



**AMERICA'S
BEST
URBAN
NEIGHBORHOOD**

Ohio City 44113



by "Average Joe" Schriener

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***Special Note:** This book celebrates Ohio City and is about local people doing local things to make this neighborhood what it is. Given that, we've decided to have this book printed locally by a rather creative and unique printing company here. *Orange Blossom Press* is a small, employee-owned company that's been around since 1976. Although the company dynamics have fluctuated over the years, at one point some 15 employees owned equal shares and had an equal vote in what went on at *Orange Blossom*.

The company was started by a group of people who were active in local politics, social justice, the environment... said Donna Larrivee-Cohen, who has been with *Orange Blossom* since 1983.

Amidst the smell of printer's ink and the clacking of printing presses, *Orange Blossom* President Greg Patt told me that although the high-tech age marches on, the "power of print," like an old friend, still endures.

"People still touch it so often every day," he said.

We hope you enjoy 'touching' this book.

Front Cover art by Dustin White, who is pursuing a Masters in "Urban Ministry."

Back Cover photo courtesy of California's Imperial Valley Press.

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all the people in Cleveland, Ohio, who have rolled up their sleeves and decided they'd be 'part of the solution.' And for that matter, it is dedicated to people in metropolitan areas everywhere who have done the same.

*** Note:** The identities of some of the homeless people, and others on the margins here, have been changed. What's more, some of the people described herein are composites.

***Edited by: Mary Susann Wake**

Special thanks to:

God.

My wife Liz and our children Sarah, Joseph and Jonathan for being a part of the urban experience.

Mary Susann Wake for the absolutely *excellent* job editing this book.

Dan Dragony for the friendship, for being a great part of our “house community,” for the computer wizardry, and for mentioning to me more than once: “It’s not how hard you hit... but how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward.” [ibid. *Rocky Balboa*]

The rest of the ‘gang’ on W. 38th St., and beyond – including Pete Hokky.

Fr. Ben Jiminez for the strong witness around: “*Be the change you want to see in the world.*” And for your “Bicycle Ministry.”

Tim and Bev Musser for the support, the letters to the editor, and the back of a motor vehicle that’s bumper stickers take a good three red lights to read.

All the rest of you down here on the “front line” who are doing all you can to make this “America’s *best* urban neighborhood.”

Debbie and Scott Smith and Dan and Nancy Kremer, our supportive friends out in rural Yorkshire, Ohio – where there are less sirens.



(photo by Liz Schriener)

“Mr. Dan” (Dragony) was our kid’s #1 soccer fan. He came to the games with a customized plastic “clapper,” making noise as if it was the World Cup matches. Which for the kids down here, it was.

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Introduction

A paradox?

In the midst of Cleveland, Ohio, one of the poorest cities in the country as I write this, there is the best neighborhood in the country.

A paradox?

Let me explain...

Now the word “best” is, indeed, subjective.

That is, best in this context (at least to many) would mean something like the most affluent and safest neighborhood. It would be a neighborhood with stately architecture, perfectly manicured lawns and shrubbery sculpture. It would be a neighborhood with the best climate and, say, the most scenic ocean view.

Think Pebble Beach, California.

However the neighborhood I contend is the best, instead of being affluent, leans toward hardscrabble.

As far as being safe, the Cleveland neighborhood is edgy at best.

There are many homeless people, several gangs, house robberies, car thefts, muggings, vandalism and even a homicide every few months.

However, it used to be *a lot* worse.

As for the weather?

It’s overcast here more days than not. It’s extremely humid in the summer. And it’s rather cold with this kind of steel mill, sooty snow in the winter.

And a view of the water?

Lake Erie. Enough said.

This neighborhood is in a place called “Ohio City,” which is on Cleveland’s near Westside.

And besides all the paradoxical draws I allude to above, many people have moved here because the *Old Fashion Hot Dogs* place around the corner (which has been there since like 1922, or something), sells these killer chili dogs for only a buck and a quarter.

At least that’s why our family moved here four years ago.

Oh yeah, and we moved here from rural Bluffton, Ohio (pop. 3,877) because I’m an independent presidential candidate who asks some people in small town and suburban America to move back into these types of decaying, big city neighborhoods – to help.

And on West 38th Street, and the surrounding environs, a good number of people have moved here in the past three decades to do just that, help.

This is a neighborhood thread through with some of the most creative ways to bring social justice, community building, environmental consciousness and peace to life. In other words, it’s a neighborhood that is chock full of the things that *really* matter.

That’s why it’s “the best.”

At the time of this writing, I have traveled some 200,000 miles through America doing extensive research for our presidential platform.

And never, and I mean *never*, have I come across a better urban neighborhood.

At the heart of this neighborhood is a group of “Catholic Workers,” and others,



photo by Dick Webber

Our family had just moved into the upstairs of this home in a hardscrabble area on the near Westside of Cleveland. We pose here next to our campaign vehicle. To really transform the urban areas of America, our platform calls for many people to roll up their sleeves and move into the cities to help.



The Old Fashion Hot Dogs place around the corner, where chili dogs have been a buck and a quarter, like forever – or least since the ‘90s. In this picture, another satisfied customer heads for his alternative vehicle (bicycle) with a stash of dogs and fries. The neighborhood’s five-star cuisine.

who have, indeed, moved here from various suburbs and small town America.

They moved here to live side-by-side with the poor in solidarity.

They moved here to fight to maintain affordable housing.

They moved here to welcome refugees.

They moved here to coach inner city recreation teams made up of youth who don’t have fathers and/or mothers at home, much less in the stands.

They moved here to reclaim nature in the midst of practically wall-to-wall concrete and broken glass. (They’ve even set up an “urban farm,” chickens and all.)

And they moved here to speak peace to the violence.

Not to be trumped, Steve’s Lunch (specialty: hot dogs) is just up the street from the Old Fashion Hot Dogs place. Preferred ‘attire’ includes: hard hats, tattoos, big gold chains, nose rings...



Chapt. 1

What happened here?

We finished a long campaign tour then headed to the Cleveland area. Our apartment on the near Westside of Cleveland wouldn't be ready for several days, so we stayed with my sister in the suburb of Westlake.

The day we arrived, there was a column in Cleveland's *Plain Dealer* newspaper about a man in Independence, another Cleveland suburb, who had just been arrested for pouring out two cans of dried corn on some snow for the deer in the area. Independence has an ordinance about not feeding deer – to keep them away.

Columnist Dick Feagler contended that deer were there *first*. And builders have subsequently come in and put in new, rather “ugly developments (that is, if you're a naturalist or a deer),” conversely calling the streets picturesque sounding names like: Fox Run, Quail Hollow, Deer Meadow... How ironic.

And a far cry from where we'd be living on the city's near Westside.

a chasm

Several years ago on yet another campaign tour, we stopped at Koinonia Farm near Americas, Georgia. The late Clarence Jordan was the co-founder of this rural Christian community, which started in the 1940s. (Jordan was also the co-founder of Habitat for Humanity.)

Jordan's *Cotton Patch Parables* series has been widely read. In the books, Jesus comes to earth, not to the Middle East 2,000 years ago, but rather He comes to Georgia during the 1950s. And the author adapts Biblical parables to fit the times.

At one point he references the *Bible's* Luke 16: 19-31. It's the story of a “rich man” and Lazarus the beggar at his gate. The rich man doesn't help Lazarus much, and as a result, the rich man goes to Hell, for eternity. Lazarus goes to Heaven, for eternity.

In between them is a “chasm” no one can cross.

The rich man, who is now in tremendous agony, asks Abraham (who is now hanging out with Lazarus) about this chasm.

Clarence Jordan, in turn, paraphrases Abraham’s response, southern drawl and all.

“Boy, you remember that you got the good things while you were alive and Lazarus got what was left? You got the good schools... You got the good section of town... You got the good streets [Fox Run, Quail Hollow, Deer Meadow]...”

By natural attrition, the poor can’t afford to move into these areas – and the chasm is developed. A chasm that merely switches around in the afterlife, writes Jordan.

