

WITNESS MAGAZINE

VOLUME 83

NUMBER 7/8

JULY/AUG 2000

● DENVER 2000

*Signs of Justice and Hope*

## on the cover

## HOMELESS PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT

Thirteen homeless people worked with Denver photographer Tory Read last winter, learning to take photos and improve their creative writing. In eight sessions over four weeks, participants used disposable cameras to take portraits of each other and document their lives and the neighborhood around the St. Francis Center. They also wrote autobiographies and poems. The project is part of The Curtis Park Photo/Story Project, a multi-year photo and writing project that documents life in Curtis Park and Five Points. Participants have presented their artwork in temporary exhibits at schools, community centers and clinics in the neighborhood as well as in three permanent exhibits. The project is supported by the Colorado Council on the Arts, Community Development Agency, Enterprise Foundation, Denver Housing Authority, Colorado State Motor Vehicles Division, Hope Communities, Weed & Seed and Eastside Health Center.

For more information contact  
Tory Read at 313-433-7500.

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Since 1917, *The Witness* has been examining church and society in light of faith and conscience — advocating for those denied systemic power as well as celebrating those who, in theologian William Stringfellow's words, have found ways to "live humanly in the midst of death." With deep roots in the Episcopal Church, we are a journal of spiritual questing and theology in practice, always ready to hold our own cherished beliefs and convictions up to scrutiny.

**Manuscripts:** We welcome multiple submissions. Given our small staff, writers and artists receive a response only when we are able to publish. Manuscripts will not be returned.

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**Subscriptions:** \$35 per year, \$5 per copy.

Foreign subscriptions add \$10 per year.

**Change of address:** Third Class mail does not forward. Provide your new mailing address to The Witness.

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## LETTERS

### Of lions and justice

The institutional church has few LIONS left! What I see out there are parishes and missions celebrating personal birthdays and trying to entertain — all noise that blocks and muffles the cries for Justice and Mercy. You all continue to be a LION!!!

Dennis Serdahl

Mountain Home AR

### Misery pornography

I found the article "Bashra Diary" (May 2000) an example of misery pornography. Evocative images are presented to us without context, without relationships, and without any way for the reader to interact. It is a kind of voyeurism, and it is wearing in the end. We hear so much about despair and pain in the world that without some indication of why we are presented with it, or how we might get involved, we just begin to tune it out. I need to know what the writer wants to do about this, why he wants me to know about this, what is the purpose of his sharing this horror with me. Otherwise it is just titillation.

Sydney Hall

Hope, ME

### Not a perfect world

I like your magazine very much and want to send the April 2000 issue (No easy answers: Gender and sexual ethics for a new age) to a friend, Jim Forest, who is mentioned in Marianne Arbogast's piece on "The pro-life, pro-choice debate: Confronting real differences with respect — and hope."

I've been a friend of Jim's for a long time, but this issue has really, I guess, put a dent in our correspondence. Hopefully it will not go out altogether. I remember very well the incident when Jim resigned from the Fellowship of Reconciliation. I, of course, stayed in, but with a very sad heart that he felt he and the FOR could not remain together.

What he says is true, I guess, and in a perfect world all babies would be born; but it is

not a perfect world. I have never had an abortion, but I do know others who have. It is a hard thing. But sometimes it must be done.

Anyway, thank you, and keep up the good work!

Roberta M. Stewart

Washington, D.C.

### Shaken trust

I will try to say this as gently but firmly as possible. I was saddened and angered that you included Marianne Arbogast's essay supporting the anti-abortion movement in your uniquely beautiful magazine. No one, not Marianne Arbogast, nor *The Witness*, nor the government, nor anyone else has the right to tell me that I cannot terminate an unwanted pregnancy within my own body.

Marianne's position is one of judgment, not compassion. She says she wants to communicate — that she wants a voice — but she wants to use that voice to control my entire life. She distances herself from the target of Marge Piercy's righteous, affirmative poem, yet in this respect is no different than those targets. Seeing such lack of compassion and disregard for human rights within the pages of *The Witness* was a slap in the face from a dear friend. My trust has been deeply shaken.

You may respond that you wished to discuss "both sides." But I don't remember *The Witness* ever publishing an article supporting nuclear weapons, or denouncing the rights of women on welfare, or calling for more prisons. No doubt someone in the nuclear weapons or prison industries has been kind, good, or committed to their idea of justice, as Arbogast would like us to understand about her fellow anti-abortionists.

Despite "quiet, prayerful vigils" and other unmentioned, not-so-quiet actions, the anti-abortionists' battle is one they can never win. Abortion will always be with us. No matter how bloody it gets, women always have and always will assert their



rights over their own bodies by aborting unwanted pregnancies.

Susan Daniels  
Pembroke, VA

## Hilltop renewal

Thanks for sending reminders that my subscription is about to expire. I certainly don't want that to happen!!

I need your thoughtful, courageous, challenging reflections as well as all the information that keeps me in touch with the larger world beyond our secluded hilltop.

Please renew my subscription immediately and keep your wonderful journal coming.  
Rita Rouner  
Center Sandwich, NH

## Speaking the truth of incest

I am writing to publicly thank Mary Eldridge of Milford, Mich., for her letter in the April 2000 *Witness*, with reference to

your December 1999 issue on recovering from human evil.

I am a fellow incest survivor. I spent much of my seminary career learning how to speak this truth and preparing to preach it. I have mentioned child sexual abuse in sermons before as one of the many crimes against persons. I used Eldridge's letter as the basis for a sermon on April 9, preached at the Cathedral Church of Saint John in Wilmington. This is my first sermon since seminary which has dealt solely with child sexual abuse and incest.

I want Mary to know that usually when I speak up on this subject I experience some measure of "feeling" flashbacks — an uncontrollable return to feelings from the time of the abuse. Over the years these have gotten less and less. This time, the only remnants of flashback came between the services, when I was waiting to preach the same sermon a second time. I had to gently remind myself that I am no longer 10 years

old and I can talk about incest and still stand without shame. There is a great deal of hope for abundant life in breaking silence and learning how to do it safely.

Thank you, Mary, for your courage and thank you, *Witness*, for publishing her full letter.

Lois B. T. Keen  
Wilmington, DE

## Valuable recent issues

The last three issues of *The Witness* have been OUTSTANDING! Bill Countryman's article in the March issue on authority in Anglicanism and the whole April issue on gender and sexual ethics have been particularly valuable to me as I try to develop some helpful theological reflections on Vermont's new Civil Union Law and the opportunities it offers the Episcopal Church.

Thank you!  
Anne Clarke Brown  
Plymouth, VT

*Jubilee =  
Justice*

**And you shall hallow the  
fiftieth year and you shall  
proclaim liberty throughout the  
land to all its inhabitants. It  
shall be a jubilee for you..."**

**Leviticus 25:10**

Our Presiding Bishop has proclaimed Jubilee as the theme for General Convention 2000. Some have emphasized the "fallow" aspect of Jubilee, suggesting that the Episcopal Church take a rest in Denver from wrestling with full equality for its gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender members. But the biblical vision of Jubilee includes setting free those who are oppressed. Jubilee without justice is an illusion.

As it has for the past 25 years, Integrity will be at General Convention—calling the church to "respect the dignity of every human being." Whatever your sexual orientation, we urge you to support this vital witness by becoming a member (\$60 household, \$35 individual, \$10 low income / student / senior) or making a generous contribution.

**PLEASE MAIL YOUR CHECK TO:**

**Integrity, PO Box 1246,  
Bayonne, NJ 07002-6246.  
Your gift is tax deductible.**

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[www.integrityusa.org](http://www.integrityusa.org)



# Paying attention to the specifics of lives and places

by Julie A. Wortman

THIS MONTH, bishops and deputations from each jurisdiction in the Episcopal Church will gather in Denver, Colo. for 10 intensive days of decision-making (check <www.thewitness.org> for pre- and post-convention commentary). It has long been a *Witness* tradition to offer our friends and supporters some hospitality and encouragement during this triennial legislative marathon. But in recent years we have felt drawn to also making sure our General Convention *Witness* event provides people with a chance to experience something of the “real” metropolis outside the polished confines of the could-be-anywhere convention centers where these large gatherings typically take place. To this end, July 9th we'll be hosting a benefit reception at the St. Francis Center, a day shelter that serves the city's ever-increasing homeless population at the edge of Denver's high-rise downtown.

Our festive event will be catered by the Women's Bean Project, a non-profit business aimed at equipping disadvantaged women with needed job and life skills. Peter Selby, an English bishop-activist for the Jubilee 2000 debt-relief campaign [see TW 6/00], will be our keynote speaker. And, mindful of this year's Jubilee 2000 appeal for restoration of right economic relationships, we'll be presenting four “Spirit of Justice” awards to people whose commitments we admire: farmworker organizer Baldemar Velasquez [TW 11/99]; New Hampshire's bishop, Douglas Theuner, who continually pushes for socially responsible church investing [TW 5/94]; war-tax resisters and bioregional activists Wally and Juanita Nelson [TW 12/96]; and Betty LaDuke, who uses her art to promote global women's economic sustainability [TW 6/00].

With this issue of *The Witness* we attempt to scratch beneath Denver's surface in other ways, too — in search of justice and hope in a

city and region which projects an image of prosperous and fun-loving frontier spirit, but where discrimination against gay, lesbian and transgendered people has been publicly advocated in statewide debates, where Superfund sites abound, and where unbridled development has forced independent-spirited poor people literally underground. We also add an interview with children's advocate Jonathan Kozol in sad memory of the Columbine High School shootings in Littleton.

This is the second time over the past year that we have probed into the spirit and poli-

is last January's Executive Council decision to cancel arrangements to headquarter General Convention at Denver's 1,000-room Adam's Mark hotel upon discovering the chain's alleged pattern of racial discrimination (in March the hotel's management agreed to pay \$8 million in damages to a variety of plaintiffs, though without admitting any wrongdoing).

And we commend the special efforts of the Episcopal Environmental Network in brokering the purchase of the electrical energy to be used by the convention from producers



Photo courtesy of Earthlinks

*Guests from Denver's St. Francis Center help with the beginnings of the Peace Garden (p. 18).*

tics of a particular place [see also TW 6/99]. Our conviction in taking up such subjects has been that in today's globalized culture, it is very easy to lose the “grounding” in the specifics of real lives in a real place that we need if, as Kozol observes, we are to “find the courage to confront directly the local inequalities which are reflections of national inequalities.”

There is something uncomfortably disembodied about the church gathering in a city to celebrate the Jubilee year and then spending long hours in windowless seclusion from that community's everyday realities. To their credit, our church leaders have tried to be mindful of Denver's justice struggles as they organized this synod. A dramatic illustration

who generate it using the renewable resource of the wind.

But we also believe that spending time taking a “toxic tour” of the Denver region (p. 14), for example, or working the earth alongside homeless gardeners bent on restoring life to more than an empty city lot (p. 18), would be well worth missing a General Convention session or two. Even essential, perhaps, if the church's Jubilee commitment extends to making its presence in this place — and in so many others where social and economic inequities flourish — a blessing to more than itself. ●

**Julie A. Wortman** is publisher and co-editor of *The Witness*, <julie@thewitness.org>.

# Overcoming the hazards of media monoculture

By Norman Solomon

AFTER THE “LOVE BUG” virus struck millions of computer hard drives, many news outlets attributed the magnitude of the damage to overwhelming reliance on the same type of software. Suddenly, in the digital world, steep downsides of technical conformity were obvious. But such concerns should also extend to the shortage of variety in media content.

Reporting on the worst virus attack in PC history, *Time* blamed “the perils of living in a monoculture.” The newsmagazine explained: “Security experts have long warned that Microsoft software is so widely used and so genetically interconnected that it qualifies as a monoculture — that is, the sort of homogeneous ecosystem that makes as little sense in the business world as it does in the biological.”

The practical benefits of diversity suggest a question that’s long overdue: What’s the sense of monoculture in mass media?

On land where clear-cutting has occurred, the rows of trees that stand are apt to resemble toothpicks — especially when compared to the intricate and diverse vegetation of natural forests. And if we take a close look at the country’s main news sources, the undermining of media ecology is all too evident.

Right now, cash crops dominate the media terrain. Little diversity takes root. Erosion of public discourse is chronic, with monotonous and stultifying results. The harvest of news and public affairs is akin to waxed vegetables: shiny and dependable, yet lacking in flavor or nutrients.

What’s in short supply? The actual experiences, perspectives and voices of some people. They may not have the income to qualify as middle class. They may be immigrants facing obstacles because of their race, religion or accent. They might be homeless, malnourished, unschooled or stuck in low-wage

jobs. Across the media expanses, where do they fit in? Who advocates for them, or addresses their concerns, with consistent focus and fervor?

