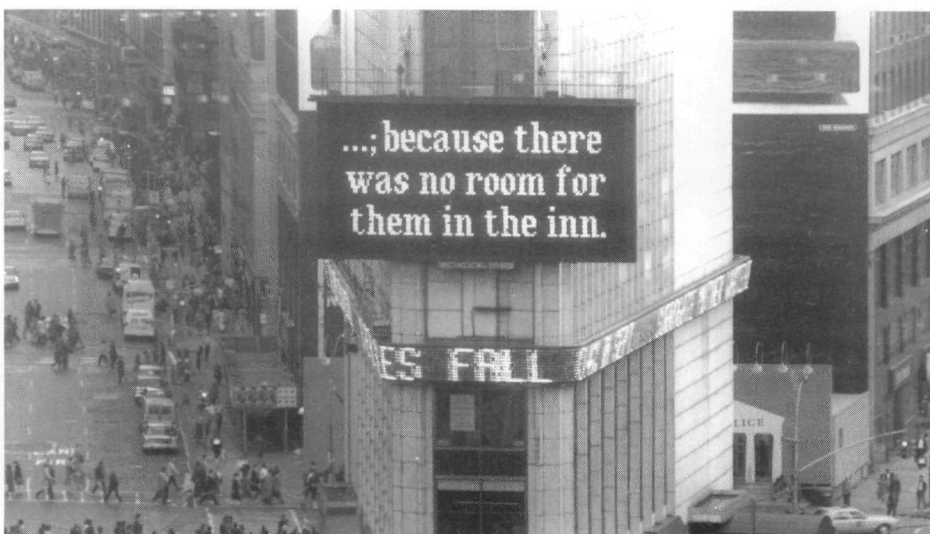
‘Messages to the public’

by Blaise Tobia and Virginia Maksymowicz



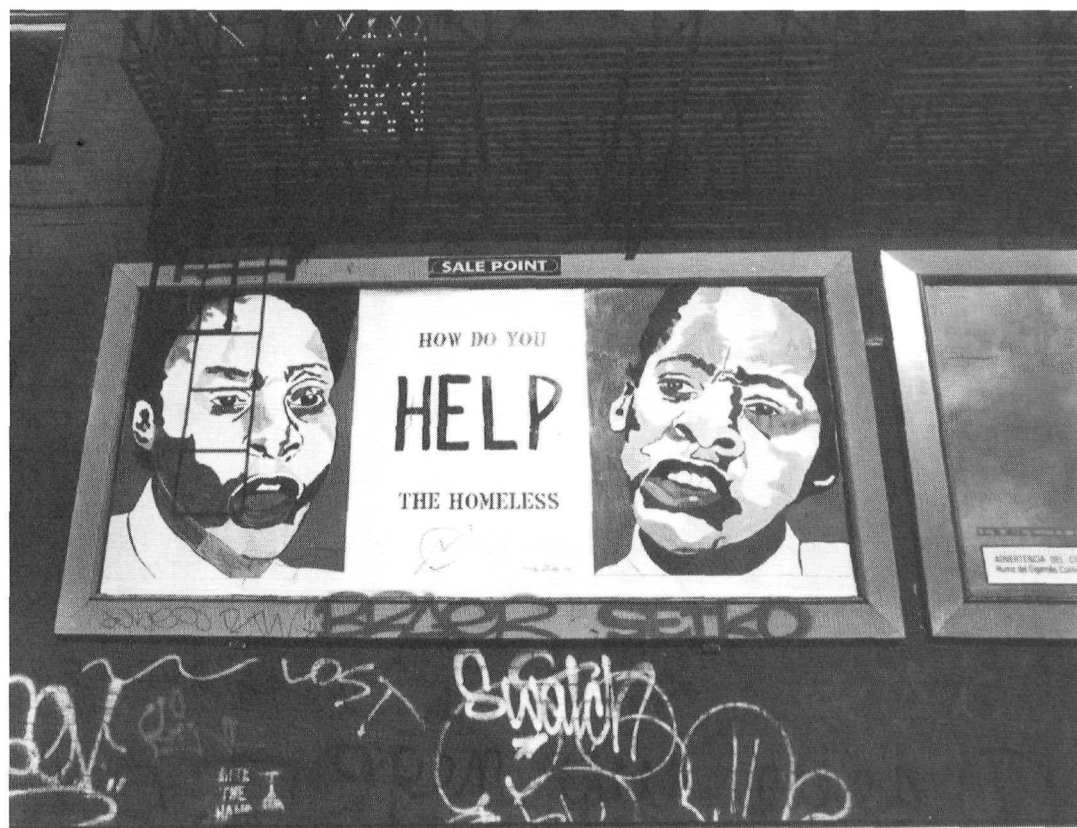
Anton Van Dalen's ‘Message to the Public’ in Times Square. Sponsored by the Public Art Fund.