So how did all this start to happen in the Cleveland area?

automobiles and white flight

Before moving into our place, I came down to the neighborhood to meet with Bill Merriman. He is a deacon at St. Patrick’s Church on Bridge Avenue here and takes fellow deacons, college students, church social action coordinators and others on tours of the neighborhood as part of St. Pat’s “Urban Plunge Program.”

The program is intended to familiarize people from outside the area with the hopes they’ll get more involved with helping here. What’s more, besides being a deacon, Bill Merriman was a mailman in the area for decades and knows the streets, the history, intimately.

As they walk the streets, Merriman told me he will introduce people on the tours to some of the homeless. They will stop in at the Malachi House, which is a free hospice for the destitute. They will eat lunch with the poor at St. Herman’s Homeless Shelter.

Merriman said a man on one particular tour in the winter said to a homeless man across the table from him at St. Herman’s: “It sure is cold today.”

“It’s been cold *all* winter,” the homeless man replied.

That, said Merriman, was a good dose of reality.

During the tours, Merriman will also give a brief history of this area, an area which is known as “Ohio City.”

At one time (turn of the 20th century), Merriman will explain the “well off” lived interspersed in this neighborhood with the working poor. The way he sees it, this demographic of the well-off living with the poor is actually a “spiritual gift.” That is being so close together, those more well-off had an intimate knowledge of the needs of others and were in a better position to respond to them.

In addition, the community in general was close here. There were neighborhood stores of all sorts, and people who sold eggs, produce, bread, milk... from makeshift groceries on their front porch. Out back there were gardens, small barns with chickens, cows and other “farm” animals. Neighbors relied on neighbors for the stuff of life.

Also, most people walked, bicycled or rode at a slow pace in horse drawn buggies. They often stopped to talk to neighbors as they were en route. And as a result, the interconnectedness and the camaraderie in the neighborhood was high.

Then came the automobile.

As automotive technology improved, and the roads improved, the more well off could now move further and further out into the evolving, and pricier, “suburbs.” And with the auto, they could still get into Cleveland easy enough to work, shop, take in entertainment.

Now the more advantaged were, for the most part, living just among people of their own ilk (read: white flight). The needs of the poor became further and further removed from them.

The city neighborhood front porch and corner stores started to close incrementally as “centralism” started to take over more and more. That is, the increased mobility allowed bigger stores with more volume to go up in more “central” locations that were pretty easily accessible by car, places like strip malls being located between, say, seven neighborhoods.

(The same thing started happening in rural America, with the small town “Mom & Pop” stores being run out of business by these bigger stores that were “centrally located” between, say, seven towns.)

More and more people started to patronize these stores because, with the higher volumes came cheaper prices. (The far end of the centralism continuum today would be places like Wal-Mart, Toys R’ Us, Home Depot...)

What’s more, as more of the well-off people moved out of Ohio City, the tax base decreased in kind, meaning less social service help, poorer schools, decaying buildings...

Note: Ironically, in the past 30 years, more and more of the well-off are moving back into this neighborhood and fixing up homes. With gas prices rising, this neighborhood is convenient for getting into Cleveland’s downtown for work, sports and cultural activities.

Sadly, instead of the intent to intersperse among the poor here to help social justice wise, and the like, many of these people are pushing for complete “gentrification” here. That is, they want *all* the houses bought up and rehabbed by those more well-off so Ohio City, in essence, merely becomes another homogenous suburb.

In this, not only do the poor remain poor. But now they are being displaced from neighborhoods where they have tremendous history with family and community.



Bill Merriman poses in front of his beloved St. Patrick's Church. The former Ohio City mailman, turned church deacon, knows the history of this area intimately. What's more, he goes about in unsung fashion everyday working with the poor, with refugees, with the neighborhood kids... If Ohio City has a "saint," it would be Bill.

part of the solution

Mark Pestak moved to W. 38th St., not for gentrification purposes, but to be part of the spiritual solution. He, like Bill Merriman, saw that being in the city among the poor was a 'spiritual gift.'

The route to his modest, two-story wood frame house here is a heartening one.

He told me he grew up in the "leafy suburb" of Euclid, to the east of Cleveland. He got a bachelors degree from Heidelberg College, a Masters degree from Toledo University and a Ph.D. in physics from Penn State University.

Shortly after school, he was selected for a year-long Congressional Fellowship and moved to D.C., but not to suburban D.C. Instead, he moved to the inner city of D.C. He'd never lived in an urban area before, and he said he simply felt drawn there.

In D.C. he attended Holy Comforter/St. Cyprian Church, where because of white flight in this area, there was now only a handful of whites in the congregation. Nonetheless he said he had never felt “more welcome anywhere,” and became quite active in the church.

The overall D.C. inner city experience was such a positive one that when Pestak moved to the Cleveland area the following year, he again looked to living in the city. While most of his Euclid high school friends had opted for the suburban life, “Cleveland needed me more than Euclid,” he smiled.

Once on the near Westside in the early ‘80s, Pestak got involved with the Commission on Catholic Community Action, helping with a new initiative called “Church in the City.” The brainchild of Cleveland Diocesan Bishop Anthony Pilla, Church in the City is a web of programs to connect suburban parishes with city parishes to draw some of the more well-off back into the city and to get more help to the city’s poor in general. What’s more, Pestak said the interchange is “two-way,” with the city churches also helping the suburban churches in various ways.

Pestak said the Church in the City was designed to stem the more affluent from continuing to move out of the city for the suburbs, and to promote the common good throughout the whole region.

As this was unfolding, Pestak got married. Shortly after, they had a daughter named Rachel.

Rachel was born with a rare chromosomal disorder (only about 250 people are known to have it in the world). Called “9Pminus,” the chromosomal imbalance causes some mental retardation, scoliosis and a variety of other physical complications.

Yet despite all the problems, Pestak said people with 9Pminus have this uncanny trait of being extremely affectionate “...and Rachel is right at the top of that chart,” he smiled.

On days when the weather is good, the Pestaks share Rachel’s joy and affection with the neighbors on the street as she takes slow walks with mom and dad, or swings at a nearby park.

A park that at one time was dangerously close to a hazardous waste processing plant.

“...just aren’t thinking that way.”

The hazardous waste plant is no longer in the area, thanks to Mark Pestak and a citizens’ group that fought it. (Being part of the solution here, has meant being an advocate for the poor sometimes.)

Pestak said highly toxic material was being driven through the area and the plant itself had a poor track record when it came to frequency of chemical fires, and so on.

Pestak said it is tragically typical that such a plant would be located near the heart of a densely populated “poor” city area. Something a more well-off suburban area would almost never have to contend with.

Anyway, the neighborhood organizing went well, a couple lawyers did pro-bono work, and a strident fight was put up over some two years. In the end, the facility was sold and then shut down... with the new owners going elsewhere.

But the Pestaks on the other hand, aren’t going anywhere. And another of Mark’s recent projects has been to buy several rental properties and, not make a lot of money, but rather to merely “keep rents affordable” in the midst of the gentrification going on.

He added he so often sees people who come in here, rehab a house for \$100,000 and want the properties around them to go through the same transition because the property values, in turn, will go up.

“Many of us on W. 38th street just aren’t thinking that way,” Mark added.

Our new landlord wasn’t thinking ‘that way’ either.

Chapt. 2

Garbage Cans and a Piano Player



Mary Grace Destefanis (left) is not only a mainstay on W. 38th St., but a mainstay in the St. Patrick's choir. She plays both piano and sings. She is shown here with our daughter Sarah, our son Joseph and Michelle Sommerfelt.

We moved into the upstairs of a small, two-story house on W. 38th St. Our new landlord, Mary Grace Destefanis, like Mark Pestak, was also a Catholic Worker. She's a GED teacher for adult students in the Cleveland Public School System. When she's not teaching, she regularly volunteers at a neighborhood drop-in center for the disadvantaged, directs the choir at St. Patrick's Church and plays a mean piano. (St. Pat's 11 o'clock Sunday Mass music is quite lively.)