Cable TV was supposed to rescue us from the limits of broadcast television. But if you click through basic cable and beyond, you may feel like a hiker wandering around vast acreage of an artificial timber farm.

IN THE ABSENCE OF  
A HEALTHY MEDIA  
ENVIRONMENT, OUR SOCIETY  
IS PRONE TO VITRIOL THAT  
ELUDES DIRECT CHALLENGE.

Take “Larry King Live.” (Please.) Most nights, insipid would be too kind an adjective. Along with featuring countless celebs who are mostly famous for being famous, the nightly CNN show has pioneered bringing in big-name journalists from other news outlets to share their purported wisdom. They know how to perform in a TV studio. But their roots in down-to-earth America are usually so shallow that it seems a major rainstorm would just about wash them away.

In the absence of a healthy media environment, our society is prone to vitriol that eludes direct challenge. For example, Don Imus — ranked by *Time* as one of “the 25 most influential Americans” — delights in spewing out a fetid brew of ersatz cleverness on his national radio program, whether at the expense of blacks, gays, women or peo-

ple with amputated limbs. Simulcast on MSNBC television, “Imus in the Morning” is an audio horror show that often denigrates because of skin color, sexual orientation or gender. (See the online journal [www.tom-paine.com](http://www.tom-paine.com) for extensive documentation.)

Rather than recoiling at the invective from Imus and his crew, dozens of prominent journalists continue to embrace it. Program regulars include CNN’s Jeff Greenfield and Judy Woodruff, CBS’s Dan Rather and Bob Schieffer, NBC’s Tom Brokaw and Tim Russert, and Cokie Roberts of ABC and National Public Radio. High-status print reporters don’t hang back, either, as exemplified by such avid participants in the Imus show as *Newsweek*’s Howard Fineman and Jonathan Alter, and syndicated *New York Times* columnists Frank Rich and Thomas Friedman.

Typically, when critics denounce the wise-guy racism and other assorted viciousness that accompanies “Imus in the Morning,” they’re tagged as rigid ideologues. In Greenfield’s words — spoken during a softball CNN interview he conducted with his longtime pal Imus three months ago — “political correctness is the enemy.”

The antidote to such poisonous drivel would be a healthy media environment that promotes the ethics of anti-racism, anti-sexism and anti-homophobia on an ongoing basis. Demagogue quipsters like Imus and his colleagues have it easy because their corporate bosses refuse to give much airtime to those who are ready, willing and able to support the kind of human solidarity that Imus works to undermine. For now, bigotry breeds in media monoculture. ●

*Norman Solomon is a syndicated columnist. His latest book is The Habits of Highly Deceptive Media.*

# Dreams Before Waking

by Adrienne Rich

**Despair is the question.**

— Elie Wiesel

**Hasta tu país cambió. Lo has cambiado tú mismo.**

— Nancy Morejón

Despair falls:  
the shadow of a building  
they are raising in the direct path  
of your slender ray of sunlight  
Slowly the steel girders grow  
the skeletal framework rises  
yet the western light still filters  
through it all  
still glances off the plastic sheeting  
they wrap around it  
for dead of winter

At the end of winter something changes  
a faint subtraction  
from consolations you expected  
an innocent brilliance that does not come  
though the flower shops set out  
once again on the pavement  
their pots of tight-budded sprays  
the bunches of jonquils stiff with cold  
and at such a price  
though someone must buy them  
you study those hues as if with hunger

Despair falls  
like the day you come home  
from work, a summer evening  
transparent with rose-blue light  
and see they are filling in  
the framework  
the girders are rising  
beyond your window  
that seriously you live  
in a different place  
though you have never moved

and will not move, not yet  
but will give away  
your potted plants to a friend  
on the other side of town  
along with the cut crystal flashing  
in the window-frame  
will forget the evenings  
of watching the street, the sky  
the planes in the feathered afterglow:  
will learn to feel grateful simply for this  
foothold

where still you can manage  
to go on paying rent  
where still you can believe  
it's the old neighborhood:  
even the woman who sleeps at night  
in the barred doorway — wasn't she always  
there?  
and the man glancing, darting  
for food in the supermarket trash —  
when did his hunger come to this?  
what made the difference?  
what will make it for you?

What will make it for you?  
You don't want to know the stages  
and those who go through them don't want  
to tell  
You have four locks on the door  
your savings, your respectable past  
your strangely querulous body, suffering  
sicknesses of the city no one can name  
You have your pride, your bitterness  
your memories of sunset  
you think you can make it straight through  
if you don't speak of despair.

What would it mean to live  
in a city whose people were changing  
each other's despair into hope? —  
You yourself must change it. —  
what would it feel like to know  
your country was changing? —  
You yourself must change it. —  
Though your life felt arduous  
new and unmapped and strange  
what would it mean to stand on the first  
page of the end of despair?

1983

*Reprinted from Your Native Land, Your Life: Poems by Adrienne Rich © 1986 by Adrienne Rich. With permission of the publisher, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc.*







# ‘TIS A PRIVILEGE?’

## ‘Tis a privilege to live in Colorado’ — but for whom?

by Nancy Kinney

THREE YEARS AGO, moving day for Danny began with a mental health worker rousting him from his makeshift shelter along the river's edge. A half hour later, Danny's "home" — and that of 200 others camped along the 10-mile stretch of the South Platte River that cuts through Denver — was demolished by a city work detail assigned to enforce a no-camping ordinance passed when the Denver city council decided homelessness and redevelopment were incompatible.

For decades the banks of the South Platte have provided refuge for many who have traveled West. Its meandering course penetrates the high plains and over time has served as an important regional waterway, first for native inhabitants and, later, for European trappers and white settlers. In the arid grasslands of this vast plateau at the base of the Rockies, the Platte (French for "flat" or "shallow") helped open a pathway to the frontier.

Those seeking adventure or a new start still follow the river's route west. The state that was christened "Colorado" for its red earth continues to attract the restless, the adventuresome and those who flee the duress of urban living elsewhere. But the banks of the Platte provide less shelter for weary travelers these days as a growing affluent population claims them as its playground. A host of entertainment and recreation venues today straddle the river valley: a Six Flags amusement park, a 20,000-seat arena for professional basketball and hockey, a stately home for National League baseball at Coors Field. The massive columns of a \$364 million football stadium, financed in large measure by a voter-

approved sales tax, has begun to emerge on the river's western bank. A museum for children and a world-class aquarium draw families to the shores of the Platte, many pedaling or skating the miles of paved trails that have replaced long-outmoded river travel.

As this sort of urban development moved in during the 1990s, however, public pressure mounted for the city to "clean up" the homeless problem along the river. People who, like Danny, spurned the constraints of Denver's overnight shelters and preferred the freedom of sleeping outdoors — even in winter — have, somewhat ironically, been displaced. Today, at the confluence of the Platte with the Cherry Creek, where pioneer settlers once staked out their claims to a new life, a new \$20-million 94,000-square-foot flagship REI "megastore" has just opened — to serve the outdoor-loving public.

The city's efforts to remove Danny and his homeless peers from their riverside encampments in 1997 were — not surprisingly — only partially successful. About 50 of the people who populated these settlements were placed in housing with the city's assistance. But within a year as many as 150 had returned to new sites along the water's edge, some burrowing into dugouts hidden from open view. Setting up camp on state and highway property outside the city's jurisdiction has helped others avoid the routine sweeps along city trails and parkways that now prevent Denver's most independent poor from setting up more permanent campsites.

### **A premium on space in the eighth largest state**

"Tis a privilege to live in Colorado," wrote

Frederick G. Bonfils, early Denver entrepreneur and promoter. Residents are discovering, however, that the privilege of living in the freedom and grandeur of the West has its price. Unparalleled growth has driven up the cost of housing and made affordable shelter scarce. Furthermore, Denver is not the only locality in the state where flourishing real estate development has brought the pursuit of individual freedom into direct conflict with the common welfare.

In one sense, the premium on space seems ludicrous; Colorado is a big place. With more than 104,000 square miles, it is the eighth largest state in the union. Visitors from more densely populated cities in other parts of the world like Tokyo or Mexico City marvel at the land area that enables such sprawling growth. But Colorado's mile-high residents place a particular premium on the aesthetics of their surroundings and on preserving their personal stake in mountain views, "treed" property and open space.

In Colorado's mountain resort communities, the astronomical value of real estate prohibits all but the most privileged from staking a claim to home ownership. Multi-million-dollar vacation villas line the winding roads ascending to ski areas and overlooking golf courses. Supporting such lavish lifestyles requires a vast labor-intensive service industry. The demand for construction help alone — not to mention the grounds- and housekeepers, maintenance crews, and hotel staff — has drawn waves of job seekers to places like Aspen and the Vail Valley. Affordable housing for service workers, many of whom are immigrants, rarely exists in these exclusive neighborhoods; the maids, busboys, framers, lift operators and



W.H. Jackson, courtesy The Colorado Historical Society (WHI 072152)

*Brown Palace Hotel, Denver, 1911*

greenskeepers usually live “down valley,” often commuting two to four hours each day under potentially treacherous conditions.

Aware of the dramatic inequities perpetuated in these resort areas, the state legislature has contemplated steps to address the situations that strain local resources, from public utilities to schools to roads. Adequate housing for resort-area workers remains a fundamental issue, and local authorities struggle to develop feasible solutions. One ski community in Colorado, Winter Park, is considering a \$3 per square foot assessment on new construction to guarantee that affordable

housing is available into the future. The individualistic character of Colorado politics, however, usually tends to discourage such intervention. Gun-control measures — not initiatives for decent housing — have recently been more likely to preoccupy state lawmakers. At times, the West seems remarkably unchanged.

**Boulder: controlled growth, even for churches**

Closer to the Denver metropolitan area, however, the struggle over space becomes more nuanced. For instance, the city of Boul-

der, which nestles against the foothills about 45 minutes northwest of Denver, has instituted stringent growth-limitation policies in an effort to preserve the aesthetics of open space for its residents. Admirably, the city hasn’t neglected to provide public housing and progressive services to its homeless. At times, though, public debate over values becomes perplexing. For example, the relocation of a colony of prairie dogs enflamed local attention when the Boulder headquarters of the Celestial Seasonings herbal tea company was rocked by a rodent eradication scandal.



Some less-fortunate victims of Boulder's controlled-growth efforts, however, have been religious organizations. St. Ambrose Episcopal Church in suburban Boulder learned first-hand about growth restrictions and the premium placed on open space when the congregation sought to expand its 20-year-old facility. Boulder land use officials required the church to provide a conservation easement consisting of all of its undeveloped property in exchange for the privilege of building a much scaled-back improvement to their facility. St. Ambrose's encounter with the Boulder land use department gave them a much-smaller-than-hoped-for building and cost them the right to future development of the property. St. Walburga's, a convent and retreat house established in the 1930s by Roman Catholic nuns who fled Nazi Germany, had to sell its property and rebuild elsewhere when the city turned down a request to expand. The sisters have happily founded a new facility on donated land in a remote spot in northern Colorado, hopefully distanced by several decades from future urban encroachment.

#### **New urban dilemmas: homelessness on the rise**

The poor who reside in the urban centers, however, face perhaps the harshest toll from the onslaught of development. Many U.S. cities are experiencing revitalization with new jobs and a resurgence in urban population. While the rate of home ownership in city centers has reached 50 percent for the first time, a HUD report showed that buying a home in the inner city is more difficult today for individuals at all levels of income (*The State of the Cities*, 1999). Furthermore, the shortage of affordable rental housing is getting worse. HUD estimates suggest that 5.3 million American households spend more than 50 percent of their income on rent. A report from the Center for Affordable Housing in Denver confirmed a comparable "worst case" housing shortage for the mile-high city, citing that apartment vacancies dipped below 4 percent in 1999.

Urban revitalization often involves more displacement than improvement of conditions for both the homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless. Sweeping the Platte

# A short history of Denver

by Phil Goodstein

**A**FTER THE PIKES PEAK GOLD RUSH of 1858-59, Denver rapidly surged from a town of 4,759 in 1870 to a manufacturing metropolis of more than 105,000 in 1890. Among those contributing to the community were the "lungers," people suffering from tuberculosis. By the time of World War I, anywhere from 20 percent to half of all the area's residents had been drawn to Colorado by health considerations.

Beginning in the 1920s, the city's business and political leaders courted federal agencies as the area's foremost industry. At one point, Denver proclaimed itself "the little capital" and "Little Washington," noting it was second only to Washington in the per capita number of federal employees. Pentagon facilities and weapons contractors and manufacturers became a dominant economic force.