Photo: Jenifer Dobbins-Seacor



Billie Boggs, pictured here,
tried to reject social services.
Billboard by Sandy Strauss.

photo: Blaise Tobia

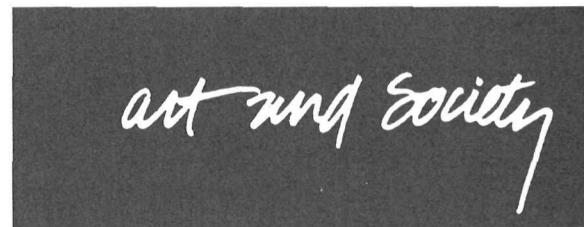


Billie Boggs (a woman who fought for the right *not* to be helped by social service agencies). In asking “How do you help the homeless?” the billboard combined a direct challenge to action with despair at the seeming hopelessness of the problem, and alluded to the very real complexities inherent in helping others without destroying their dignity and self-determination.

Perhaps one of the largest audiences ever made available to artists came through the Public Art Fund’s decade-long project, “Messages to the Public,” wherein visual artists were given time on the giant Spectacolor lightboard in New York City’s Times Square. Each month a different artist produced a 30-second sequential message (animated, in color and sandwiched among standard commercials) that was broadcast 50 times a day and viewed daily by an estimated 1.5

million people. Those people included prosperous businessmen, panhandlers, tourists, prostitutes, runaway children (Covenant House is around the corner), drug dealers, working people, newly arrived immigrants and the homeless — pretty much a full cross-section of urban society. In September of 1988, photographer Anne Turyn’s message asked, “What if everyone had a home?” Martha Rosler’s 1989 sequence of images showed deteriorating public housing and dollar signs, and drew connections between federal budget cuts and real estate speculation. She concluded with the statement, “Housing is a Human Right.” And Anton van Dalen’s lightboard showed a figure huddled on the ground with the Biblical reference, “...; because there was no room for them in the inn.”

Has any of these heartfelt artworks made a difference for the homeless them-



selves? Quite possibly not. In fact, the Spectacolor lightboard is gone, and homelessness seems to grow at a rate beyond our capacity to imagine. But artists have not accepted homelessness as an excuse for inaction, and have recognized that, in making political statements through their art, they must reach out beyond the limitations of the traditional artwork and the traditional exhibition venue. Where they may succeed is in keeping our imaginations from becoming paralyzed by inertia, not allowing us to become blind to homelessness and deaf to the cry for basic human dignity.

...The liberating magic of all serious tales... was a social one, for they sought to celebrate humankind's capacity to transform the mundane into the utopian... The magic in the tales (if magic is what it is) lies in people... being shown what they are really and realistically capable of accomplishing.