When Mary Grace found out about our presidential campaign (with a tremendously strong social-justice bent), she charged us rent that was just under

half of what she could have gotten for the place. And what's more, knowing we were on the road some six months out of a year, she decided to charge us rent – *only when we were there!*

This just underscored, even more, what Mark Pestak had said in regard to it, not so much being about upward mobility for the people here, but rather about making sure there's enough for everyone.

Because, well, it can be tough for people down here.

“...neighborhood on the edge.”

The head of Cleveland's Human Services Department, who lives a few streets over from us, told me this can be a “neighborhood on the edge.”

And I saw that the day we were moving in.

A city garbage truck lumbered down the street. At one point, the guys missed picking up a couple cans because they were blocked from view a bit by two cars parked pretty close together on the street.

The truck was no more than a couple houses down, when a man literally burst through his front door and started angrily hollering for the men to come back and get the cans. Shouting was instantly returned from the workers. And this went on, back and forth, getting louder and louder.

After several minutes, and a lot of pent up anger had been released, the garbage men finally relented and went back to get the cans.

As in many American metropolitan cities that we've visited over the years, anger is indeed pent up and boils close to the surface here in Cleveland.

People are angry, and stressed, as they continually struggle with minimum wage (or not much more) jobs that barely pay the rent, the utilities, the food... healthcare insurance a distant dream. People are angry because their kids have little option but the local public schools where teachers are tremendously overworked, discipline ebbs almost off the charts, and peer influence pushes their children closer and closer to gangs, drugs, bullets... People are angry being surrounded by the continual crime and violence.

Before my presidential run(s), I was a counselor who worked with family system dynamics. And with people trapped in trans-generational poverty loops and abuse cycles in the city, it's only natural that anger, desperation and fear are going to boil over into heightened levels of alcohol and drug abuse, heightened levels of street crime, heightened levels of domestic violence...

It's an emotional cauldron.

A cauldron so often fueled, not by the people trapped in these trans-generational loops; but rather by all the privileged who have, for the most part, turned their backs to all this as they continue to climb the upward mobility ladder.

sirens

We fell asleep that first night in the city to the sound of sirens.

We awoke the next day to the sound of sirens.

They echoed off the almost wall-to-wall concrete cityscape. The song lyrics: "...they paved paradise and put up a parking lot," kept coming to me.

Mary Ellen Eickman-Fiala is trying to do something about the wall-to-wall concrete.

Chapt. 3

Two Wooden Flower Pots

Near the corner of W. 38th St. and Lorain Ave. stand two, old rather large wooden flower pots. They have stood as colorful sentinels of hope in this neighborhood for years.

A neighborhood pretty regularly strewn with broken store window, and broken liquor bottle, glass. A neighborhood often littered and sprayed with graffiti.

The flower pots are compliments of Mary Ellen Eickman-Fiala. And they're not even on her property.

They are on the corners of an old, asphalt parking lot across the street. Mary Ellen thought this decaying topography, oh, needed *something*.

And she didn't even ask anyone, just one day put the pots there.

What's more, Mary Ellen is out there pretty regularly (and at all hours) tending to the colorful array of flowers. One warm Friday night recently she was out at midnight watering and chatting with a local drug dealer who happened by.

She believes the key to changing the community is engaging *everybody* in the community. And Mary Ellen believes another key to changing a community is remaining steadfast about what you do in a community.

When the fence behind the parking lot gets sprayed with graffiti, she, without fanfare (or complaint, most of the time), will be out the next day repainting it. When vandals tip the flower pots over, as happens occasionally, the next day she's out putting the dirt back in and replanting.

And as Mary Ellen works diligently amidst the cracked asphalt and shattered glass on the street, she also regularly volunteers at the Storefront drop-in center around the corner, at the May Dugan Center for the disadvantaged here and is on the board for the Neighborhood Family Practice medical facility treating those in the area without healthcare insurance. And she and her husband, Mike, are also foster parents.

Mary Ellen is a nurse who has chosen to only work three days a week – so she

has time to volunteer for all these other people. Because these people, after all, are God's 'flowers' too.

Note: Recently a professional photographer happened by our neighborhood when I was out on the sidewalk with the kids. The man approached, camera in hand, and said he was doing a book of photo-essays on dynamic green spaces in Cleveland.

“Do you know of any around here?” He asked.

I pointed to Mary Ellen's two wooden flower pots.

Chapt. 4

Catholic Workers in the 'Old West'

The Catholic Worker presence here formally started in the 1980s. In fact, I attended a 25th Anniversary Catholic Worker function recently.

Those who were around then, said they originally met in each other's homes, put out a small newspaper and started to take homeless people into their places.

What's more, they eventually started a small drop-in center for those on the margins down here. And beyond that, they just generally went around the community trying to do as much good as possible.

Over time, their presence grew.

Some of the Catholic Workers started incrementally moving to one block on W. 38th St. Eventually, every fourth or fifth house had Catholic Workers in it on this block.

Those who moved here first in the 1980s demonstrated a lot of faith, and guts.

A long-time resident up the street told me that during that time it wouldn't be unusual to come out of your front door just in time to see your car on cinder blocks and the last tire being stolen, in broad daylight.

What's more, if you decided to confront some of the toughs in the area over something, it wouldn't be uncommon to have bricks crashing through your front windows later that night. The street atmosphere was akin to something out of the lawless old West. And it's still only changed in part.

We've had a rock thrown through a window of our campaign vehicle and the whole side of the vehicle was sprayed with graffiti (which Liz said was an improvement). Several cars have also been stolen and there has been a shooting homicide on the block in the four years we've been here.

Yet these Catholic Workers continue to stay.

Mike Fiala was the first Catholic Worker to come to W. 38th St. And he has been an absolute lynchpin in a lot of what goes on here. (Fiala is colloquially referred to as "the mayor of 38th St.")

He has fought stridently to keep affordable housing for the low-income. He volunteers regularly to aid those on the street. Fiala helps facilitate a bi-monthly Bible Study. He is one of the coordinators for an annual “Peace Show” that is as a counter to Cleveland’s “Air Show,” which features military planes.

Many Catholic Workers believe in non-violence.

The Catholic Worker Movement was started during the Great Depression by Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin. The Movement’s guiding principle is hospitality toward those on the margins of society. There are currently about 185 Catholic Worker Communities around the world, with a majority of them in the United States.

In our cross-country travels, we have come across a number of these communities. And it’s been our experience that their concern for the disadvantaged (especially the most desperate), and their community building skills, are, well, practically unmatched.

What’s more, it’s important to explain that the catholic in Catholic Worker is really with a small c. It is not an official arm of the Catholic Church. In fact, the word catholic in this case is connotative of catholic as defined by: universal. The Catholic Worker Movement is actually made up of Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, non-denominational Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, even some agnostics...

Chapt. 5

House of Hospitality

One of the projects most people on W. 38th St. are involved with, as are a good number of other people in the area, is the Catholic Worker House on nearby Whitman Ave. It has officially been dubbed: The Whitman House.

This is an old, three-story convent behind St. Patrick's Church that has been converted into a "house of hospitality." (As with the Catholic Worker Community, the house is not under the official auspices of the Cleveland Diocese, but rather is merely rented from St. Patrick's for a nominal fee.)

Four Catholic Worker volunteers live in community in the house with some 12 other people who would otherwise be homeless.

The 'extended family' Catholic Workers, like the ones who live on 38th St., regularly donate money to the house, lend a hand with repairs and sometimes cook for the house. They also take residents shopping, to the doctor, to a show...

What's more, businesses and other private individuals in the area also donate to the Whitman House in various ways. Some also give money. The Panera Bread Co., for example, donates bags of "day old bread" every week. A produce market up the street donates vegetables. Used clothes are regularly dropped off.

The house functions, in part, on what could be called a "gift economy," said Catholic Worker volunteer Chris Knestrick, 22.

Chris told me he had recently graduated from Mercy Hurst College in Erie, Pennsylvania, and was looking for a way to deeply, and "radically," live out the Gospel message around helping the poor. And he said he found that here, in spades.