#### **Civil rights struggles**

Despite being part and parcel of building Colorado — numerous blacks also sought gold and some were also cowboys — African Americans generally lived apart from ruling white Denver, building institutions of their own. But after World War II, middle-class blacks were no longer content with the *status quo*. They demanded their children have the right to share the good schools which the city provided for the white middle class. When the board of education instituted a rather mild, almost token, busing plan for racial integration in 1969, mass opposition arose against it and an anti-busing ticket swept the May 1969 school board election. But in 1973 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled Denver had an illegal segregated system. It ordered court oversight of the school system to assure desegregation.

The legal intervention did not, however, produce the promised results. Within a few years, school enrollments plummeted while complaints about education soared. Many white families fled Denver for the suburbs. Numbers illustrate the impact on the growing region: In 1970, Denver's total population was 514,678 in a metropolis of 1,239,545. Ten years later, it had declined to 492,365 in a community of 1,620,902. By 1990, Denver was down to 467,610 in a sprawling area of 1,980,140. Today, it is estimated Denver has about 500,000 residents, overwhelmed by nearly two million suburbanites.

#### **The 'Crusade for Justice'**

The Chicano movement came to the fore in the mid-1960s. Individuals of Mexican-Indian heritage compose nearly a quarter of Denver's population, having been part and parcel of the area since the formation of the Colorado Territory in 1861. A former prize fighter and Democratic Party ward-heeler, Rodolpho "Corky" Gonzales, took the lead in 1966 in forming the Crusade for Justice, which demanded an end to police brutality, discriminatory court sentences on Mexican Americans, and school policies imposing English-only on students in need of bilingual education. The more Chicanos protested, the more the establishment had to respond. Soon numerous affirmative action programs were in place, recruiting African Americans and Hispanics to positions of power and influence in the corporate community. Black and latino activists also targeted the local Democratic Party. Before long, advocates of civil rights were on city council and in the legislature.

#### **Political upheavals**

In the post-war years, Denver sought revitalization through urban renewal. The Skyline Urban Renewal Project, authorized in 1967, eliminated the old working-class neighborhood along Larimer Street, an area city hall dismissed as skid row. And, despite mass

*continued in side bar on page 13*

River and Cherry Creek free of settlements of vagrants may force a few into shelters or permanent housing or simply to leave town. But clearing away the evidence of a homeless population does not eliminate either the need for low-cost accommodations or the poor's desire to live independently.

As the modern city of Denver has reinvented itself in the last few decades, the living situations of those who exist at the margins have been made increasingly precarious. An early wave of urban development in the 1960s flattened blocks of depressed buildings into parking lots, permanently eliminating hundreds of single room occupancy (SRO) units from the city's core. In the 1970s, the creation of a multi-institutional college campus bordering downtown was made possible by the demolition of the Auraria neighborhood, an enclave of mostly working-class and Latino residents. During the 1980s and 1990s, revitalization of the former warehouse district in lower downtown followed the construction of a stadium for Denver's new professional baseball team. Upscale commercial interests — shops, restaurants, clubs and high-priced lofts and condominiums — edged out shelters for the homeless.

Despite the impressive economic comeback from the oil industry "bust" that battered the city during the 1980s, the number of homeless persons in Denver continues to rise. A 1995 study showed that homelessness increased at a much higher rate in the early 1990s than in the late 1980s (*Patterns of Homelessness in the Denver Metropolitan Area*, University of Colorado at Denver). An average of 3,300 persons were homeless (living on the streets or in emergency or transitional housing) in Denver on any given night in August, 1995. The research also showed that children are the fastest growing segment of the homeless population in Denver, their number almost doubling during the first half of the 1990s.

Although the homeless tend to be concentrated in central Denver, there is evidence that many people become homeless while living in the suburbs, but move to Denver because services are available there. Urban gentrification has largely consolidated the location of Denver's homeless service

providers within the shadow of central downtown's skyscrapers. Overnight shelters for singles and families, health clinics, as well as distribution points for meals and clothing are clustered within a few short blocks. The Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative (MDHI) reports that about 1,000 emergency shelter beds are available each night in the city for individual adults; about half that number of spaces are available for families.

#### **Private solutions to a public dilemma: the St. Francis Center**

While the number of homeless persons is on the rise, the 1995 study also showed that the capacity of groups to provide services has also increased. Furthermore, Denver's network of privately initiated services is markedly preferable to the municipally run facilities in other major cities, according to Franklin James, lead investigator for the UCD study.

The St. Francis Center day shelter, a ministry of the Episcopal Diocese of Colorado, has provided a refuge from the streets for homeless people in Denver since 1983. In addition to offering homeless men, women and children a safe haven from the elements and the stress of street life, the Center provides shower facilities, telephone access, and limited health services. Guests can earn a clean set of clothes by working around the Center. They can also use the Center's street address to receive mail, a basic but critical service for preserving contact with family, the Veteran's Administration or other government agencies and employers. For a period of time limited only by the demand for available space, guests can also place their belongings in storage at the Center. A single black plastic garbage bag contains the extent of the worldly possessions for many who take advantage of this service.

Unlike many other faith-based programs for the homeless in Denver, the St. Francis Center does not subject its visitors to proselytizing or other demands for personal change. Basing its approach on the centrality of the Incarnation, the Center, its staff and numerous volunteers try to uphold the dignity of those who enter, trusting that respect will have a greater long-term impact than

any sermon or lecture. The homeless make about 125,000 visits to the St. Francis Center annually, about 400 each day.

The number of guests increased dramatically in late 1999 when the unexplained murders of six homeless men briefly focused the attention of the entire metro area on the dangers of living on the street. The crimes committed were vicious: Two of the victims were decapitated. Although all but one of the murders remain unsolved, territorial conflict between younger homeless people and older transients is suspected as a contributing factor. The names of the victims, along with the other homeless who have died on the streets of Denver, are engraved in a set of modest memorial plaques at the St. Francis Center.

Attention to the plight of the homeless is ordinarily a seasonal (i.e., Thanksgiving and Christmas) concern, but service providers are increasingly subject to scrutiny from locals displeased with their presence. The St. Francis Center recently began to feel the pressure of gentrification as complaints from a nearby property owner last year threatened to shut the facility down. Evidence of neighborhood redevelopment is beginning to encircle the facility. A number of buildings in the vicinity — some dating to the 19th century — are undergoing costly restoration and rehabilitation. Fears about the Center's impact on surrounding property values probably prompted a surge in community interest in the activities at St. Francis. The Center was able to persuade local authorities that providing a safe place for the homeless was beneficial for the neighborhood, and efforts were made to reduce the number of guests loitering near the entrance to the Center.

The Center has continued unabated in its efforts to provide a sanctuary for the homeless for the past 17 years, whether such concern has been in the public's favor or not. While the needs of the chronically homeless remain constant, the varying ability of service providers to "stay afloat" often has a ripple effect on other providers. This year, in collaboration with the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, the St. Francis Center helped avoid the closure of one of the few facilities in Denver where the most vulnerable homeless — the aged, the infirm, those with multiple disabilities — can be provided

with stable and secure shelter. The Social Security Income for an individual with mental illness is \$435 per month, an inadequate amount to provide housing, food and competent supervision. Grant funding from the city, as well as contributions from foundations and other private sources, will help keep the doors of the Valdez House open.

#### **The measure of 'progress': the closing of the frontier?**

What lies ahead for service providers like the St. Francis Center, particularly as a robust economy and subsequent development pressures continue? The options for the chronically homeless, who experience higher rates of mental illness and drug and alcohol addiction, are dwindling as cities undergo revitalization. Solutions for the problems of the homeless will inevitably challenge our own economic values. The invisible hand of the market makes no provision for those who, particularly because of illness, debilitation, or age, cannot fully participate in a capitalist system. It is imperative that the communities where we live — in addition to our faith-based initiatives — begin to think and strategize systemically, not just to respond with palliative measures. The metro Denver voters who approved the 1-cent tax on every \$10 to pay for a new football stadium will hardly feel the pinch of their largesse. Would that decent housing for Denver's poor deserved a fraction of the same consideration given to a home for its football team.

A few years ago, the author Kathleen Norris rekindled an appreciation for the spirituality of place in her book, *Dakota*. Her insight expressed the depth of our longing for stability and for a sense of connectedness to the land, to a particular place. For some in our inner cities, however, stability can only be measured by the 2.4 cubic feet of a single plastic garbage bag in storage at a day shelter for the homeless. When human progress prevents one's ability to find a place to stand and to belong, the western frontier will indeed be closed. ●

*Nancy Kinney is an Episcopalian doing graduate work in public policy at the University of Colorado in Denver.*



*From the late 1800s to the 1950s, so-called "down-and-outers" congregated in shanties along the South Platte near the scrap iron mills. The buildings shown here in Denver's Petertown in 1938 were demolished in the 1950s.*

protests and social upheavals, Denver rode high in the 1970s. This was the time of the international oil crisis. In response, Colorado touted its shale oil reserves, promising they were the solution to the alleged Arab control of petroleum resources. From 1973 until 1983, countless skyscrapers arose in central Denver, monoliths celebrating the dominance of oil buccaneers.

Many middle-class homeowners, in turn, found themselves deeply troubled by the city's direction. They liked old Denver, a town filled with numerous quaint, distinctive residential enclaves with affordable single-family houses. Seeing that a pro-business city hall did not care about such values, they banded together in neighborhood improvement associations to protect their interests.

In 1983, an aspiring young Latino legislator, Federico Peña, who had been staff attorney of the Chicano Education Project in the 1970s, built a coalition among black, Hispanic and neighborhood associations and won the mayoral election. Peña took power right about the time the oil boom went bust. While he named many blacks and Hispanics to high city posts, he also backed subsidies for new airports, convention centers, and development that further reshaped the central business district. When Peña became mayor, numerous low-income hotels and apartment houses sprinkled the fringes of downtown, but most have now been leveled. And the city destroyed another enclave of the poor, an area filled with shelters, to build a new baseball park in the early 1990s, Coors Field. The adjacent lower downtown area, long a section filled with warehouses and light industry, blossomed about the same time as the center of city night life.

Peña's successor, Wellington Webb, won the mayor's seat in 1991. Webb has repeatedly endorsed the city's numerous neighborhood improvement organizations. In the historic sections of the city, overwhelmingly populated by Hispanic and black renters, the improvement organizations primarily consist of white, recently settled homeowners. Ethnic/racial tensions, rooted in economic disparity, continue.

— Phil Goodstein is author of *Denver in Our Time: A People's History of the Modern Mile High City, Volume One: Big Money in the Big City*, Denver: New Social Publications, 1999.



# A 'TOXIC TOUR'

## Working for environmental justice at the grassroots

by Camille Colatosti



W.H. Jackson, courtesy The Colorado Historical Society (WHJ 3346)

Red Mountain Pass, Yankee Girl Mine, 1886

**In addition [to the pollution caused by the state's mining industry], U.S. government agencies such as the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy also manufactured chemical and nuclear weapons in Colorado and in the process generated toxic, hazardous and radioactive wastes. Colorado has been left with an unimaginable toxic burden that may take generations to remedy."**

**— Susan LeFever, Sierra Club Rocky Mountain Chapter**

**“W**HEN YOU VISIT DENVER, be sure to take a tour,” says Laurel Mattrey, assistant program director of the Colorado People's Environmental and Economic Network (COPEEN). But the tour Mattrey describes differs from the ones that most vacationers would immediately consider. “We call it the ‘toxic tour,’” explains Mattrey. “We want everyone to see what it is like to live in a neighborhood where the air, soil and water

are polluted, and the noise and smell of industry dominate.”

Since 1990, COPEEN has been not only giving “toxic tours,” but also working for environmental justice in Colorado.

“Environmental justice” was most clearly defined in the 1987 groundbreaking study of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice. This study, “Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States,” found that “race served as the determining factor regard-

# OF DENVER

ing the siting of polluting industries and dumps." This study also revealed that "three of every five African and Hispanic Americans live near uncontrolled toxic waste sites, and that facilities were more likely to be in poor and minority communities because they were seen as paths of least resistance."

A 1994 study of the National Wildlife Federation Corporate Conservation Council drew the same conclusion: "People of color and low-income communities are disproportionately exposed to health and environmental risks in their neighborhoods and in their jobs."

COPEEN, says Mattrey, "assists communities in Denver and throughout Colorado who are dealing with environmental issues. We work with mining issues outside of metro-Denver; we work with people who have a Superfund site in their neighborhood and want to be sure that the Environmental Protection Agency monitors and cleans that site effectively."