Jack Zipes, *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales*

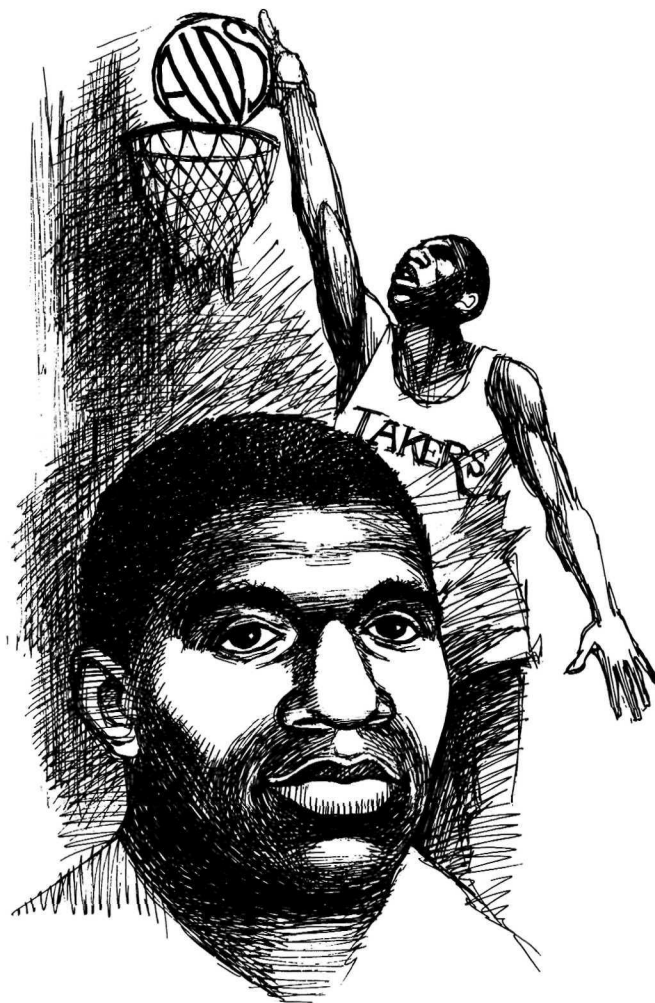
On November 7 Earvin "Magic" Johnson announced, with indisputable courage and grace, that he had tested HIV- positive and was retiring immediately from professional basketball. This painful and surprising twist in the life of such a celebrated and intensely marketed public *persona* presents us with a "text" that is truly difficult to interpret. I say "us," and not just Magic's family and friends, because in the popular culture of modernity — whether or not one thinks it fair— the life-texts of most visible, famous people are in fact matters of civic discourse. And in the flurry of commentaries since Magic's announcement the pundits have clearly been trying to figure out whether this is a text of— in the classical sense— *tragedy* or *comedy*.

In the glitzy, highly-fabulated world of big-time sports the news was received as unprecedented *tragedy*. This terrible shock, this rude awakening, embodied the literal meaning of the term *dis-aster*: a "reversal of the stars." "The Day the Magic Stopped" blared banner headlines in the next day's *Los Angeles Times*. Magic's basketball colleagues and other sports luminaries wept on national television. They even had a moment of silence in *Boston Gardens*!

This dramatic departure must of course be understood as an irreplaceable loss to basketball. But Magic himself has refused to play the victim. On the contrary: from the outset he signalled his intent to turn this into a *comic* script, in which the fallen hero redeems himself and the city.

"Do not cry for me," he said; "I'm going to beat this thing." An overly optimistic prognosis, drawn perhaps too hastily from his competitive worldview? Perhaps; yet what he meant is that the AIDS epidemic itself stands to lose more than Magic the man by this turn of events. This is because he intends to commit himself, as well as his formidable marketing apparati, to the educational fight against the disease. As he put it in *Sports Illustrated*'s "authorized version" of recent events, no matter what people think of him, if they are "getting tested and changing their life-styles and practicing safe sex, I'll win anyway."

Ched Myers is West Coast program director for AFSC and author of *Binding the Strong Man*, Orbis Press. Artist **Eleanor Mill** is syndicated from Hartford, CT.



Magic Johnson

credit: Eleanor Mill

Magic and fairy tales

by Ched Myers

That Magic's vow is genuine appears to be confirmed by his initial moves. It may well be that his decision to accept Bush's invitation to join the National Commission on AIDS will serve only to blunt his voice, as Randy Shilts warned in a concluding editorial in the same issue of *Sports Illustrated*. Too, the wisdom of his setting up yet another AIDS foundation could be questioned. But Magic has no history of venturing into controversial politics. He will soon enough learn how different that world is

from the rarefied atmosphere of big-time sports.