Many of the volunteers and the formerly homeless people, once they get on their feet, obtain jobs. The formula is that 30% of their pay (no matter what they make), then goes for room and board at the house.

While at the time of the interview Chris was working as a full-time campus minister at a local Catholic high school, he said many at the Whitman House take

part-time jobs in order to have more time for active “community building” among the members. A key, he believes, in keeping the community emotionally healthy and solid.

Pete Quilligan agreed.

Pete, who is also a Catholic Worker volunteer in the house, said society at large these days is in such a frenetic rush that “...many simply don’t have much time to sit and talk.”

He said in this talking, this communicating (including regular house meetings), that community bonding happens. And it shows here. For people who were, by nature, quite transitory before coming to the Whitman House, some had now been living in community here four, five, six or more years.

Late author M. Scott Peck, who wrote a book on community building called *A Different Drum*, noted that we, for the most part, have quasi-relationships these days and live in a sort of ‘pseudo-community,’ not deep, lasting community – like these people at the Whitman House seem to have developed.

Which would make the lives of those at the Whitman House, paradoxically (there’s that word again), “richer” in the things that really matter.

Pete Quilligan, who majored in Religious Studies at Walsh University in Canton, Ohio, said the ethos at the Whitman House revolves around the “Corporal Works of Mercy” described in Luke 4: 18-21.

The crux is that Jesus comes to bring “liberty to the captives.”

Marlo, 21, was one of those ‘captives.’

Marlo, who is now a Catholic Worker volunteer in Cleveland, said she was tremendously impacted by how Catholic Worker Houses across the country were extending the kind of help that did, indeed, free those who were captive to poverty, captive to addiction, captive to despair...

Unlike Chris or Pete, Marlo doesn’t have a degree in Religion, nor did she even go to college. She had a rough upbringing, dropped out of school, developed a drinking and drug problem and became a drifter at an early age.

Yet she was welcomed with open arms at various Catholic Worker Houses that she stayed at in her late teens. And what’s more, she was not only made to feel a part – she was made to feel equal.

“It’s not hierarchical here. Nobody acts ‘cooler than thou,’” Marlo smiled.

After living in several Catholic Worker Houses across the country in her late teens, Marlo said her priorities started to shift, and now she wanted to give back some of what she had received. So she signed up as a volunteer at the Cleveland house about a year prior.

Others who were formerly homeless at the Whitman House also regularly give back in the way of volunteering. (This is another reason for taking the part-time jobs.)

And one of the main venues for this “giving back” is at the Catholic Worker Storefront nearby.



One of the Good Friday “Stations of the Cross” is staged in front of the Whitman House, an old converted convent. The banner contrasts the Works of Mercy vs. the Works of War. In the foreground, Catholic Worker Chris Knestrick’s coat offers a cliff note to it all” “The Only Solution is Love.”



(photo by Dick Webber)

Some of the attendees at a Whitman House summer cookout, “everyone welcome.” Just pull up a curb.

Chapt. 6

The Storefront

The Catholic Workers here have set up a drop-in center called the Storefront on Lorain Ave., about a quarter mile from the Whitman House.

As the name indicates, it's in an old storefront that's been converted.

It's primarily open Wednesday through Friday from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. and Saturday and Sunday mornings from 9:30 to 11:30.

Meals are served during these times and afterwards people can hang out talking, playing cards, reading, playing chess... catching up on some sleep.

The people who come here are poor, some are homeless. The room is set up with soft chairs and couches so people can feel like it's their "living room." There is also a shower, storage lockers in the back for homeless peoples' clothes and a washer and drier.

The first day we volunteered here, there were some 50 people. It was a Saturday morning.

My wife Liz cooked, our daughter Sarah, 9, served up sausage at the counter, and Joseph, 7, went from table to table bringing milk, fruit... There were 10 volunteers in all this morning.

I talked with Angelo who said he had just gotten a low-paying job in the Cleveland's factory district, and he couldn't make rent yet. He was currently staying at a nearby homeless shelter.

Paul Kapczuk Jr., one of the Catholic Workers who has been helping at the Storefront the past 15 years, said people who come for the meal are quite a diverse mix, from those with active drug and alcohol problems, to those who might be considered "modern-day hobos," to those with mental disorders, to those who, well, just couldn't make rent yet...

"We try to give people a way station on the road [of life]," he said.

Paul said of late he is also seeing an increase in the number of poor families with children here. And he told me he finds that quite disturbing in the scheme of

how more of society seems to be spiraling down.

Note: The Catholic Workers strive to make the atmosphere at the Storefront as nice as possible. They believe the poor are entitled to all the advantages the more well-off in society are entitled to.

To that end, the Catholic Workers, with the help of some volunteers from a suburban church, recently turned the backyard at the Storefront into a backyard habitat with wild flowers, a small vegetable garden and other creative landscaping. The plan is to put tables out back to create an outdoor summer café atmosphere.

And speaking of nature...



The Storefront is a 'way station' on the road of life for many who are falling through the cracks down here. As the mural on the side of the building represents, it is a place for young, old, Black, White, Hispanic... No admission charge and the coffee is always hot.

Chapter 7

Urban Farm

Many in the city are simply out of touch with nature because of the vast amount of concrete topography.

America used to be an agrarian-based society. People were rooted in the land. However, with the advent of industrialization and urban centers, many people have incrementally moved farther and farther away from the land.

And it shows.

It shows in how ‘un-rooted’ many feel in our metropolitan areas. It shows in the city’s heightened levels of stress, in the city’s heightened levels of emotional disorders...

In recent years however, Ohio City has been quite successful in a series of “green” projects to reconnect people here with the land.

And in no place has this been better demonstrated than at the *Gather Round Urban Farm* on W. 38th St.

“City Fresh”

Behind Mark Pestak’s home on W. 38th St. is an old asphalt parking lot that is about an acre and a half in length. Mark owns the parking lot.

Meagan Kresge, who has lived at the Whitman House for several years, approached Mark about being able to use the lot for an “urban farm.”

Mark said sure, no charge.

Meagan, who is ‘gardener extraordinaire’ at the Whitman House – she tends vegetable and wildflower gardens there – had just completed a 10-week “City Fresh” course.

Sponsored by Ohio State University’s Agricultural Extension and the New

Agrarian Center in Oberlin, Ohio, City Fresh is about inspiring “small scale agriculture” in the city. The course covered such topics as: growing, irrigating, composting, and selling to area restaurants and other markets.

Meagan was able to get a \$5,000 grant to help start the farm.

Some of the phases included getting Cleveland’s “Forest Service” to drop off free wood chips. These were spread 12-inches thick over the asphalt.

This was then layered, in a lasagna fashion, with top soil, leaves and other composting material.

Some of the compost comes from neighbors on W. 38th St.

Each week Meagan drops off recycled, labeled plastic tubs for neighbors to collect such food scraps as: fruits, vegetables, grains, bread, egg shells... She then collects the full tubs, puts the scraps in a big compost bin, then washes the tubs, puts new sawdust in and returns them to the participating neighbors.

This food scrap composting helped initially connect people to the farm.

In the Fall, Meagan would also solicit leaves from neighborhood supporters for more compost material. People, again, felt more connected.

And the leaves and food scraps being composted, as opposed to just being thrown away, gave people a sense they were contributing to something that was, indeed, “life giving.”

As time went on, some of the neighbors started volunteering time at the farm. So did some of the children in the neighborhood.

My wife Liz and our kids would work on the farm regularly.

In our travels through rural America, we’ve seen time and again how grounding it is for youth to be raised on the land. And we’ve seen the discipline, and strength of character in general, that’s been developed through regular farm chores, and so on.

It also develops a sense of toughness in youth as they are regularly out in the elements, as opposed to being raised in what could be considered now to be a primarily “temperature controlled” urban/suburban existence.

Then there’s the actual “exercise” of farm work versus the tremendously sedentary (TV, computers...) lifestyles of many modern urban and suburban youth.

farm viability

Yet another way to introduce more neighbors to the farm, has been *Gather Round’s* regular farm “theme parties.”