## **A beautiful state — with an 'unimaginable toxic burden'**

When you first picture Denver, you probably don't picture pollution, says Mattrey. Colorado has a national reputation for its beautiful mountains and vistas, but the state suffers from a wide span of toxic, hazardous and radioactive pollution. As Susan LeFever, the director of the Sierra Club Rocky Mountain Chapter explains, the mining that began in 1859 — mining for gold, lead, silver, coal, tungsten, vanadium and uranium — "left much of the state polluted by human, animal and industrial wastes." While only one mine remains active in Colorado's San Luis Valley, a valley once dominated by mines, many have left their mark. Mining companies used cyanide to leach silver and gold out of the rock. Then they took the mine trailings — the waste products — and left them in a heap. Trailings from a number of Colorado's old mining sites have polluted groundwater,

riverbeds and streams.

"In addition," says LeFever, "U.S. government agencies such as the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy also manufactured chemical and nuclear weapons in Colorado, and in the process generated toxic, hazardous and radioactive wastes. Colorado has been left with an unimaginable toxic burden that may take generations to remedy."

COPEEN's "toxic tours" show people this burden. The tour includes the four Denver neighborhoods that the Environmental Protection Agency has declared Superfund sites. "These are four *entire* neighborhoods — not just factories or buildings — but four neighborhoods that received this status," says Mattrey, because substantial concentrations of cadmium, arsenic and lead have been found in the soil.

## **Grassroots victories**

Despite this bleak news, COPEEN has a number of successes to show off during its "toxic tour." One of the earliest victories concerns RAMP Industries. COPEEN board member Beth Blissman notes that when she first became involved with COPEEN in 1994, "RAMP had just abandoned over 6,000 barrels of undocumented toxic waste in a North Denver neighborhood called Sunnyside. RAMP posed as a recycler and they were going to act as a middle-man to take low-level radioactive waste from colleges and universities, treat it properly and then dispose of it. Instead, they just abandoned it."

There was a quick response. "The EPA declared RAMP a Superfund site and it has since been cleaned up. Rarely do we see such fast action by the EPA," adds Blissman.

## **Asarco**

Another great victory was Asarco. COPEEN supported the efforts of a group of environmentalists — Neighbors for a Toxic Free

Community — in the Denver neighborhood of Globeville, which in 1994 sued Asarco and won a jury verdict of \$24 million in damages. "This was the largest citizen lawsuit ever won against a major corporation," says Blissman.

When a 1989 State of Colorado public health evaluation revealed that Globeville was sitting on contaminated land, community leaders asked the state to clean up the land. But, says Margaret Escamilla, a plaintiff in the case, "the state told us that the lead, cadmium and arsenic released by Asarco created only a small risk. We didn't believe them."

Asarco, Inc., a multinational producer of cadmium oxide and powder, high-purity and nonferrous metals, was found to have spewed arsenic and cadmium into the air and soil. The court required Asarco to remediate the soil around 567 homes, and replace soil to a depth of 18 inches on 285 properties.

Escamilla, a 45-year-old mother of two, describes her neighborhood, whose population includes Polish-American, Mexican-American, and African-American residents, as "a small community, a pretty poor community. Most everybody knows everybody." Escamilla has lived in Globeville for 23 years; her husband, Robert, is a third-generation Globeville resident. The Asarco plant had been in Globeville since 1886. Although Asarco has since stopped operating this plant, it still operates mines in other parts of the U.S., as well as in Australia, Mexico and Peru.

## **Ludlow**

After Asarco, the "toxic tour" could take visitors past Park Hill, a mainly African-American section of Denver. There, tourists would have to notice what is missing — the toxic waste transfer station that had once been proposed. In fact, a Denver zoning administrator had granted the station the right to locate at Park Hill before Park Hill for Safe Neighbor-

hoods, working with COPEEN and the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, convinced the Denver Board of Adjustment for Zoning Appeals to reverse the decision. Ludlow Environmental Services, Inc., had planned to transport hazardous waste from a four-state region into Denver, where it would be housed for up to 10 days before it was transported for treatment, storage or disposal.

"But Park Hill was already saturated with toxic stuff," says COPEEN's Blissman. "So we raised hell around the zoning permit and we told Ludlow to take a hike."

### **Shattuck Chemical**

Some victories come more quickly than others. The ongoing case against Shattuck Chemical, a processor of radioactive radium and other heavy metals in another Denver neighborhood—Overland—has been a long and hard battle.

People in Overland were pleased with a 1991 recommendation of the Colorado Health Department to clean up the site by shipping radioactive waste from there to Utah. "Everything seemed to be on track," says Helen Orr, who lives just across the street from Shattuck. "Most people thought that was the end of it."

But in 1992 the Colorado Health Department and the EPA changed their minds. Instead of cleaning the site and removing the hazardous waste, the company was allowed to bury the waste and cap the land. EPA documents unsealed in 1999 revealed that this decision was made after Shattuck had private meetings with the EPA.

The remedy that the EPA approved allowed Shattuck to mix radioactive soil with fly ash, then bury this on its six-acre site. A clay cap, covered with rocks, is said to protect and contain the material. The result? A one-story mound referred to in the neighborhood as "Shattuck Mountain" and "the hot rocks." A chain-link fence and barbed wire surround this hill.

Residents continue to pressure the EPA to reverse its decision. Neighbors believe that state officials did not take the time to hear their concerns. At the request of U.S. Senator Wayne Allured and other Colorado officials, EPA ombudsman Robert Martin is investigating the decision to allow the burial and capping of waste.

The Platte River, says Blissman, "is only seven feet below the surface of the soil. This runs right under the capped land, and the river is already showing contamination."

### **Rocky Flats: 'Would you let your children hike there?'**

After Shattuck Mountain, the "toxic tour" could next take tourists outside of Denver, with hikes to two unusual "environmental" sites: the recently renamed Rocky Flats Environmental Technology Site (formerly the Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant), and the Rocky Mountain Wildlife Refuge (formerly the Rocky Mountain Arsenal). How did two nuclear weapons plants—no longer manufacturing and now declared Superfund sites — become environmental centers? That's a question that Denver environmental activists are asking. "Would you hike there? Would you let your children hike there?" asks Sandy Horrocks, a member of the Conservation Club's Rocky Mountain Arsenal Subcommittee, charged with monitoring the clean-up. "I sure wouldn't."

For nearly 40 years, from 1952 until December 1989, Rocky Flats produced plutonium triggers, using various radioactive and hazardous materials, including plutonium, uranium and beryllium. Located just 15 miles northwest of Denver, more than 3.5 million people live within a 50-mile radius of the site. Over 300,000 people live in what is known as the Rocky Flats watershed. Rocky Flats also has the distinction, among all nuclear sites in the U.S., of housing the largest inventory of plutonium that is not in final weapons form, with more than 3.2 tons of plutonium spread through more than 8,000 containers.

A Department of Energy promotional brochure describes Rocky Flats as "a small city. It comprises more than 700 structures on a 385-acre industrial area surrounded by nearly 6,000 acres of controlled open space. This open space serves as a buffer between Rocky Flats and the encroaching communities and is home to many species of animals and plants."

Designated by the EPA as a Superfund site, Rocky Flats has been undergoing a massive clean-up since 1995. But there are a number of problems. "It is hard to clean up a federal facility, especially a weapons manufacturing

facility, when information has not been declassified," says Sue Maret, who has been working with the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Sierra Club for several years. "Regulators cannot make decisions without adequate information."

In addition, explains Maret's colleague, Susan LeFever, "the plant has a long history of sloppy management practices, and when dealing with radioactive material, there is no room for sloppy."

In fact, management practices in the past were so sloppy that on June 6, 1989, the FBI and the EPA raided the plant to investigate. They found evidence that hazardous wastes and radioactive mixed wastes had been illegally sorted, treated and disposed of at the plant. According to the Sierra Club Rocky Mountain Chapter, the agents also "discovered violations of the Clean Water Act and other environmental statutes through a variety of continuing acts, including the illegal discharge of pollutants, hazardous materials, and radioactive matter into" a number of area waterways — the Platte River, Woman Creek, Walnut Creek, and the drinking water supplies for nearby cities.

### **Acting 'above the law'**

In 1992, a federal grand jury attempted to indict officials responsible for alleged criminal activities at the site, but indictments were blocked. The grand jury report was sealed from public view until January 1993, when Federal Judge Sherman Finesilver approved release of a redacted version of the Grand Jury report. However, an unofficial copy of the uncensored report made its way to the Net and can be found at <[www.downwinders.org/rocky\\_fl.htm](http://www.downwinders.org/rocky_fl.htm)>.

The Colorado Federal District Court Report of the Federal District Special Grand Jury 89-2, January 24, 1992, concludes that, "for 40 years, federal, Colorado, and local regulators and elected officials have been unable to make DOE and the corporate operators of the plant obey the law. Indeed, the plant has been and continues to be operated by government and corporate employees who have placed themselves above the law and who have hidden their illegal conduct behind the public's trust by engaging in a continuing campaign of distraction, deception and dishonesty."



At Rocky Flats, one of the worst releases of radioactive waste took place in the 1950s and 1960s. Officials stored oil laced with plutonium and chemicals in steel drums. Beginning in 1958, the drums were placed outdoors on a concrete pad. Within a year, the drums began leaking, but officials did nothing to address the problem. Winds from the Rocky Mountains, blowing sometimes as high as 90 miles per hour, picked up soil contaminated from leaking barrels and blew it towards Denver.

In the end, the U.S. Justice Department settled with the DOE and its contractor, Rockwell. Rockwell pleaded guilty to five felonies and five misdemeanors and paid \$18.5 million in fines, an amount smaller than the bonuses the company received during the time the crimes were committed.

The Sierra Club's LeFever believes that the clean-up is facing many of the same problems that plagued the production at Rocky Flats. "Our concern," she says, "is that the DOE is not looking seriously at the problems and the need for research and testing before clean-up decisions are made. They are so focused on public image that they cast aside safety."

LeFever, a part of the community board that oversees the clean-up process at Rocky Flats, describes some of the latest struggles. "The DOE," she explains, "wants to do a controlled burn at the plant. This means burning a huge number of acres of land." Prairie ecosystems typically have natural fires that help them stabilize and bring nutrients back into the soil. These controlled burns can rejuvenate the national ecosystem and help prevent accidental fires.

But, says LeFever, "the DOE doesn't have much information about what kinds of radioactive issues we're looking at. They are in a rush to get this done and they are not being careful. If there are radioactive hot spots out there and they start burning, those radioactive isotopes will become airborne and people will breathe it. They have done a very limited amount of testing — 10 or 12 soil samples — so this is not adequate to say that the whole area is safe."

In addition, Rocky Flats is shipping nuclear waste to a Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) near Carlsbad, New Mexico. In fact, about 2,000 shipments of waste from Rocky

Flats will travel down Interstate 25 through Denver to New Mexico, where it will be buried 2,150 feet deep in a salt bed.

The concerns about shipping, says the Sierra Club's Maret, include "risks to folks in traffic, accident concerns and not being able to characterize the waste. A couple of the shipments leaked and some of them have been misanalyzed."

There are also environmental justice issues, she adds. "The shipments travel through many poor communities."

### **Rocky Mountain Wildlife Refuge?**

Traveling from Rocky Flats to the Rocky Mountain Arsenal brings home Maret's concerns. The Arsenal, located just north of Denver's Stapleton Airport, has been called the most contaminated square mile in the world. In 1942, the army began production there, manufacturing mustard gas, lewisite, phosgene, button bombs, gb sarin, and napalm bombs. Beginning in 1951, the army leased space at the Arsenal to Shell Oil, who manufactured pesticides such as dieldrin, aldrin, vapon (also known as DDVP, Shell's No-Pest Strip), DDT, blade and chlorine. Until 1956, hazardous waste effluent was regularly discharged into unlined evaporation ponds; then it was buried, then incinerated. Then solar evaporation was used, then well injection and chemical neutralization. Currently, the Sierra Club, which works to monitor the Superfund clean-up of the site, estimates that there are between 179 and 181 contaminated sites at the Arsenal.

Sandy Horrocks, of the conservation group's Rocky Mountain Arsenal Subcommittee, has serious doubts about the clean-up. "The site is being remediated, not cleaned up," she says. "A lot of it will be landfilled, and some will be capped. I would hesitate to say that there is a perfectly clean area."

"Turning the Arsenal into a so-called 'wildlife refuge' was a brilliant idea," says Horrocks sarcastically. "It reduced clean-up standards, therefore saving dollars, from a residential level of remediation to a less stringent level for wildlife. I view it as a way to do less clean-up. The clean-up is based on cost effectiveness rather than on doing what is best for public health."

It was Shell's idea to transform the Arsenal into a refuge, says Horrocks. "Shell influ-

enced Colorado Congresswoman Pat Schroeder to campaign for the a National Wildlife Refuge designation based on an endangered species — the bald eagle. Eagles started coming to the site in late fall and early winter. This became a real big deal."