Whether or not Magic will become a major force in the long-term struggle around the political epidemiology of AIDS obviously remains to be seen. But as a major cultural figure — whose reach is truly international, as the massive response from Spain to Brazil indicates — he has *already* had an extraordinary impact on AIDS consciousness. Thus to *whatever* degree he lends his voice to educational efforts this fallen hero will surely earn a real measure of redemption.

For those who have long been part of the lonely personal and political struggle against AIDS, meanwhile, Magic's text is neither tragic nor comic — just full of bitter irony. There has been predictable, and not unjustified, resentment of this highrolling jock, heretofore blissfully ignorant (by his own admission) of the epidemic, suddenly becoming a celebrity for the cause.

In an *LA Times* editorial shortly after Magic's announcement, for example, Latino culture critic Richard Rodriguez angrily reminded us that thousands of AIDS victims have faced their fate with equal or greater courage and grace — *without* the benefits of spotlights and public lionizing, indeed often alone and abandoned by all but their similarly-stricken lovers. This is a point surely worth making. Most of us can doubtless think of more compelling "witnesses to the passion" of AIDS than Magic Johnson. A local southern California hero, Father Luis Olivares, who opened up the *placita* at Our Lady Queen of Angels to thousands of Central American refugees and became their public champion, comes immediately to mind. But I'm not sure comparison is the point.

Most critics do not begrudge the exposure given Magic's case, recognizing that the fight against AIDS needs all the help it can get. Rather, their indignation has focused on the fact that it *took someone famous to force the issue onto the public agenda*.

Such anger is understandable; yet why should we expect anything different from contemporary U.S. media culture? This is after all the same journalistic community that became a mouthpiece for the inane politics that brought us the Desert Storm show. The star-system is a legitimate target for criticism, but an easy one.

More annoying are the moralist critics. Take the well-publicized objections of *NY Times* sports writer Dave Anderson, one of the early dissenting opinions, who argued that Magic should be seen as a hedonist, not a hero:

"Say a prayer for him. But since his disclosure a week ago, too many people sound as if they're praying to him. He's not St. Magic of Sunset Boulevard, he's Earvin Johnson of the Fast Lane who finally got caught for speeding."

Well, sure. I'm all for devaluing the inflated currency of the celebrity economy. But would that we could be spared the sermons of sports columnists and vice-presidents. I prefer the much harder lesson in ethical exhortation we find in the Gospel of John 8:1-11.

Whatever the "politically correct" interpretation of Magic's

text, my own vision is surely skewed. I am one of the many who genuinely enjoyed watching the man at his craft. Worse: I'm a diehard Lakers *fan*, since I was old enough to sneak the transistor radio under my pillow so I could listen

to the games after my mom tucked me into bed. I still annoy those around me with my insistence upon listening to every game I can.

I freely concede the high moral ground here to those, including most of my activist colleagues, who eschew the bread and circuses of popular cultural diversions such as professional sports occupy. It is just that they cannot know the pain we admirers of Magic the player feel at the prospect of never again reveling in that no-look pass, that sweet, twisting drive to the hole, that last-second game-winner. And that smile. However highly huckstered by the corporate sponsors, it *was* infectious. I'm not ashamed to admit that Magic provided me — like countless others — many genuinely wonderful, head-shaking, adrenalin-surging moments. It's hard to accept that the curtain has rung down on Laker "Showtime" — surely one of the most entertaining contemporary circuses.

I have followed the story closely since November 7, clipping the paper, even watching television news, which I normally shun. Ten days later I had the impossible fortune to be given a ticket to the Lakers' game against the Atlanta Hawks. (It was my first trip to the Forum in three years — seeing the Lakers in person is for those with means.) There was a rumor that Magic might make his first appearance at a game since his announcement. Sure enough he walked out before tip-off to thunderous applause that would not stop, embraced Hawks players, and then assumed his old seat on the bench (where he proceeded to root and coach his teammates through the game as if nothing had changed). And always, that smile. It was a strange, sad, thrilling sensation that perhaps only public spectacle can offer. Yes, I cried.