There was a Fall Harvest Party, a Summer Party, ‘A First Year Birthday Party’ for the Chickens (that was actually a lot of fun)... They’ve all been potlucks, complete

with street musicians and slides set up on hay bales for the kids.

In addition (and to draw neighbors even *farther* in), “farm meetings” are regularly conducted to brainstorm about new ideas for the farm, etc. Our family has attended a couple of these.

My wife Liz, for instance, who has an agricultural science degree, has offered a number of excellent, small-scale farming ideas during these. Liz also has a background in business and is helping with a business plan for the farm.

In discussing economic viability of the farm at one of the meetings, one person suggested the farm start a Community Sponsored Agriculture (CSA) initiative, which have been starting up all over the country.

Meagan has decided to go with that idea.

People from the area would buy so many “shares” in the farm, in return for receiving so much produce, say, every couple weeks. The money would be paid up front every year, and not only serve as payment for the produce, but would also be “crop insurance” if it was a bad growing year.

For all the benefits the farm was bringing to the neighborhood, it was suggested at the meeting that many of the neighbors here would gladly take the risk to support the farm. What’s more, shares or no shares, some of the neighbors periodically donate to the farm just to help keep it going.

Our family has donated simply because of the phenomenal benefit the farm brings to the neighborhood.

Meagan told me it’s her belief America will start to see more and more local, urban growing across the country as oil prices continue to climb.

Meagan is also planning education seminars to be held at the farm to help people understand things about how “freshness” adds to a foods nutritional value (as opposed to produce that’s trucked to Cleveland from corporate farms in North Dakota).

And besides farm fresh produce, *Gather Round Farm* is now featuring “farm fresh” eggs.

In the second year of the farm, Meagan added chickens and this rather elaborate, and tasteful (there are zoning laws), chicken coop.

What’s more, they let the kids in the neighborhood “name a chicken.”

Our son Jonathan, 5, named his *Spider Man Chicken*. And he chases it regularly.

The *Gather Round Farm* eggs are left in a cooler where people can come anytime to get them and leave a “donation.” Meagan said one of the neighbors (I won’t give it away, but think: big wooden flower pots) leaves *way* more than what the eggs she takes are worth every time.

“It’s her way of donating to the farm,” said Meagan.

Someday Meagan hopes to take the eggs, and the produce, all over the

neighborhood every few days as sort of a “mobile market.” That is, she envisions constructing an actual “veggie cart” and wheeling it about.

This would add to several of the ‘stationary’ Farmer’s Markets that are already around Ohio City.



Gather Round Farm’s Meagan Kresge feeds some of her flock. The chickens yield farm fresh eggs for the neighborhood and Meagan was actually able to get a rooster that does a barely audible cock a doodle doo (wow, my spell check says that’s right) that hardly wakes anyone in this population dense neighborhood. No kidding.

Chapt. 8

Food Centers, Community Gardens and Prostitutes

Another arm of the City Fresh movement, is the establishment of “Food Centers” at various locations throughout a community. These are quite similar to Farmer’s Markets, except the food comes not only from farmers, but also from local Community Gardens and home gardens as well.

Ohio City has several of these Food Centers, which are set up weekly at venues like local church and school parking lots.

The Food Centers that are sponsored by City Fresh feature “market bags” which include an assortment of seasonally available produce. What’s more, for low-income people, these bags are available at a 50% discount.

And it’s not just about the produce.

Athens, Ohio, organic farmer Art Gish once told me that the conversations he has and relationships he develops at the weekly Farmer’s Market in Athens are worth as much, if not more, than the actual sale of his produce.

It is in these interchanges that the stuff of “community building” happens, said Art.



One of Ohio City’s most prominent “food center’s” is the West Side Market that has vendors of many different nationalities who promote spirited haggling over produce prices. The Market was recently named one of the “Great Places in America” by the American Planning Association.

homeless gardeners

As mentioned earlier, these Food Centers are supplied, in part, by local Community Gardens. And there are a number of them in Ohio City.

Perhaps the largest is the Kentucky (Community) Garden on W. 38th Street. The plots are both 10 and 20 square foot ones and are tended by Ohio City residents who, say, are living in apartments and don't have green space for a garden. Or urban homeowners who have minimal yard space. Or, for that matter, they are tended by people who just simply want to garden with others.

Besides the garden they have on their own property, the Whitman House also has a plot at the Kentucky Garden. Catholic Worker volunteer Chris Knestrick regularly gardens there and alternates bringing some of the residents down to help as well. Several times our children have gone there to help too.

Several years ago, we researched a similar Community Garden in Woodstock, New York, and like with the Food Centers, it's not just about the crop.

Woodstock gardener, and special education teacher, Martha Hill, told me it is also about getting to know people better, gleaning gardening tips, sharing seeds and plants, sharing harvests. . .

What's more, up the road in New Paltz, New York, not only is there a Community Garden, there's a Community Garden Board and a regular newsletter. All of which are being discussed in Ohio City.

And while not the biggest Community Garden in Ohio City, perhaps the one with the most "heart," if you will, is "St. Paul's Patch Garden" on W. 45th St., just across the street from St. Paul's Community Church.

St. Paul's is co-sponsoring this half an acre tract of land. In it's 4th year, the Garden consists of thirteen 10 by 15 foot garden plots.

"A Community Garden takes a place in the city that is often ugly and turns it into both an aesthetic and productive place," said project co-leader Beth Mancuso. "What's more, it provides a common thing for neighbors to come together over down here, other than, say, just a police blotter."

The plots are open to area residents, and to the homeless. Some of the fresh produce from the gardens go to St. Herman's outreach to the poor, which is just around the corner. And St. Paul's also has a number of outreaches to the poor.

Beth is on the board at St. Paul's. And she and Pastor Doug Horner there are trying to take the "back to the land" movement to yet another dimension.

Their intent is to start a program to help get area prostitutes off the street and into a long-term country setting so they can detoxify from street life.

home gardens

And as Community Gardens have gained more and more support here, Ohio City residents have become more jazzed about planting gardens on their home properties. None more elaborate, or creative, than Beth Mancuso's home garden on W. 45th St.

Beth combines a green thumb with, well, being "green" in general.

In a large feature article in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, Beth was referred to as the "Queen of Recycling."

For her and her husband Al's rather elaborate organic garden, Beth obtained a mixture of aged sawdust from Cleveland's Forestry Department and manure from the Cleveland Mounted Police Stables. (*Who would have thought of that, huh?*)

She noted that if she grows her own vegetables for her family of four, there is less impact on the environment because tractors don't have to plow and trucks don't have to transport the produce.

Beth also uses recycled coat hangers for cucumber vines and recycled computer boxes are used for cold frames in her backyard mini-greenhouse. Recycled plastic jugs, filled with water dyed black, are used for solar heating within the greenhouse.

And as Beth has been extremely creative with growing for her family, there has also been talk about "planting a row for the hungry."

This is a takeoff of a program we heard about in Philadelphia, where area gardeners set aside a row in the garden, or several, to regularly supply local soup kitchens with fresh, nutritious food.

What's more, churches in Ohio City are also looking at setting up gardens on their property, to be tended by congregation members, with the produce going to area food outreaches as well.

In fact, fresh produce from our backyard has been used in a number of Whitman House meals.

backyard habitats

Our backyard, like so many back yards in the big cities these days, was overgrown weeds, patches of scraggly grass, long neglected soil, and a pigeon for "wildlife."

My wife, who is from New Zealand and has a green thumb that won't quit, set out to turn our long-neglected backyard into a diverse "Backyard Habitat."

The weeds were pulled, compost was mixed in with tremendously sandy soil,

an organic garden was planted and native plants like ferns, a berry bush, geraniums, and *so much more* were put in.

And each year the plant diversity gets fuller, the garden yields more and a good mix of squirrels, birds, chipmunks, and even a small garter snake have taken up residence out back. (The snake keeps trying to hide from Jonathan, the chicken *and* snake chaser.)