Some say that the eagles were baited and encouraged to nest at the Arsenal just to win the refuge status. Many also note that the other wildlife in the refuge is there unnaturally. It was pushed there as urban and suburban sprawl eliminated more and more open spaces. According to the Sierra Club Rocky Mountain Chapter, the wildlife was then trapped there with a "million-dollar fence."

"The health of the animals is a real concern," says Horrocks. "There is a problem with animals who don't leave the arsenal for their food. For the eagles, they eat elsewhere and are only at the Arsenal for two to three months. Other birds, who are there year round, are being hurt and many are dying."

Despite the problems with the clean-up, Shell has been funding a visitors center and the Audubon Society has been conducting tours. In fact, groups of school children take nature trips to the refuge. "Parents sign permission forms thinking that the clean-up is complete," says Horrocks.

The Sierra Club sent letters to schools informing principals of the health risks and asking them to stop taking field trips there. The Sierra Club has also asked that refuge tours be suspended and trail building and volunteer activities cease until dioxin levels get under control.

"But it's been very confusing," says Horrocks. "There's an awful lot of publicity given to the eagles and the wildlife center."

Horrocks adds, "One of the most dangerous things we have to deal with is the hazardous waste that we produce and most people don't understand this — the complications that come with trying to clean it up. The military has more than 10,000 sites to clean up. Unless we start coming up with better ways to clean up sites, unless we put real money into clean up, unless we really clean sites and stop just burying waste and covering it up — unless we do this, we won't have much earth left." ●

*Camille Colatosti is The Witness' staff writer, <colakwik@ix.netcom.com>.*

# EARTH-LINKING



*'Spirit returns to the land when people work together,' proclaims the Spirit Eagle on the Peace Garden Mural across the street from the St. Francis Center, a day shelter for Denver's homeless.*

**'You cannot  
know who  
you are if  
you do not  
know where  
you are'**

*by Cathy Mueller*

**To become dwellers in the land, to come to know the Earth fully and honestly, the crucial and perhaps only and all-encompassing task is to understand place, the immediate specific place where we live.**

**— Kirkpatrick Sale**

**F**OR PEOPLE who live on the margins of society, life is not always hospitable. Yet, amazingly, when people step into nature, everyone is equal. Almost five years ago, Bette Ann Jaster (a Dominican Sister of Hope) and I (a Sister of Loretto), wanted to find a way to share the Earth's invitation to belong to the land in this part of Colorado with people in Denver who often are pushed aside and isolated. Through the support of our religious communities, each of which has a deep commitment to work for justice for the poor and marginalized as well as for the Earth, we found a way: We founded EarthLinks, an experiential Earth education organization that links persons on the margins of society with the Earth and other people.

Early on, when hearing of the vision of EarthLinks, a man who was homeless said to us, "You want to link us with the Earth? We sleep on it every night!" But after joining us on some nature trips he invited us to network with another group that provides housing for the homeless. Through such invitations, EarthLinks has grown and evolved.

EarthLinks is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to enable persons of all ages to learn to see, appreciate, celebrate and integrate the great diversity inherent in the Earth, her inhabitants, her elements, her mystery. We begin very close to home, exploring the places where people live — their local parks, favorite gardens, even the parades marching through their streets. EarthLinks gathers people who are homeless, living in transitional housing or living with physical or psychological challenges and then ventures out to a park with a creek, to the mountains, or to a wildlife refuge.

We walk, sometimes with a naturalist who will talk about the geological formations, or the edible plants, or the migrating and local wildlife. In cold weather, we go to museums to learn about earthquakes, atmospheric research, the dinosaur trail in our backyard, or about the lives of early pioneers. "We may be homeless," one group member said, "but we still want to learn." On these outings we share a meal and enjoy conversation. In the process, we create community.

"These trips help my mental health," one participant told us. Another said that upon returning from a one-day adventure with EarthLinks, he felt like he "just returned from a vacation." Time in nature can renew and revive us, better enabling us to face some of the chaos and difficult challenges of life.

### From barren lots to blooming beauty

This last year, we began several garden projects. We used elements of horticulture therapy along with people's desire to vision healthy, beautiful gardens and work to create them. In the process, EarthLinks' participants and Kinfolk (volunteers) are transforming several litter-strewn lots into places of beauty and abundance.

In downtown Denver, across the street from the St. Francis Center, a day shelter for the homeless, EarthLinks worked with the Center's guests to dream the garden. Then, through many small steps of testing soil (which turned out to be highly contaminated), building raised beds from scraps found in dumpsters, bringing in soil shovel by shovel, planting donated seeds and plants, watering throughout the hot summer, the garden became a reality. The sunflowers, cosmos and roses grew and bloomed into vibrant colors. "Last summer was the only time a rose bloomed over there — probably in all time!" one of the homeless guests remarked. Another said he liked bringing broccoli, tomatoes, chilis and squash that we grew ourselves on EarthLinks' trips.

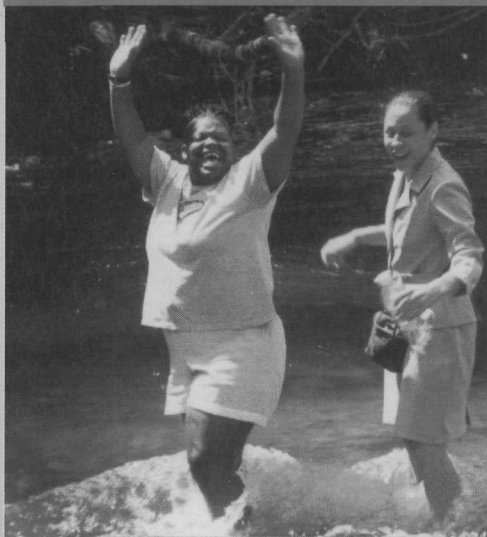
From the wall bordering the garden grew a mural, reflecting the diversity of the people in the neighborhood and affirming that each has something to offer. The Spirit Eagle waters all of us, proclaiming that "Spirit returns to the land when people work together." The project involved homeless guests at St. Francis Center and many other volunteers, through the direction of local artist Emmanuel Martinez.

This year we are continuing the garden at St. Francis Center as well as working at several new sites: a boarding house directed by the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, a residential setting for women living with mental health and addiction issues, and another housing situation for women at risk. Our goal is not simply to create gardens. But a garden speaks of our inner landscapes. What we plan for and nurture outside ourselves can profoundly affect what is happening inside us. As one homeless man who worked in the St. Francis Center garden commented, a person can find dignity working in the soil.

### 'Organic' programming

The programming at EarthLinks can be called "organic." We network with other nonprofit agencies to connect with people who are not in the mainstream. We listen to them, plan activities that reflect their deep desires, and then together enjoy these adventures. We also find ways to link people — homeless participants helped with a Thanksgiving food drive for families; women in one residential program helped to clean up the yard and garden for a new program for

**Alleluia! Renewing spirits through experiencing a mountain creek.**



women coming out of prison; folks who are economically secure work side-by-side in a garden with people who are poor and possibly homeless. In the ways of the Earth, we are all equal and very precious.

Our hope is to assist people of all ages in becoming grounded where they are. As Wendell Berry says: "You cannot know who you are if you do not know where you are." So we take steps together to develop a sense of place.

### BioBox Project

Another EarthLinks' program is the BioBox Project. It is an experiential, Earth-education adventure for students and teachers alike as they explore their school grounds, neighborhood, bioregion, and local habitat. Fifth- and sixth-grade students from Denver are partnered with peers from other parts of Col-

orado. This partnership enables students to learn about their own area and then to teach their peers in Denver or in the mountains, plains or foothills of Colorado.

We promote using the school surroundings as "grounds for learning," creating gardens on site or pacing the block, measuring distances, watching for erosion, noticing plants and pets and trees, looking at everything with attention. Students fill their BioBoxes with artifacts, reports, experiment results — whatever will enable their partners to come to know the diversity in their area. In this process, students often learn new facets of their own neighborhood, such as the efforts that have been made to reclaim a lake in a neighborhood park.

The partners exchange their BioBoxes twice during the year. The highlight is traveling to meet one another and explore each other's area first-hand. The city kids experience farms and farm animals, feed lots, mountain streams, life in a smaller community. The rural kids see urban wildlife and parts of Denver they usually don't get to visit — inner-city neighborhoods, the 16th Street Mall, or a soup kitchen. One discovery is that it is the same South Platte River that flows through the city, where it is managed and controlled by the Water Department, that becomes free flowing on its way out to the eastern plains, where the banks are filled with trees, grasses and wildlife.

We are motivated by the reality that all life is connected and, as Shakespeare said, "One touch of nature makes the whole world kin." Through her seasons, elements, species and mystery, the Earth teaches us the importance of diversity, the depth of the inner life, the value of reciprocity and cooperation, the wonder of communion. We explore these realities as we walk a dirt path in the mountains, sit by a calm lake inhabited by geese and cormorants, marvel at the deer that cross our way, or plant a seed that is full of potential. What we do is very simple and very profound. Together, we are learning where we live, and in that process, we are coming home. ●

*Cathy Mueller lives, works and learns in her native South Platte Bioregion. Contact EarthLinks at: 623 Fox St. Denver, CO 80204-4541; 303-389-0085; <[www.earthlinks-colorado.org](http://www.earthlinks-colorado.org)>.*



# We're grateful for your support!

THE STAFF of *The Witness* and the Episcopal Church Publishing Board have been gratified by the financial support we have received from the people listed here over the past year. Their enthusiasm for our work has been a great encouragement as we continue working hard to provide the sort of analysis and inquiry useful to Episcopalians and Anglicans wishing to tread a faithful path in these bewildering times. We are deeply grateful.

—Julie A. Wortman, publisher

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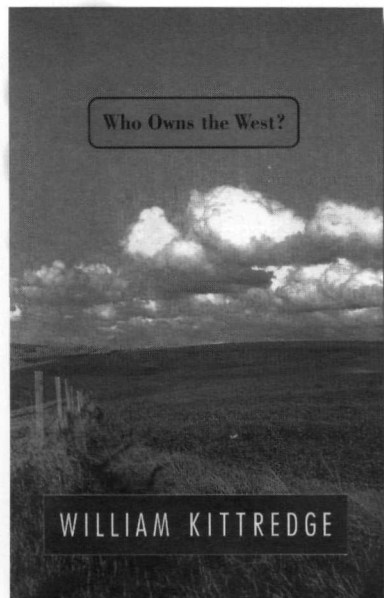
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# Who owns the West?

by John Bach



## Who Owns The West?

by William Kittredge  
(Mercury House, 1996) 168pp.

IF YOU WERE REAL LUCKY as a kid, you'd have a guy like William Kittredge for a grandfather, which is to say, someone to tell you stories. What's more, he'd tell you stories about stories; about how you live by and learn from them, and how when stories go bad, people and their societies suffer and become lifeless.

Kittredge's *Who Owns the West?* also reveals him to be historian, commentator, prophet, raconteur, and elder. The book is wonderful grandfather material gleaned from a well-traveled past, great intersections with people and nature, and an ability to keep eyes open to the miracles and tragedies of humankind and its scars upon the earth.

Kittredge grew up on, and later managed, tens of thousands of acres in southeastern Oregon, spanning the period of transition

from literal to figurative horsepower. His family raised livestock and crops on a mega scale. He altered the landscape with huge machinery, mutated the soil with chemicals, poisoned the water with runoff. Then, after something of a conversion, he turned away from it all, saying that the land should be given back to the birds and turned into a wildlife refuge. Lifelong friends considered him a "turncoat," and never forgave the betrayal.

He became a writer, professor and storyteller, writing in the tradition of Wallace Stegner, Terry Tempest Williams and Wendell Berry (all of whom take human involvement with Nature personally), hearkening back to John Muir and Thoreau. Their common theme: 1) Nature is beautiful and dignified, maybe even sacred. 2) We have really messed it up. 3) We ought to get better and clean up our mess.

Nowhere is this more pressing than in the West, an area rich in open resource potential and thus subject to rapacious plundering. In this, the West is not unique, just newer, larger and more immediately vulnerable to the transition from ambition to conquest. Western politics, environment, and landscape have all changed. Jobs are no longer secure; human impact has turned back on its perpetrators; heritage and assumed rights are no longer sacrosanct. Emotional, spiritual, and physical dislocations abound and violence becomes more prevalent.

Problems facing the West are legion: unchecked development, dammed and polluted water, clearcut logging, toxic deposits, transport of nuclear waste, despoiling of Yucca Mountain, and continued genocidal treatment of Native Americans. "We know the story of civilization," Kittredge says. "It can be understood as a history of conquest, law-bringing and violence. We need a new story, in which we learn to value intimacy."