And no, none of this is comparable to the greater pain of the real world. It is simply the end of a particular era of a particular aspect of North American culture, nothing more or less.

I guess only those who grew up (OK, *were socialized*) as amateur players and fans can understand the *feelings* of loss

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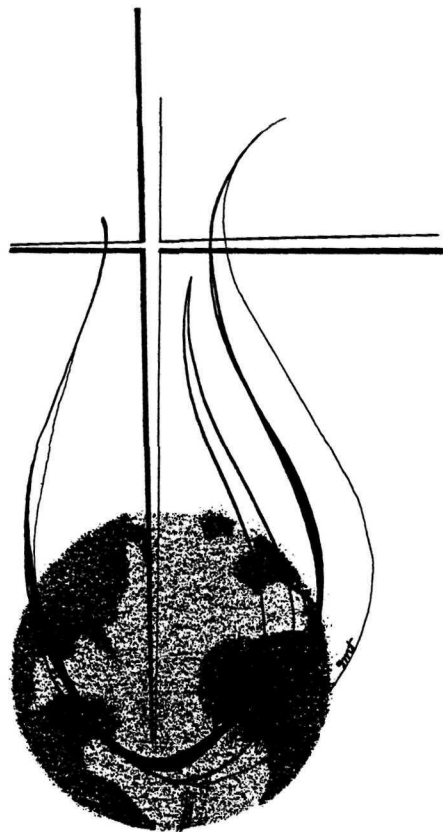
What if the story of Magic is not tragedy, not comedy, but indeed a fairy tale?

What Then Must We Do?

by Jo Clare Hartsig

What Then Must We Do?, Leo Tolstoy. Original publication date: 1886. Reissued in 1991, Green Books, Hartland, Devon, UK. (U.S. Distributor: Seven Hills, Cincinnati, OH), pb. \$13.95.

Two years ago, five Americans stood on the doorstep of a third floor apartment tucked behind the stately Hermitage Museum in what was then called Leningrad. All five of us had come from U.S. cities where we work with homeless, isolated, and uprooted people and we were eager to search out and make contact with what we had heard was Leningrad's first unofficial "shelter ministry." When asked if it was true that homeless people could stay there, the woman who had answered the door consulted privately with her husband and then turned to us and said, "Well, we can take three of you, but that is all." One could turn this story into a charming tale of Russian hospitality and mistaken identity, or using a parallel story (Leo Tolstoy's) from a century ago, one could be challenged to understand this one in



I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already.

Luke 12:49

credit: Margaret Thompson, SSJ

the context of class barriers and the arrogance of charity work.

Tolstoy, a favorite novelist of many Russian Literature majors and an essayist who has inspired generations of pacifists, is just as descriptive and autobiographically provocative as a person caught up with "humanity's struggle for life." His sensational book *What Then Must We Do?* is permeated with a deeply confessional tone. After a successful career as a writer of fiction and political and spiritual essays, Tolstoy found himself hungering

for more meaning in his life. With every good intention, he decided to serve poor people and then set out to look for some. Over a period of months, Tolstoy accompanied census-takers as they canvassed dark taverns and severely overcrowded boarding houses. He describes his society acquaintances whom he had invited to join the census project as: *dressed specially in shooting jackets and high travelling boots, a costume in which they went on hunting expeditions, and which in their opinion was adapted for a visit to the night-lodging houses. They were in that special state of excitement people are when preparing for a hunt, a duel, or to start for the war.*

The description does not widely differ from the attitude of eager social service providers and volunteers seeking out "the poor" in the backstreets of Leningrad, depressed neighborhoods in Chicago, crackhouses in Denver, residential "hotels" in Louisville, or municipal park areas in cities around the world. The reality that surfaces in Tolstoy's vivid description of his interaction with Moscow's poor is instantly recognizable by all who have been challenged and damaged by class barriers. The conversations recounted between the author and the targets of his charity help us understand (again!) the frustrations of doing good to people. The poor are not a romantic horde who are transformed by the application of alms. Tolstoy's stories are parables about the variety of attitudes people have about money. Money alone will not solve anything and money freely given cannot be monitored, nor should its use be judged. How do we react when the poor are not grateful or are extravagant and unpleasant?