What's more, Ohio has a Backyard Habitat Program with consultants to aid people in determining which native plants to introduce, the kinds of environments



City 'gardener extraordinaire' Beth Mancuso poses by a raised bed spinach patch in her Ohio City backyard. She is surrounded by her children and neighbor kids who just recently arrived from Somalia.

that will attract native wildlife back, and so on. The program provides free seeds, and it offers "Official Backyard Habitat" certificates for those meeting some basic criteria for transforming their backyards.

Our kids, who are home schooled, regularly help with the backyard. We actually think this kind of thing should be a part of school curriculum. And so does well-known agricultural writer Gene Logdson.

During a campaign tour of central Ohio, Logdson, who wrote *The Contrary Farmer*, told me he believes farming and small-scale agriculture (gardening, permacultures, etc...) should be taught in both country and city schools. Not only because some kids growing up in the city may actually have a vocation to be farmers, but working the land (no matter how small a plot), and growing some of one's own

food, should be a basic part of almost everyone's life.

And while Ohio City schools aren't on board with farming and small-scale agriculture classes yet, Meagan Keresge has been talking about teaching such classes at her urban farm, including a class on how to set up a perma-culture.

That's the next step beyond home gardens and basic backyard habitats.

A perma-culture is an intentionally designed, small eco-system that is compatible with a certain region's climate and growing season.

As a basic example: The sun gives plants energy to grow. Some plants attract bees that cross-pollinate. Bees provide honey and some are eaten by deer, other animals, birds... The plants also give off seeds that are eaten by, say, chickens and other small animals. Some of the seeds take root, growing into more plants and trees. Trees, in turn, provide roosting for birds, squirrels and the like. Leaves from the trees create natural compost to fertilize the soil and provide food for small insects and other micro-organisms

And there are many perma-culture design variations.

During our travels, we came across a man from the state of Washington who had a landscaping service called "*Food Not Lawns.*" His service was to take out grass, sod... and replace it with perma-cultures.

the "old days"

Ohio City, in effect, is moving back to being much more sustainable – like it was in the "old days." That is, the way Bill Merriman described it to me.

Ideally, most people will eventually have gardens, some will have chickens, some will even have a cow or two in small barns out back. Interspersed throughout will be more and more community gardens and urban farms.

Also, with some zoning changes, people may even be able to again sell their produce, their eggs, their milk... from the front porch, at local outside markets, and so on.

Ohio City community members will again be much more interdependent on each other and the bond of camaraderie will strengthen in kind.

Because, as Art Gish says, quality of life is not just about the food, it's not just about sustainability, but rather it is about the relationships that are fostered as we share the 'stuff of life.'

Chapt. 9

Modern Hobos and Christ Rooms

In the first essay about the Catholic Worker Storefront, Paul Kapczuk Jr. said some of the people served there could be considered “modern hobos.”

Our family met one today, “John” (not his real name).

We had gone to volunteer at the Storefront again on another Saturday morning in June, and I had struck up a conversation with him.

John had a rather large backpack, a bed roll and a New York accent. He told the kids and me that he was hitchhiking his way across America to California. John said he’d done it before, several times. He had no home.

After the Storefront closed, I invited John to come with us to the Kentucky (Community) Garden where the kids and Liz had promised to help someone with their plot.

As they worked in the garden, I talked some more with John. He, at one point, noticed a Hispanic man in his early 20s who was on an adjacent ball field. The man had a mitt and was simply throwing the ball up in the air to himself.

John approached him and started up a game of catch. Toward the end, John was even showing the man how to throw a curve ball.

I invited John back for lunch, while the rest of the family kept working on the garden. He would periodically reach into his backpack for short sips from a plastic drink bottle. This was juice mixed with Vodka, he explained.

John admitted to being an alcoholic and was doing “maintenance drinking.” That is if he’d stop drinking for any length of time, he would go into serious shakes and the possibility of delirium tremors.

On the walk back, I explored some of John’s drinking history. He said he had been sober in Alcoholics Anonymous several times, but was now in yet another relapse cycle. Being a former substance abuse counselor, I gave him some advice, told him about some free, medical rehab options in the area and where he could find some local AA meetings.

For a myriad of reasons, he said he wasn't interested at this time. But I'm confident seeds got planted. And sometimes that's all you can hope for.

During lunch back at our place, John asked me what I did for work. (I was in a t-shirt and faded jeans, with a hole in the left knee – not by fashion design.)

I said, as straight faced as I could, that I primarily was “running for president of the United States.”

“Wow, Ohio has really been weird this time around,” John smiled.

He said since he'd been in the state the past three days, he'd also met a woman who claimed she'd been “abducted” by space aliens. John said that while that had been, oh, a little hard to believe, it was no harder to believe than my assertion.

It was my turn to smile. I then showed him a newspaper article about the campaign.

“You got my vote,” he said.

I told John that because of his active drinking he couldn't spend the night at our place for the safety of the kids, and so on (our house rule).

In the interim, Liz had dropped our children off with a friend and had come back to offer to wash the clothes in John's backpack. Also, we invited him to take a shower, or better yet a “Jacuzzi”. (There was actually a little Jacuzzi spray apparatus in the tub in our apartment.)

Unbeknownst to me (or John), our son Jonathan, 2, had been playing around the tub earlier in the day and had poured part of a bottle of “Baby Wash” in. When John turned the spray on, well, the whole bathroom looked like the opening to an old *Lawrence Welk* TV episode. Bubbles everywhere.

“Wow...” I could hear John exclaim through the door, – his Ohio experience getting even ‘weirder.’

“Mr. Davidson”

In our extensive time on the road campaigning, and for that matter, in the various towns we've lived in over the years, we have met a good number of “modern hobos.”

One of the most memorable was “Mr. Davidson (also not his real name).” He'd been on the road for a phenomenal 20 years, or more, when we met him in our old hometown of Bluffton, Ohio.

Mr. Davidson didn't have a drinking problem, but he was afflicted with bi-polar disorder.

I used to work as a liaison between a drug and alcohol agency and the Cleveland Psychiatric Institute, helping with dual diagnosis patients. So I knew

that people with bi-polar disorder – sometimes colloquially referred to as manic-depressive disorder – were relatively safe if they were on medication. Mr. Davidson was on medication.

What’s more, Mr. Davidson had stopped in Bluffton to see an old friend who was a mutual acquaintance of ours. I talked to the acquaintance who gave me a relatively good reference.

So we took Mr. Davidson in for awhile. And we put him in our “Christ Room.”

In this particular case, because we had the bottom part of a house with only two bedrooms, the “Christ Room” became Liz and my bedroom, and we slept in part of the living room.

The idea of a Christ Room came from Dorothy Day, the co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement. Dorothy Day believed every home should have a Christ Room, in line with the *Biblical* exhortation (Hebrews 13:2): “Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by showing hospitality some have had angels for their guests...”

And we believe this so strongly that part of our platform on alleviating homelessness in America is to suggest many in America establish Christ Rooms (or similar types of rooms, depending on one’s faith or just general spirit of benevolence).

What’s more, when we get to the White House, we’re planning on turning the Lincoln Bedroom into a Christ Room.

Note: For some who are a bit squeamish about taking a homeless person in, this wouldn’t preclude renting out a room in one’s house – or converting a garage and renting that out. Then the rent money could be used to fund humanitarian outreaches to the homeless, both in this country and abroad.

We “shelter” cars in this country while little children sleep in back alleys.

Note 2: Short of providing a room or renting out a room, one could also impact homelessness by becoming part of a “Care Team” for someone who is homeless. That is, one family could take the person in, while others in the community, or church, or civic group... provide a host of supplemental help for the person.

For instance, various Care Team members could regularly take the person shopping, or to a movie, or to a restaurant. Others could serve as mentors to help the person with: finding a job, setting up a budget, the ins and outs of insurance. Still others could do fundraising to help the person... and so on.