For Kittredge, stories are a necessary part of reimagining the West. There's been a

plethora of bad stories about "a world in which moral problems were clearly defined, and strong men stepped forward to solve them." This no longer works. Bad stories reek of Manifest Destiny, of owning not cherishing, of running roughshod over impediments to wealth, of equating power with wisdom. "Can we learn," he wonders, "to care about stories centered on gifts rather than getting, on giving away and learning to practice the arts of empathy?"

Kittredge's prose is folksy though eloquent, didactic yet accessible, at times peppery but never vulgar. His descriptions of nature come off the page like music, his prose matching the landscape. You hear his voice and can discern his spirit.

What does Kittredge want? "A process," he writes, "everybody involved — ranchers, townspeople, conservationists — all taking part in that reimagining. ... What we need in our West is another kind of story, in which we see ourselves for what we mostly are, decent people striving to form and continually reform a just society in which we find some continuity, taking care in the midst of useful and significant lives."

Is it possible to create this new vision while nuclear transports haul radioactivity to leaky graves, while the affluent invade working communities to build 10,000-square-foot houses, while ancient forests are clearcut, while toxic deposits infiltrate nature, while hundreds of ICBMs lie in silos?

The challenge is there, waiting for just the sort of reimagining Kittredge inspires.

So, "Who Owns the West?" Precisely those who could never fathom the idea of ownership. Those who would understand themselves to be stewards for all forms of life. And those who would create and tell the most life-affirming stories for the future. ●

*John Bach lives in the West and spends most of his waking hours outdoors.*



# THE INTERFAITH ALLIANCE OF COLORADO

## Standing up to be counted

by Michael H. Carrier

**I**N EARLY MAY, 1998, five of us sat around a table at a Denver coffee shop to talk about a challenge issued by Steven Foster, Senior Rabbi of Denver's Temple Emmanuel at the first annual banquet of the Denver Area Interfaith Clergy Conference. Foster had called the audience to take a stand against the narrow, exclusive and divisive politics of the Religious Right that had become so powerful here. Now a dominant force in the state's Republican Party, Foster believed this well-funded and well-organized group was only going to become more influential and powerful unless the state's liberal/progressive religious community could dispute its claim to speak for all people of faith. The upcoming election, when the state would be electing a new governor and many state legislators would be forced by term-limits to give up their seats, seemed an opportune time to begin a counter-movement.

Our coffee-shop group was convinced that liberal people of faith were ready to be counted. Desiring a statewide coalition of clergy and laity representing a broad, interfaith spectrum of religious traditions, we took as our organizing model that developed by The Interfaith Alliance in Washington, D.C., itself a relatively new group, having been founded in 1994. We decided to call ourselves The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado (TIA-CO). And for our first initiative, we opted to engage the state political campaigns, already well underway. Our hope was to ensure that religion was not used as a weapon against or to demonize candidates.

Making use of resources developed by The Interfaith Alliance, we began by contacting every person running for office and asking them to sign a "Code of Civility," which asked them to conduct their campaigns with integrity — to speak to the issues and not attack persons, and to refrain from using religion as a weapon against their opponents. Approximately 70 percent of the candidates

signed the Code. The media coverage we received helped to begin making us known to people who identified with and supported our efforts. Many legislators, too, expressed appreciation for this first step in creating a new political climate.

After the election, TIA-CO began organizing a series of educational forums. In March 1999, we heard from four legislators, a senator and representative from each party, on the "State of the State." Highlighted were a number of "pro-gun" bills. One was a "pre-emption" bill that would have gutted Denver's strict gun control laws, including a ban on assault weapons. The second was a "conceal and carry" bill mandating that sheriffs give permits to anyone who qualified, thereby losing their discretionary control.

TIA-CO joined with the mayor's office, state legislators and other groups to hold a rally opposing these pieces of legislation. Soon after, on the morning of April 20, 1999, reports came out of Columbine High School of the worst school shooting in U.S. history. Within days, the state legislature pulled all gun-related legislation from consideration.

For many people in Colorado, Columbine galvanized a growing sentiment that ordinary citizens needed to take the lead if effective legislation around firearms safety and responsibility was ever to be passed into law. With that in mind, a bipartisan organization called SAFE Colorado was born. In the fall of 1999 SAFE brought together a number of organizations, including TIA-CO, the Police Chiefs Association, the PTA and The Colorado Children's Campaign, to work together in promoting reasonable gun control legislation.

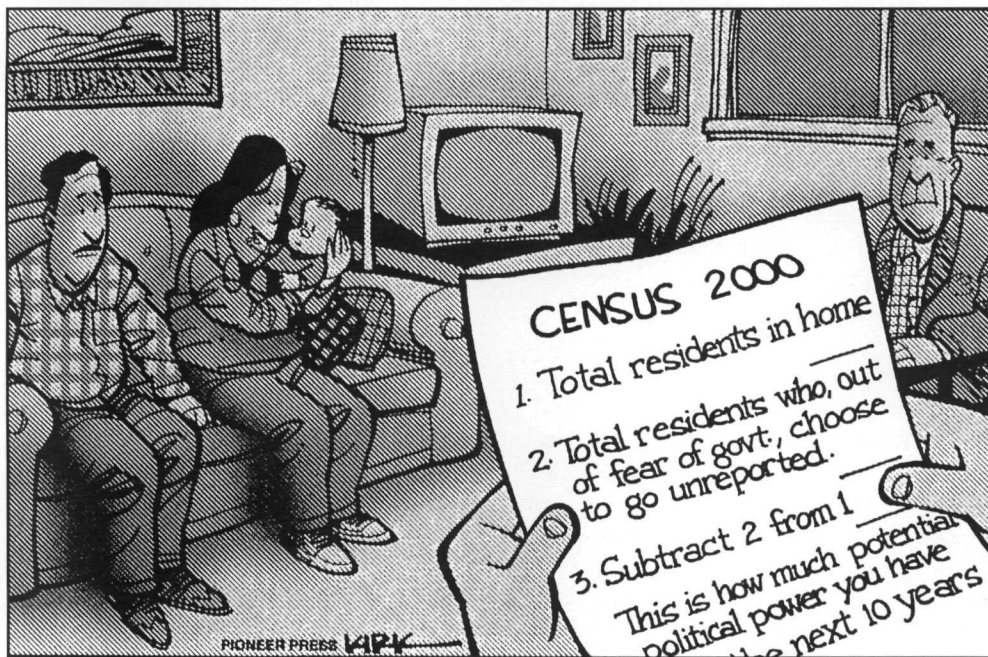
As the new legislature convened this year, the governor and the state's attorney general, a Republican and a Democrat, proposed a five-point legislative package that was endorsed by SAFE, TIA-CO and others around the table. But although poll after poll shows that 80 to 90 percent of Coloradans

favor more restrictive gun laws, our legislature remains unresponsive. As a result, SAFE Colorado, TIA-CO and others will be working together to place an initiative on the November ballot that will require background checks on individuals purchasing handguns at gun shows.

This year's legislative session also saw the introduction of a bill requiring both the posting of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms and the observance of a moment of silence at the beginning of each school day. Since TIA-CO opposed this measure on constitutional and religious grounds, I was invited by the Anti-Defamation League to a luncheon debate with the bill's sponsor, a Republican Senator and Presbyterian Elder. In addition, I gave testimony against the bill when it came before the Senate Education Committee. But despite the overwhelming public testimony against the legislation, the bill passed out of committee to be debated and voted on by the Senate. In response, TIA-CO called a press conference to publicly state our opposition, which not only created a lively debate in the media, but also heated debate on the Senate floor, leading the sponsor to eventually withdraw the bill.

Reflecting on that coffee-shop gathering two years ago, I remember the trepidation with which the five of us, some of us meeting for the first time, considered Steven Foster's challenge to begin speaking up for a progressive religious perspective on the issues facing our state. We worried that we might not be able to make an impact. These past two years have shown us that we were wrong. Pray for us as we continue developing the organizational support so critical in sustaining our work for the long haul. ●

*Michael Carrier is a Presbyterian minister at Denver's Calvary Presbyterian Church and the chair of The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado, <tiacolorado@tialliance.org>.*



## Christian kosher laws?

Christians might consider adopting contemporary forms of kosher laws, Garret Keizer suggests in *The Christian Century* (4/19-26/00).

"We live in a time when Christians of the industrialized world sense that they are implicated in any number of crimes against nature and neighbor but feel powerless to extricate themselves from their own culpability," Keizer writes. "We live in a time when many Christians feel a crisis of identity within an alien culture that not so long ago described itself (albeit incredibly) as 'Christian.'"

"This is not unlike the historical situation in which a group of Israelites found themselves in the sixth century before the Common Era. They were exiles in Babylon, a conquered people without country or shrine. They needed ways in which to preserve their identity and counteract their powerlessness. They also needed a way in which households could effectively replace the temple they had last seen in flames.

"Their answer to these needs was profoundly simple. They codified the way they ate. They took the preparation and eating of food—that is to say, they took the basic stuff of biological, domestic and economic life and put it at the center of their religious life.

"They were, of course, a fragile minority. In contrast, there are at present more than 250 million Christians in North America. What if even half of them refused to purchase factory-produced chicken because that kind of food production is unjust to family farmers, unhealthy for poultry workers and certainly unpleasant for chickens? In other words, because it was 'against their religion.'"

## Macabre vegetables

A Boston demonstration against biotechnology in March drew some 2,500 protesters, *The Boston Globe* reported (3/27/00).

"Protesters dressed as mutant creatures and macabre vegetables marched along five blocks of Boylston Street. The demonstration capped three days of a counter-conference staged in the shadow of Bio2000, a biotechnology convention at the Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center.

"Organizers of 'Biodevastation 2000' yesterday said the march, and the three-hour rally in Copley Square that preceded it, offered proof that the fledgling movement is catching up with those in Europe, where protesters have forced governments to rethink the sale of genetically modified foods."

## Looking back on Seattle

The media's "obsessive focus on property destruction" by some WTO protesters in Seattle led to under-reporting of significant exchanges made possible by the nonviolent blockade, writes Chris Nye in *Fellowship* (3-4/00). "Many reporters unfairly depicted protesters as ignorant or vague on the issues," Nye says. "Not one reported the exchange I heard between a young man and a delegate from the European Union, one of hundreds that took place that day.

"The protester asked the delegate about a controversial WTO ruling striking down local laws that required shrimp trawlers to use equipment to protect dolphins from their nets.

"Perhaps it's a burden to industry,' hazarded the delegate.

"Do you know how much those devices cost?' the protester inquired.

"No I don't,' the delegate replied.

"Fifty dollars,' came the answer from the protester. 'What shrimp trawler can't afford 50 dollars for a low-end dolphin protector? And if they can't afford it, why shouldn't governments help them acquire it?'

"During a 30-minute conversation, the protester offered well-reasoned arguments supported by statistics and analysis. Similar scenes were repeated throughout the day as delegates, prevented from entering the convention hall by the protesters' blockades or the police, were deluged with questions and comments. The kind of access that corporations pay thousands of dollars for was afforded free by the protesters' nonviolent blockade."

## Guerrilla curriculum

Convinced that TV-dependence was depriving his students of critical life experience, New York teacher John Taylor Gatto sent them on solitary pilgrimages through the streets of the city.

"Always acting in conspiracy with the kids' parents (who were as desperate as I was), I sent my 13-year-old students out to journey alone on foot through the five boroughs of New York City," Gatto writes in *The Sun* (4/00). "Some walked the circumference of Manhattan, a distance of about 28 miles.



People acting out of religious convictions were among the protesters who blocked intersections around the World Bank/IMF meetings in Washington, D.C. this past April 16.

Others walked through different neighborhoods, comparing and contrasting them and constructing profiles of the people who lived in each from clues of dress, speech and architecture, coupled with interviews and library research. Some mapped Central Park, great university campuses, churches, businesses or museums. A few invaded such government departments as the board of education or the courts, describing and analyzing what they saw there.

"I didn't force my students to do this, but I made a standing offer that any of them could get a day or two or 10 away from school to explore part of the city — as long as she or he was willing to walk alone."

Commenting on the recognition he received from school authorities, Gatto says, "The irony is that my guerrilla curriculum was designed to sabotage exactly the kind of passive attitudes that government schooling, like television, depends on."

## Gardening for bio-diversity

"Some scientists suggest that the preservation of bio-diversity in many places may depend on gardeners," Lucinda Keils writes in

*Groundwork for a Just World* (3/13/00). "If you garden or live in a place that has gardens, you can do something. Even planting a small number of native wildflowers and grasses will help preserve species. Learn which native trees, shrubs and plants feed native birds, animals and insects. Plant and preserve these natives. Ask nurseries to stock native plants and to stop stocking invasive exotic species. ... Because they are already genetically adapted to local conditions, native species require less or no fertilizer, and no pesticides. Once established they generally require no additional watering. They belong here."