By having made the awkward journey himself, Tolstoy invites us to go beyond pity and superficial acts of charity. Repeatedly, his call is toward truth: *Strange*

book review

Jo Clare Hartsig, a UCC minister, is the director of Center City Ministries in Bethlehem, PA. Hartsig is fluent in Russian. Artist Sister Margaret Thompson is an assistant professor at Moore College of Art and Design in Philadelphia and member of the Sisters of St. Joseph.

to say, *whereas it seemed to do good—to give money to those in need—was a very good thing and should promote one's love of people, it turned out on the contrary that this business evoked in me ill-will towards people and condemnation of them.*

Through exposition of popular theories on poverty (with particular venom directed at Malthus and his exponential population growth theory), Tolstoy began to analyze why there were poor people, how division of labor began, and who keeps “the system” in place. Yet, the analysis is not the end of this fascinating book. We are indeed given an answer to the title question which is the same question the multitudes put to Jesus: What are we to do about “the poor” who from every indication will always be with us? Tolstoy, like Jesus, requires a personal and active response. His answer leads us inward—into our own spirit, into repentance. Our responses to our inner truth will become evident in our style of living and the inevitable ripple effect will transform our surroundings.

Several chapters are devoted to describing this process which is one of tak-

ing responsibility for one's basic needs. If exploitation is the root of poverty, then we must cease being exploiters. Poverty continues to grind people up because we fear the truth, accept privileges, deny responsibility, and reject the notion that each person must labor for his or her own well-being. Government, the “entrepreneurial class” (now experiencing a boom in modern Russia), artists, and the Church are described as part of the problem—but *could* be part of the solution.

Sadly, the final chapters regarding men's and women's work are problematic for women who choose not to marry and/or have children. Tolstoy describes feminism as a by-product of classism, and perhaps just as detrimental! It is one segment of the book most closely bound to the era of its original publication in 1886.

By having made the awkward journey himself, Tolstoy invites us to go beyond pity and superficial acts of charity. Repeatedly, his call is toward truth.

Tolstoy's solutions are simple, but certainly not easy. He provides a refreshing look into the heart of the poverty puzzle. He encourages us to trust where we are led when we refuse to honor class distinctions. The reward of such action is the power of liv-

ing closer to the truth, closer to one another.

Not to lie, in that sense, means not to fear the truth, not to invent excuses to hide from myself the conclusions of reason and conscience, and not to accept such excuses when they are invented by others: not to fear to differ from all those around me or to be left alone with reason and conscience, and not to fear the position to which truth will lead me, believing firmly that what truth and conscience will lead me to, however strange it may be, cannot be worse than what is based on falsehood.

TW

Magic, continued from page 23

associated with Magic's retirement. Older people talk about the farewell speeches of Ruth and Gehrig. Maybe the lament of *disaster* is somehow just part of “being American.” Please, say it ain't so, Joe.

But here lament does not have the last word. True, many sportswriters have bemoaned that the game's greatest figure has been cheated of a storybook finish to his career: there will be no farewell pageantry associated with the retirements of Kareem and Dr. J. Ever looking for happy endings, the media has again missed the point. As Magic said: “If I die tomorrow, next year or whenever it might be, I'll know that I've had a great life... It's been a fairytale.” And with these words he has perhaps solved the meaning of his text.

What if the story of Magic is not tragedy, not comedy, but indeed a *fairy tale*, also in the classic sense? Such tales, as Jack Zipes argues in his brilliant *Breaking the Magic Spell*, were the popular discourse of social change among the peasant classes in

feudal Europe. They envisioned radical reversal in social fortunes: what is the storyline of Jack and the Beanstalk or Hansel and Gretel if not “the poor being lifted up and the rich sent empty away?” And always through “magical” circumstances, the symbol of political imagination and social transformation. (Zipes also shows how the subversive edge of these stories has for us been blunted by the domesticating editing of Grimm and Disney.)