Charles Holliday is a Vietnam vet who did several tours of duty for our country. Afflicted with a severe case of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, he lived outside year-round in Cleveland for many years. With support from the Catholic Workers and others, Charles eventually got an apartment and a job at Nick's Diner in the neighborhood. He now gives tremendously impacting talks to Urban Plunge groups, and the like, about his life on the streets – and how he got help.

Chapt. 10

'In Their Cups'

Homelessness generally doesn't happen in a vacuum. For that matter, poverty seldom happens in a vacuum.

There are usually a myriad of precipitating factors.

Ralph (also not his real name), is a "backyard" mechanic in Ohio City who lives below the poverty line. He also has a drinking problem.

We've had him work on one of our campaign vehicles.

One day as I worked with him on the engine, he told me about his late father who was also a mechanic who had lived in the area. The father, too, had had a drinking problem.

The family didn't have the money to send Ralph to college, and he ended up working as an apprentice to his father who had a small shop.

Ralph said in his teen years he was in the shop at all hours – doing not only his own work, but that of the father's because "...my old man was always out drinking."

If Ralph made a mistake on a vehicle, he said it wasn't uncommon for his father to fly into a fit when he was drunk and lash out physically at his son.

"I got beat up a lot," said Ralph.

As a drug and alcohol counselor, I worked a lot with addictive family systems dynamics. And this scenario is typical with some alcoholic parents.

What's also 'typical,' is that in a case like this the son starts to develop some of the symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder. That is, the constant criticism and the regular beatings will lead to a lot of emotional problems in the son. Problems like heightened levels of fear, extremely low self-esteem, shame about being poor...

With all this getting progressively worse inside, the ultimate irony is the victim then turns to alcohol and/or drugs to alleviate some of the emotional pain.

And sadly, the cycle gets repeated.

And repeated...

“half”

Not my problem?

Think again.

For every Ralph, there's Ralph's counterpart out on the other side of the 'chasm' in suburban and small town America.

They've grown up not having to dodge hunger, needles and bullets each day in the big cities. They've grown up with, not only both parents, but parents who were often much more emotionally stable and more educated than Ralph's.

The school systems were better.

They had every advantage as far as going to, say, college.

They got out of college and never looked back as their career track kept ascending...

In the *Bible*, as an example, a group of these upwardly mobile people come to see John the Baptist. They're concerned. They apparently know something's amiss.

John the Baptist lays it out plainly to them (Luke: 3: 9-11):

“The axe lies at the root of the trees. Therefore every tree that doesn't produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire [read: Hell].

“And the crowd asked him. “Then what should we do?””

He replied: “The person who has two coats must share with the one who hasn't any.”

That's easy.

That's sharing “half.”

And “half” comes up later on in the *Book of Luke* as well. Actually in Luke 19.

This is the story of a rather well-off tax collector named Zacchaeus who meets Jesus. He is so inspired by Jesus that he tells Him: “Look, half of my possessions Lord I will give to the poor...”

Jesus, in response, says: “Today salvation has come to this house.”

And what is this ‘salvation’ from?

In both Bible passages it's the same thing.

Hell.

So if we don't want to go to Hell, if we want to bridge the ‘chasm’ between rich and poor – many of us need to be sharing “half” our stuff.

What does that mean exactly in this day and age?

Nothing all that perplexing. Nothing all that vague and couched in endless rationalization.

It means what it says, “half.”

It means suburban house sharing to ‘halve’ expenses, with the savings going to the poor.

It means getting rid of one of the two cars (half) and bicycling, bus riding, car pooling, walking... with the savings going to the poor.

It means many of us cutting our food intake in half (including non-nutritional junk food and beverage, much of our eating out...), so the poor in American cities don't have to go without the basics in nutritional food – and 24,000 people don't have to starve to death every day in the Third World (UN figure).

It means going without half, or more, of the money we spend on regular entertainment – whatever that is.

It means halving the retirement accounts.

It means losing the air conditioning in the summer (humans lived without air conditioning until the 1950s), significantly cutting the thermostat back in the winter and helping fund any number of humanitarian aid projects.

Like some of the ones described below...

life lines

In Ohio City, there are a series of safety nets for people like Ralph and for those who have even gone beyond Ralph's stage into homelessness.

Churches in the area alternate in providing free meals every day of the week. In addition, there's the Catholic Worker Storefront on weekday evenings.

These are life lines to many, and – at times – help keep people alive long enough for them to find alcoholism and/or drug addiction recovery.

Since we've been here, my wife Liz has several times been approached on the street by people who had frequented the Storefront – and were now sober in Alcoholics Anonymous and doing well.

One person told Liz she had been particularly touched by the genuine kindness and non-judging that had been showed her at the Storefront. And she said that these were some significant factors in her eventually wanting to seek help.

On Sunday mornings at the Storefront, the group *Project Save* comes in to make breakfast and talk to guests. This is a group of former homeless people who have united, formed a non-profit and now to try to help others “who are still out there.”

The group is headed up by Carl Cook. He told me he himself is a recovering addict and former homeless person. Cook now regularly speaks in schools, is involved with a youth mentoring program and is an absolute evangelist when it comes to reaching out to the addicted and the homeless.

In the same vein, St. Paul's Community Church in the neighborhood is just about to put a trained alcohol and drug abuse person on their staff to help some of those coming through their doors regularly. (St. Paul's, like many churches in the

area, also hosts Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous meetings every week.)

And there are a couple short-term, “detox centers” in the area for low income and homeless people.

“...a model all over the country.”

Beyond this front line drug and alcoholism help, St. Procop’s Church in the neighborhood has donated a vacant convent to be used as a long-term living facility for those recovering from alcohol and drug addiction.

I met with Bob McCauliff, who is the volunteer coordinator for the project.

He said the facility has a capacity for 24 people, including live-in volunteers to supervise. In addition, liaisons have been set up with area businesses to help find residents work, and so on.

What’s more, area churches and others have donated significantly to the project. And McCauliff said if the program proves successful in the long term, “... it could be used as a model all over the country.”

Beyond formalized halfway houses like this, some area people have also set up informal “sober houses” where rooms are rented out to those in recovery.

80%

Dealing with alcohol and drug issues in a community, especially in communities in the big cities, is extremely crucial. And here’s why.

In our travels, I interviewed Mark West who designed the Oasis Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program for the Piqua (OH) Correctional Institute. (The program is now being used as a model at a Federal level.)

West said a whopping 80% of the crimes that land people in prison were committed under the influence, or were motivated by people wanting to get more drugs, more alcohol.

And if you extrapolate this out – how many people get caught?

This means that besides all the people who have gone to prison for their crimes, there are that many more out here “under the influence” and creating all kinds of mayhem. Widespread cases of domestic violence, of assault, of armed robbery, of homicide...

Then there are all the ‘silent victims’ who are being abused emotionally and/

or physically by a parent(s) with a drug or alcohol problem. And as I mentioned earlier, in these cases the cycle tends to then repeat itself in the next generation.

And as we have to get to the adults with comprehensive help, we have to get to the kids. Especially the kids down here.

Chapt. 11

Sports Down Here...

Kids in the city, as with everywhere, need healthy outlets for their youth. And in nowhere is this better displayed than the Michael J. Zone Recreation Center in Ohio City.

Run by the City of Cleveland, the center is free and open to the general public.

The Zone has indoor and outdoor basketball courts, a weight room, racquetball courts, an indoor pool, baseball fields, soccer fields... and every league and other extra-curricular activity imaginable (karate, boxing, aerobics, ping pong, art, dance...).

While a significant number of adults use the facility, including even some homeless people who shower and take saunas here, a majority of the patrons are youth.

Liz and I have coached a number of baseball and soccer teams our kids have been involved with. And on some Saturdays, the boys and I go up to the Zone to play in some pick-up basketball games.

Granted, the facility is a bit well-worn, but the staff (and I *really* mean this) have such a love and concern for the kids here that it's absolutely palpable. In fact, they're not just staff, they are, in a very real sense, mentors, role models... who work overtime trying to help these kids.