## Police license to kill

"The construction of a vast prison-industrial complex and the enlargement of private security forces throughout the U.S. have created the preconditions for a politically active, ideologically motivated national police apparatus," Columbia University's Manning Marable writes in *Along the Color Line* (3/00). "Thousands of cops no longer believe they can leave 'justice' to the courts. Many thousands more doubt the capacity or will of most elected officials to curb street crimes.

"It is instructive, and disturbing, that widespread examples of police deadly force and the disregard for citizens' Constitutional rights is not opposed by a significant number of white Americans. For example, in the wake of Patrick Dorismond's killing, New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani made callous remarks about the dead black man. Giuliani illegally disclosed Dorismond's sealed juvenile records, and refused to extend condolences to the deceased's family. All blacks, Latinos and even most whites living in New York City were appalled by Giuliani's racist behavior. Yet according to polls, only 28 percent of upstate New Yorkers and 34 percent of suburban voters disagreed with Giuliani's handling of this situation. Two-thirds of upstate New Yorkers even said that Giuliani should not have to express remorse to Dorismond's family.

"In effect, millions of white middle- and upper-class people have made the cold calculation that a certain level of unjustified killings of blacks, Latinos and poor people is necessary to maintain public order. Yet inevitably they will discover, much to their regret, that when the police and security forces are given a license to kill, that they will not stop at the boundaries of the black community."

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# REAL CHILDREN LIVING



## An interview with Jonathan Kozol

by Julie A. Wortman

ON APRIL 20, 1999, students Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold killed 12 of their peers and a teacher at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colo., a community to the southwest of Denver. In the aftermath of this tragedy, there has been a wide-ranging public discussion about the hidden lives of this nation's young people (see TW 4/99). Educator Jonathan Kozol's new book, *Ordinary Resurrections: Children in the Years of Hope* (Crown Publishers) is one of the latest contributions to this conversation. Like Kozol's best-selling *Amazing Grace*, this book describes the children of New York's South Bronx and the roles St. Ann's Episcopal Church and the public schools play in their lives, but this time from the vantage point of the children. In these pages, too, Kozol offers a more personal and reflective assessment of these children and their prospects for the future.

**Julie A. Wortman:** *Ordinary Resurrections* focuses very specifically on the lives of particular children that you've come to know in Mott Haven in the South Bronx. Why should people in Denver, for example, read the book?

**Jonathan Kozol:** Well, there are neighborhoods almost exactly like this in every major city in the U.S. In fact, I'm always fascinated at the number of people in places like Denver or Seattle or Los Angeles who will write me letters and tell me they want to go immediately to the South Bronx to meet the children and the priest that I've described. I always politely suggest to them that they don't need to come 3,000 miles to New York to see racism inequality and the physical illness in a poor community. Sometimes the longest journey they'll ever take is the one across town in their own city.

**JW:** So what you're saying is: As the South Bronx goes, so goes the rest of the nation?

**JK:** No, I wouldn't say that, because every city has its unique dilemmas. Only New York has Mayor Guiliani, for example. I have always written about specifics. But although my first book about children, *Death at an Early Age*,

Photo by Harvey Wong

# IN APARTHEID AMERICA

was about black children in the segregated public schools of Boston, it is read in education schools in all 50 states and I don't think at this point anybody thinks the issues it raises are unique to Boston.

**JW:** You make a point in the book that these days when we talk about inner-city children we really put a false emphasis on how different they are from other children.

**JK:** The conditions of their lives are dramatically different from those of suburban children. About a quarter of the children in this section of the South Bronx have asthma. I don't know any other neighborhood in the developed world in which so many children suffer chronic asthma. Approximately 75 percent of the men in the neighborhood are unemployed. Nearly 95 percent of the families live on incomes of about \$10,000 a year. Also, an awful lot of the children I know see their fathers only when they visit them in jail or in prison. But in the details of their lives and in the things they long for and the things that they find funny and the things that they find sad, they are very much like children everywhere.

Take Elio, one of the children in the book. The number one subject on Elio's mind last year was the New York Yankees. He's a baseball player. Like children anywhere he and the other kids in Mott Haven start telling you what they want for Christmas way before Thanksgiving, you know? Elio started last September. He wanted a Ken Griffey, Jr. baseball mitt, which he got thanks to Santa Claus. Another child in the book, Pineapple, goes to the store — tugs her little sister to the store to buy candy, which she's not supposed to have because she's plump, but she does it anyway. Just like kids everywhere. And she gets the same kind of red licorice sticks that kids everywhere buy. They're called Twizzlers. They all watch Sesame Street when they're little. When Mr. Rogers came to visit them with me, it seemed like all

the kids knew who he was. Elio wasn't sure at first, but as soon as somebody told him who he was, Elio went running up to him and kissed him. I went back with Mr. Rogers just three weeks ago and Elio went right up to him and said, "I missed you."

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PROFOUND RELIGIOUS FAITH.

That's one reason that I put the focus in this book on what I call the details of life. There are too many big labels that we plaster on inner-city children. The experts tell us that they are really premature adults — precocious criminals, we're told by experts at conservative think tanks who probably don't know many children of the inner city, but who read each other's statistics.

Baloney! These are real children and, by and large, remarkably innocent. And in many cases their innocence persists well into their teenage years. Ariel, who's one of the

little girls in the book — a very generous little girl who's very tender towards Elio — is now a young teenager and she's still as innocent and graceful and pure of spirit as she was at the time I met her. In fact, if there's one way that these children differ from wealthy children, it's that they're certainly more religious than most affluent kids I know — and their religion is not perfunctory. And it's not simply liturgical. It's religion of the heart, profound religious faith.

**JW:** Yes. I enjoyed reading the scene in the book where the children ask the priest to bless them with holy water — "Bless me Mother," they all cry, and she does.

**JK:** To me, watching the priest sprinkling holy water on the children was one of the most beautiful experiences I've ever had — a very poignant experience to see the faces of the children when Mother Martha [Overall] did that and to see her face, too, because she glowed with joy when she did it. She said at one point, "Of all the things I have to do here at the church, this is the part I love the best!"

**JW:** From what you wrote, it sounded like she sprinkles them with holy water a lot?

**JK:** Yes, she does. If the children ask her to bless them, she delivers the goods. One reason it's so moving to me is that these children don't get too many blessings from our society these days. Congress hasn't blessed them in a good long while. President Clinton in signing the welfare "reform" bill certainly didn't bless them. The mayor of New York City doesn't seem to try too hard to bless children of color in the poorer sections of New York. The newspapers don't really bless them, except in the convenient month preceding Christmas and then, suddenly, poor children become the object of sympathetic news stories.

Mother Martha, however, doesn't simply limit herself to rituals and symbols, she blesses the children in thousands of other

ways. She runs one of the best after-school programs in the U.S. And she started this long before it became fashionable, before the White House was talking about after-school programs. It's a very intense program with very strong academic content. She goes to court when they're going to be evicted from their home. She goes to court to get a juvenile released from prison. She uses every bit of skill she has — and, fortunately for the children, she has tremendous resources because of her prior experience as an attorney. It's very unusual to walk into a church in the poorest neighborhood and find a priest who went to Radcliffe and studied with John Kenneth Galbraith and took the same courses that I took at Harvard.

Most of all, she blesses them by her own playful personality. She engages them at their own level. And that, I am sure, is why the children love her so much. She doesn't come to this as a missionary. There's no missionary condescension; there's nothing saccharine about her ministry.

She's far more in the tradition of Dorothy Day than she is in the tradition of Mother Teresa.

**JW:** As I read your book I thought to myself, Kozol's revealing a scandal — he's revealing the existence of an apartheid system within our country, and not only within New York, but within every city, within every community, at some level.

**JK:** As I point out in the book, 99.8 percent of the children in Mott Haven's public schools are black or Hispanic, so it's a virtually absolute apartheid. It's a scandal which the northern press no longer talks about. Even *The Boston Globe*, which is one of the best newspapers in the U.S., very seldom condemns racial segregation in Boston any longer. And I never see *The New York Times* refer to the South Bronx as a ghetto, a segregated neighborhood. The press, in fact, is beginning to advance the notion of the perfectible ghetto.

**JW:** Now what is THAT?

**JK:** The happy ghetto which has nice townhouses and pretty parks and slightly improved schools. But the press in the major northern cities no longer directly challenges the banks and real estate firms and the other powers and principalities for creating and

reinforcing an indomitable system of apartheid. They condemned every element of apartheid when the issue was Mississippi, but never today. Not in New York. Instead, almost any week you can find a story in the newspaper about how happy people are in the South Bronx now that we gave them a pretty new park or something like that.

**JW:** Despite the political perspective of your book, it comes across as kind of a contemplative journal.

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**JK:** Well, it is a journal. And in fact I was reading Thomas Merton's journals as I was writing the book. It was reading those religious journals that enabled me to feel that it was okay to wander and not to give any chapter a tight discipline. If the chapter was mostly about asthma, but a child told me a funny story about her dog, then I wrote about her dog.

**JW:** The book has a bioregional flavor, too, in the way you immerse the reader in the specifics of this community.

**JK:** Yes. I think that emphasis tends to make people more political. Mother Martha, for example, doesn't say in her sermons that

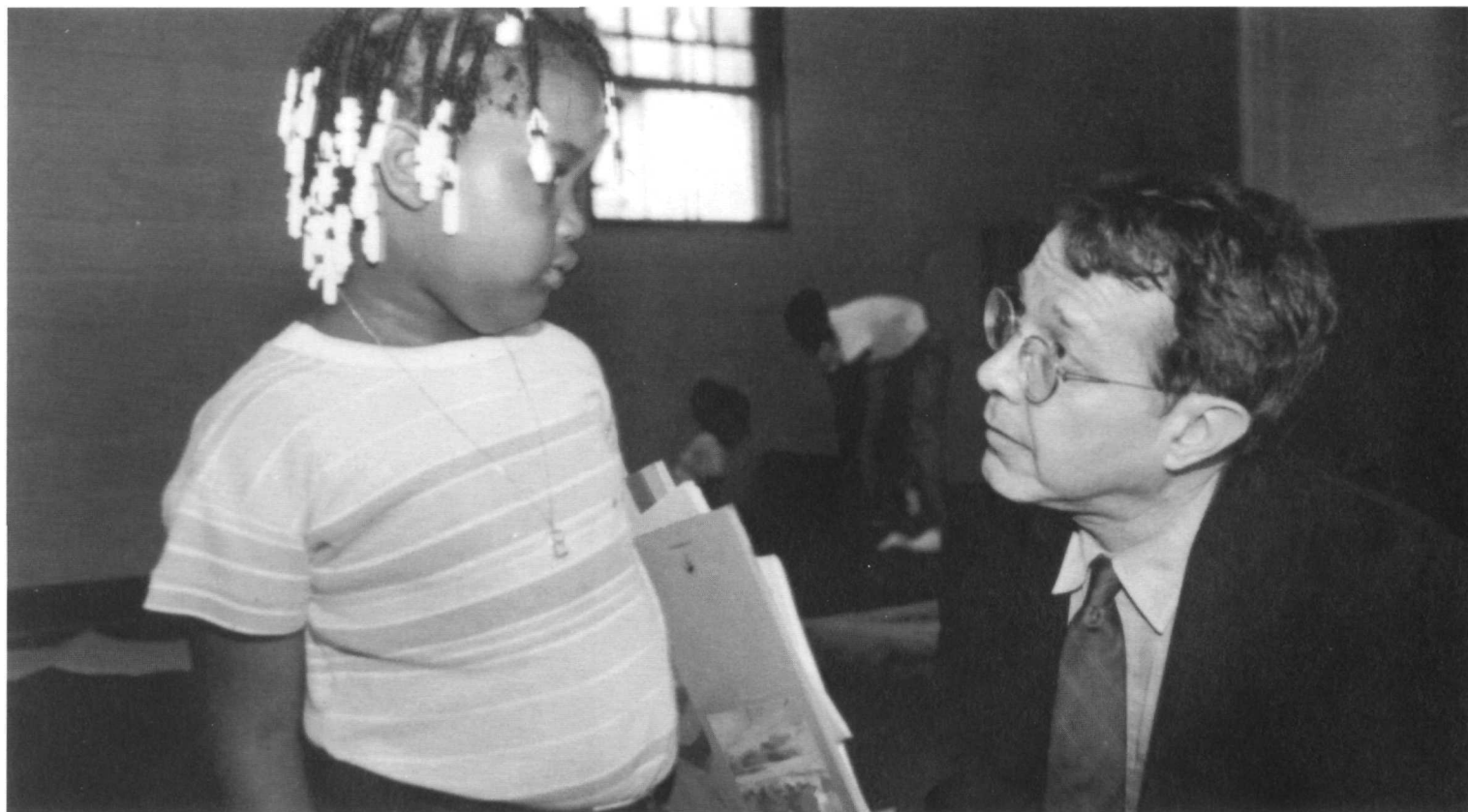
affluent, white people in the suburbs have advantages. She says they TAKE advantages. She's very specific, because she knows that the school funding in New York state is contrived — is rigged! — to give the advantage to suburban children who get two to three times as much spent on their public schools as the children in the South Bronx. She sees a direct connection and when she's invited to preach in a wealthy parish she doesn't let them off easy! She doesn't sugarcoat it. Mother Martha never settles for a box of used clothes from a wealthy suburban church; she asks them to join the struggle for justice. And that means to find the courage to confront directly the local inequalities which are reflections of national inequalities, because these are endemic patterns. Every state, as you know, has unequal public schools because of the archaic property tax.