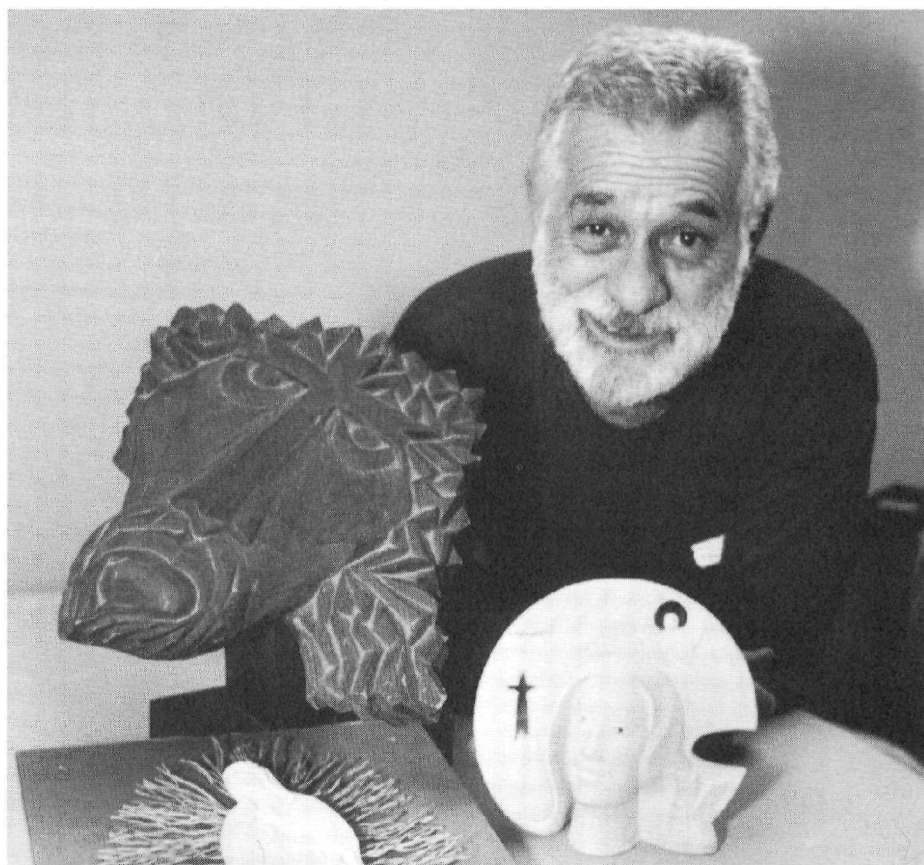
So with Magic: the famed athlete, rich in health and well-being, undergoes a profound reversal of fortune — and countless would-be Magics on backlot courts around the world awaken to reality. By speaking out he has brought crashing down one of the last and strongest bastions where flourished the social taboo about where and when AIDS can be discussed: the institutionalized machismo of professional sports. Insofar as he continues to speak out in the struggle against AIDS, Johnson will truly extend his life as a fairytale. That will be “liberating Magic,” helping to break the evil spell of Silence = Death. TW

The doleful face of Christ, with a cross imprinted on his brow, cries the pain of Gethsemane. "I wanted to portray His agony in the garden," said artist Leandro Della-Piana. "I carved it from sugarpine and stained it with rusty nails which I made by putting the nails in a can with vinegar and water."

Della-Piana sculpted *Gethsemane* more than 20 years ago when he was struggling to fit his art into a career. He offered it last fall in the first annual art show of the Cathedral Church of St. Mark, Salt Lake City, which displayed the work of the homeless and those living on the edge. For the past year Della-Piana has lived in the apartment of a friend near a Salt Lake City shopping center.