**JW:** What is the best advice for someone of means in terms of developing a political consciousness — to go to their own inner city and spend time, or to pay attention in a very detailed way to what's around them with respect to the children?

**JK:** I would say both at once. The problem with purely localized decency is that for those who live in an entirely affluent community, it never involves them in any high risk of confrontation with the social order. It makes it too easy to be good Judeo-Christians. It seems to me we have to try to do both at once. For example, for those in relatively affluent parishes of New York state who read this book it seems important that they do more than simply advance enlightened attitudes about children and gender and race in their own immediate community, though that's a starting point.

When I'm asked by affluent congregations in New York state or nearby areas, "What should we do?" I often will say, it starts at home, in your own town, but, ultimately, I would hope that you would join us when we go to Albany to demand an end to the savage inequalities of school financing in New York state. And that means sacrificing something, because if I were talking to somebody in Scarsdale, I'd have to point out that they are sending their children to schools in which teachers are paid \$25,000 to \$30,000 more than the teachers in the South Bronx.





*Jonathan Kozol and one of the children who come to the after-school program at St. Ann's in the South Bronx.*

As long as they do that, all their children's victories and lives will be contaminated because they will be victors in a game that they rigged to their advantage. I say that constantly and I find that most serious Christians do NOT mind when I talk candidly. I tell them, don't simply deplore the fact that the South Bronx is one of the most segregated ghettos in North America. Ask how the housing patterns in your hometown guarantee that! Because there couldn't be a South Bronx without a segregated Great Neck.

At the point where decent people of faith in largely white, affluent communities are willing to face these issues and join us, not just in the state capitals, but also in Washington, in fighting these issues, it's at that point that they cross over from charity to justice. And that is the transition that I always ask of devout people, who write me very moving letters about my books.

**JW:** I'm interested in your commentary about the commodification of children as

economic units — and how even those who are the advocates for children get seduced into justifying the dollars spent on their behalf with talking about them as “future workers,” or saying, “If you spend money on this child now, you won't be spending money later to house them in prison.”

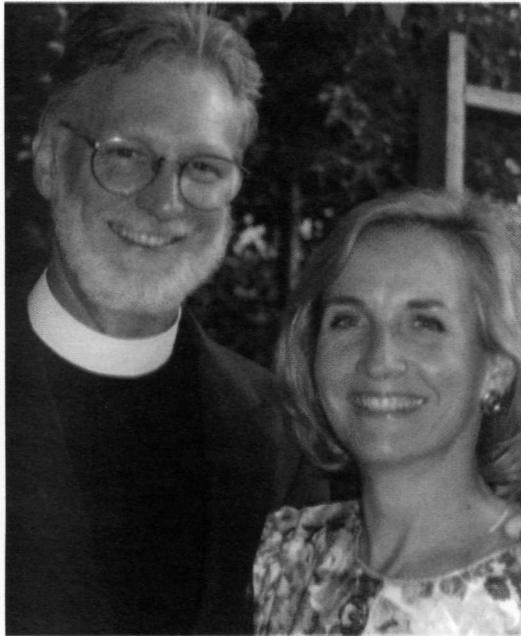
**JK:** Well, this business about commodifying children and seeing the value of a child only in her future earning power simply devalues the lives the children are living now. What if they don't live to be 25-year-old wage earners? And what if a child dies when she's 15? Does that mean that her childhood was useless? I don't like the idea of valuing children only as economic units in our society. This way of looking at children has become so fashionable that even liberal advocates are forced to buy into it in order to lobby effectively. And I've done it, too. I cannot tell you how many times I've gone up to Capitol Hill and pleaded with members of the Senate and House to put more money into Head Start because it will

save money later on. As I look back, I feel a sense of great distaste for that argument. If we are truly acting on Judeo-Christian principles, we should be doing it because they're children and deserve to have some blessings in their lives while they're still children and it should have no connection with how they might possibly benefit America's economic interests later on.

And, in fact, the most wonderful kids, if they're really well-educated and grow up to think independently for themselves and to find their way into unusual careers such as poetry or art or ministry, will never be of any use to the economic system — Thank God! God help us if Toni Morrison had been looked at when she was 12 years old, you know, and valued solely for her possible future payoff to IBM. Thoreau certainly was of no use to American industry. Nor was Gwendolyn Brooks. ●

**Julie A. Wortman** is publisher and co-editor of *The Witness*, <julie@thewitness.org>.

# Bridging the gap between community and conscience *by Marianne Arbogast*



**"I inherited a parish that was probably between 25 and 30 percent gay and lesbian — out, safe, embraced by the straight community of the parish — completely open and inclusive. The next question became, how do we act out our values in ways that address the agenda, and at the same time are productive within the diocese — not just go off and do our own thing as if no one else was there."**

**— Al Halverstadt**

**A**L HALVERSTADT likes to tell the story of a couple at St. Barnabas Church in Denver, whose 12-year-old son came to dinner one evening and asked if he could share something with them.

"Mom, Dad — I've discovered I'm heterosexual," he announced.

To Halverstadt, recently retired as rector of St. Barnabas, the incident illustrates one of the fruits of the parish's long history of inclusiveness.

"Part of the grace of where we are is that it was a legitimate discovery, and there was not value placed on it," he says. "The family had been in the midst of diversity at St. Barnabas. The whole church, gay and straight, see themselves as one community. Everyone is included socially and structurally."

This spirit is part of what attracted Halverstadt and his wife, Susan Weeks, to St. Barnabas nine years ago.

"There was a meeting of values between me and the parish," Halverstadt says. "I inherited a parish that was probably between 25 and 30 percent gay and lesbian — out, safe, embraced by the straight community of the parish — completely open and inclusive. The next question became, how do we act out our values in ways that address the agenda, and at the same time are productive within the diocese — not just go off and do our own thing as if no one else was there."

The willingness to acknowledge and listen to others who disagree with them has earned Halverstadt and Weeks a reputation as bridge-builders in the Diocese of Colorado. At a reconvening of their diocesan convention in March to deal with three conservative resolutions on the authority of Scripture, women's ordination and homosexuality, Weeks was invited to set up ground rules for dialogue.

"We were asking people to engage in sacred conversation, and the goal was to understand one another and not try to convert the other person," says Weeks, an organization development consultant who has worked extensively in church settings. "There was a different tenor of cooperation, as opposed to wanting to win or lose."

The convention ultimately affirmed Scripture without insisting on a traditionalist interpretation, affirmed the ministry of women, and tabled indefinitely the resolution on homosexuality.

Halverstadt describes himself and Weeks as "team players."

"Everything we've done here in Denver — which is a fairly conservative diocese compared to the others we've been in — we have tried to do openly and within the system," he says. "When I first came here I told the bishop, Jerry Winterrowd, that I was in favor of Holy Unions [of gay and lesbian couples], and I planned to do that and I would not blindside him — I would keep him informed and work with him on how that might happen. That I wouldn't just steal off to a flower-covered hillside and bless people, that we would do it in the church so we would offer the same kind of dignity and respect for people of the same gender who are making lifelong commitments to one another as we would for people who are heterosexual."

When the first such ceremony was planned, Halverstadt scheduled a meeting with the bishop.

"My senior warden and I went in and the bishop said, you may not do it, and I said, I'm going to do it. The question became, how can we do it?"

After a day and a half of negotiation, Halverstadt was allowed to proceed under mutually agreed-upon conditions.

"I do not rehearse the people through their vows — they make their own vows to one another. I do not bless them in the name of the church — I ask them to face the congregation, I put my hand on their shoulders, and I pray for God's presence within their life together."

The bishop "took a lot of guff from the conservative clergy," Halverstadt says. "But the fact of the matter is, we hadn't broken a rubric, we hadn't broken canon, we had been in agreement with the bishop."

Eleven Holy Unions later, Halverstadt reports a lessening of controversy.

"Over time, people have discovered that it did not kill the church, it did not destroy the diocese. St. Barnabas has grown, we're much stronger than we were nine years ago. We've increased our pledge base, we've grown in size, we've got a choir of 35 — life has not dried up, it's the other way, and people recognize that."

For both Halverstadt and Weeks, the commitment to inclusiveness is grounded in their experience of the Gospel as a liberating force.

"I think my empathy comes from my own journey as a woman, and going through a liberation/consciousness-raising in the 1970s in a spiritual context," Weeks says. "The message of a liberating Gospel was very personal and experiential. I felt very aware of how groups are oppressed and left out of the mainstream and how the church, along with the rest of the culture, has participated in that."

Both Weeks and Halverstadt are trained spiritual directors and both serve as mentors with the Education For Ministry (EFM) program of The University of the South's School of Theology. Weeks also trains EFM mentors.

"A lot of my passion is about one's own journey and one's own spiritual growth and development," she says. "As people find their own liberation through the Gospel, my assumption is there will be empathy for others."

Halverstadt says he felt a call to priesthood from the age of 16, but did not go to seminary until he was 38, after serving in the Air Force and beginning a career in advertising and marketing.

"I was brought up in a conservative town by conservative parents, and I had a lot of trips laid on me in terms of expectations," he says. "When I flew in the Strategic Air Command, it was because I really did believe that

it was the first team, that it was going to keep the world from falling apart. I had led a very, very responsible life — at my own expense. Part of my going to seminary was to try to get out of the shell that had been enclosed over me. A lot of my own journey, and I think it's true for all of us, is the journey out of the darkness of who we are expected to be into the light of who we are called to be."

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GOSPEL, MY ASSUMPTION IS  
THERE WILL BE EMPATHY  
FOR OTHERS."  
— Susan Weeks

"Which carries over into the issue for gays and lesbians in a big way," Weeks adds.

Halverstadt credits Robert DeWitt with nudging him into the seminary.

"I was in Philadelphia when he was bishop, and he went through such abuse during the sixties with all the racial adjustment that was taking place. His example around liberation issues was so substantial for me, it was what finally got me off my duff after 22 years of knowing I was going to go into the priesthood but never acting on it."

At Episcopal Divinity School in the early 1970s, Halverstadt was immersed in liberation theology and liberation movements. He graduated in 1975, but postponed being ordained until women's ordination was approved by the church.

Since coming to Denver, Halverstadt and Weeks have worked steadily to lay the groundwork for greater openness.

"We've introduced resolutions over a period of time in support of gay unions and

gay ordination, which have all been voted down, but they've been visible," Halverstadt says. The introduction of one such resolution led to a year-long diocesan-wide dialogue, with the bishop calling in ethicist Tim Sedgewick to address the tension between conscience and community.

Halverstadt and Weeks have taken leadership roles in a wide variety of community organizations and projects.

Weeks was instrumental in the development of a mentoring program for children at risk and serves on the board of the Center for the People of Capitol Hill, the downtown district in which St. Barnabas is located. She is also involved with the Vincentian Center for Spirituality and Work.

Halverstadt heads the Grove Project, which is establishing a section of a park in Denver as a contemplative setting in memory of those who have died of AIDS. He was a founding board member of Project Angelheart, which prepares and delivers free meals to HIV and AIDS clients, and is helping to establish an employment readiness program called Ready to Work/Strive. He has also served as president of Capitol Hill United Ministries, a consortium of Capital Hill churches which lobbies legislators on issues of social concern.

Halverstadt and Weeks intend to remain in the St. Barnabas community, and have been asked by the bishop to work as consultants and facilitators of congregational development within the diocese.

Halverstadt says he is hopeful about the church's future.

"What I think is wonderful about the Episcopal Church is our ability to seek the middle way, to make some sort of commitment to one another in the midst of conflict and diversity. I think we will emerge from the issues we are facing today — whether it's how we interpret the Bible, or how we are inclusive to all people — discovering the strength of our unity. We are going through exciting times, and if we are just willing to hang in with each other, we will discover that we are people who are living under grace."

*Marianne Arbogast is associate editor of The Witness, <marianne@thewitness.org>.*



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