A native of Boston, Mass., Della-Piana served a studio apprenticeship in ecclesiastical sculpture, then worked for ten years on cathedrals in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. When changes in the Church mandated simpler architectural design, the demand for his skills disappeared, and Della-Piana channeled his energies into an art program for students in ghetto schools. The project spun off nationwide, and Della-Piana was invited to bring his program into prisons and reform schools across the country.

"But it all closed down on me," he said. "What I was doing was helping youth to express themselves, and it seemed the powers-that-be wanted the opposite. They wanted them to conform."



Leandro Della-Piana

credit: Judy Kiel

Art and healing

by Sarah T. Moore

Pressures to conform had already left their mark on Della-Piana. In the 1960s, he did a mural representing Jesus with the children for a church in New Orleans, only to be told to remove the black children from his work. Another church complained that he "made Christ look too Jewish."

"For awhile, I did away with any images of race, or male or female," he said. "My work was almost semi-abstract."

Further pressure came from economic necessity.

"I was lucky to have a landlord who carried me for a long time," Della-Piana said. "But I was on food stamps and eating in soup kitchens for quite awhile. The more I got behind, the more I thought of art from a commercial point of view. That's thinking wrong."

"The economic system we have kind of controls what it's practical to do," he said. "I can do a piece of sculpture with great sensitivity that would take me a year's time, but the chances of getting a year's pay are pretty slim. The way our

*Witnesses,
the quick and the dead*

Sarah T. Moore is editor of Utah's Diocesan *Dialogue*. Photographer **Judy Kiel** works for the Diocese of Utah.

throw-away society is going, society depends on not quality but quantity and turnover. I hope eventually it will turn around. You have to have faith in people as individuals."

To Della-Piana, fidelity to one's unique personhood and vision is a sacred value.

"All life has a certain lawfulness to it," he says. "If we respect those laws of all living things we are as close to God as we can get. If we are in tune with our own body, who we are as individuals, that's being in tune with God. Unless we're in tune with ourselves, we can't be a vital part of any society," he says. "The more people conform to propaganda coming down from on top, the more chaotic the society. Like politics: Propaganda comes from the nationalistic point of view, saying it's all right to kill someone from another country because we're the good country and they're the bad country. That's a lie."

Della-Piana continues to struggle to make a living. But he has found a way to contribute his skills to a project that expresses his personal vision.

Della-Piana works at the Lotus Project, a ministry which provides jobs for homeless people. Located in a warehouse on the west side of Salt Lake City, it is

directed by Episcopal priest Jerald Merrill. Della-Piana works under the direction of Steve Topaz, a bio-medical engineer who has designed a pillow for exercising muscles of people who are bedridden.

"I feel what I'm doing now is more in tune with what an artist can do in our society," he said. "I'm doing what I enjoy doing. I'm working with steel, wood and plastic, all the materials and processes of sculpture, and it's all having to do with healing people."

Della-Piana was influenced by a book he read which talked about work being done by Russian sculptors as a healing influence on their country.

"I thought about that a lot," he said. "I think it helps to stir people up, but a little of that goes a long way."

Della-Piana's current work offers healing in a very concrete form.

"To me, this is creative," he said. "I'm working with a team of people from different disciplines — engineers, architects — to create a product that's going out into society to help people. Healing is the most important thing to me."

Marianne Arbogast contributed to this report.

The Empty Bowl Project

Michigan potters John Hartom and Lisa Blackburn conceived a project to raise funds for shelters and soup kitchens which has gone international.

During the last year, potters and students have made bowls which people buy, filled with food, at a fundraising dinner. The purchaser then keeps the bowl. Meal prices have varied from \$5 at schools to \$50 for an Oxfam benefit.

Art Park, an art instructor at Wayne State University and member of the Empty Bowl Project, has put a new spin on the project: homeless Detroiters will soon be firing bowls at Cass United Methodist Church to raise funds for food, shelter and advocacy.

Welcome to The Witness!

If you are not a regular subscriber to *The Witness*, but you received this issue, it is probably because we purchased a mailing list with your name on it. We wanted to send this issue to people who are concerned about how our religious beliefs relate to homelessness.

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