And their influence can literally mean the difference between a youth joining a gang down here, or the youth joining, well, a baseball team.

picked first

Liz and my first coaching gig was a Michael J. Zone team in the "Little F Co-ed Baseball League," ages 7 to 10.

It started with a draft.

Coaches stood in the center of the gym floor and sequentially picked their players from the stands. I decided on a “social justice strategy.”

I picked the kids who looked like they’d normally be picked last, first. (And apparently I did pretty good with this, because we went on to lose almost all our games.)

But even the losing record didn’t trump the look on these kids’ faces as they were being picked toward the top – for once.

After the draft, I huddled the kids up and told them I wanted them to go out and practice on their own before the first “official” practice.

Shortly after everyone broke up, a young Black boy broke from a circle of friends and hesitantly approached me.

He shyly asked: “Coach, can we borrow a ball to practice with?”

Who are you cheering for again?

It was mentioned earlier that the Catholic Workers at the Whitman House don’t believe in hierarchical structure in their community.

They are also tremendously non-partisan as well, I found.

A group of them came to one of our baseball games.

In the top of the first inning, they cheered boisterously for our team. In the bottom of the first inning, they cheered boisterously for the other team.

And it went on like this throughout the game.

This was probably good from both an egalitarian perspective and, well, a purely logistic one as well.

Many kids, on both teams, not only didn’t have parents in the stands – they were short parents at home. In fact, I’d estimate some 70% of the players on my team didn’t have a dad at home.

“DO YOU WANT US TO LOSE?!”

And as the Catholic Workers are non-partisan, I have to be the most non-partisan coach in the league, if not the entire country.

And I could well be the best coach.

No, not ‘best’ in a won-loss record sense, or anything else having to do with the current societal paradigm around success.

But rather the ‘best’ in the way I believe it should be around coaching. That is, if we’re *really* serious about instilling the right things in youth. . .

It happened in our fourth game.

Our team was in the dugout along the first base line and one of our players was up. He hit a fly ball down the right field line that landed about eight inches foul.

I saw it.

The kids on the bench saw it.

However the umpire, who was standing behind the pitcher, didn't have as good a vantage and called the ball "fair."

Our player pulled up on second with a stand-up double.

I called time out and walked out to talk to the umpire, who was one of Michael Zone's staff members.

"Linda... I know that was hard for you to see (pause...), but the ball was actually foul," I said in a low tone.

Linda stood silent for a moment confused, which was wholly understandable.

I have to believe that never in the history of the sport had a manager argued a call that went *for* his/her team.

This was not lost on Linda either.

"But that was *you're* batter," she said incredulously. "I mean, what do you want me to do?"

"Just call it a foul ball and let him keep batting," I smiled.

Linda hesitated, knowing this probably wasn't covered in the 'Official Umpire's Manual.' After another 20 seconds, or so, she said.

"Ok," and ordered the kid on second back to the plate.

Coming back to the bench smiling, I felt absolutely *great* knowing in my heart (cut-throat competition be damned) that I'd done the right thing. And even more, what an excellent example of fair play this was for our team.

Our Sarah, however, who incidentally wasn't smiling as much, looked up at me, narrowed her gaze, and scolded:

"DAD! WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?!"

DO YOU WANT US TO LOSE?!"

Yep, all that 'parenting for social justice' stuff is really paying off.

Chapt. 12

Painter's Plus Pause

Lying

In my last book series about *America's Best Town*, I injected a few what I colloquially referred to as “Painter’s Plus Pauses.”

While in Bluffton, Ohio, when we weren’t on the road campaigning, I did some house painting with a small business called Painter’s Plus. And when we moved to Cleveland, I took the trade with me.

‘Joe the painter,’ if you will.

The weekend after the Zone baseball game I describe in the last chapter, I was painting a porch deck at one of Mark Pestak’s ‘affordable housing’ units on 38th St. As I painted, I was listening to a local Cleveland sports talk show on the radio.

There was a call in segment, so I called in.

I explained, in detail, what had happened with our team’s ‘double that was really a foul ball’ incident.

Then, extrapolating it out, I said wouldn’t it be refreshing if a Cleveland Indian ballplayer, any Cleveland Indian ballplayer, just once did the same.

That is, I said, what if a Cleveland Indian slid into third base and the umpire called “safe.” But when the dust cleared, the Indian ballplayer stood up, dusted himself off and in front of his other players, the crowd and, say, a national TV audience, said:

“You know ump – I’m really ‘out.’ He got me before my foot hit the bag.”

I mean when you think about it, I continued, and set aside all the rationalizations (rational lies), it boils down to being honest, or not.

What’s more, I said, does allowing dishonesty on the ball field (it’s just how the game is played), spill over into other things later in life.

That is, an advertiser will exaggerate (read: lie about) the benefits of a product in an ad without thinking twice. Because it “sells.” And because, well, business is

business and that's how people play.

A politician will take something another politician has said out of context and will merely call it “spinning (read: lying).” But, well, that's just how politics is played.

Etc., etc., etc...

For the next couple minutes the talk show host vehemently rebutted my position, calling it, in essence, Pollyannaish, sophomoric... “and anyway, the bad calls usually even out.”

He must have been talking to Sarah.

I said I still disagreed.

He then said it was time to move on to the next topic, the Ohio State / Michigan game – which was still *three* months off. But that's how big that rivalry is!

My phone clicked off and I went back to painting, still convinced what we were talking about is what it is: lying. And to say it would be something different is, well, lying. Sort of.

Chapt. 13

Speaking Peace to the Violence

“People don’t you understand,
“The child needs a helping hand,
“Or he’s going to be an angry young man some day...”

--song: *In The Ghetto*,
by Elvis Presley

And they’re angry here in Cleveland (Detroit, Chicago, L.A. . .).

Many have grown up abused by addicted parents, abused by neighborhood toughs, abused by the system. . . They’re trapped.

And the anger has grown, and grown. . .

You can hear it in the loud beats and the ever increasing violent lyrics of rap songs. You can hear it in the volatile elongated yelling, and fights, that frequently erupt over a disputed call on an inner city basketball court. You can hear it in the ‘road rage’ that seems to, just as frequently, explode down here.

And you can see it in the Metro Section of the *Plain Dealer* newspaper almost every day: **Two Shot During Robbery... Man Gunned Down On His Own Front Porch... Police Officer Shot...**

Just within a two block area of our house, in two separate incidents, someone was shot to death and another man, a father of three, was dragged from his car and knifed to death in the last couple years. (Both happened in the early morning hours.)

The *Plain Dealer* did a series of stories on the alarming increase in violence in the city. Perhaps the most poignant picture in the series was a photo taken in the early morning hours of four young brothers and sisters huddled up against each other on a fold-out living room couch in the interior of their small apartment. They were trying to sleep.

It was 2:30 a.m. and the bar across the street was just closing. There’d been so many shootings in the parking lot there, the parents were concerned one of the

bullets might come through one of the kids' bedroom walls facing the bar.

Again, people trapped in desperate poverty on this side of the 'chasm.'

roll up their sleeves

So how do you speak peace to this kind of violence?

To just look to increasing "police presence" is tremendously myopic and, at best, a "Band-Aid" approach to something that needs major surgery.

During Campaign 2008, I told nationally syndicated columnist Drew Sefton that some of the people in Shaker Heights (an affluent suburb of Cleveland) should roll up their sleeves, move down here and live side by side with the poor to help make these neighborhoods much safer.

Just like these Catholic Workers did on W. 38th Street.

As I mentioned earlier, every fourth or fifth house on the block is a Catholic Worker's house. These people have reached out to others in the neighborhood. They've developed rapport, camaraderie.

They've put on Saturday afternoon parties for the neighborhood kids at a park up the street. They've invited all the neighbors to things like the urban farm parties.

They play in pick-up basketball games with the kids at the park.

At Christmas, a local group put on a "Miracle on 42nd St." event. This was complete with carolers, an outdoor fire, a "talking Christmas tree" (I'm still not sure how the technology oriented guy at this house did that), and none other than Santa was in front of yet another house.

One of the neighbors told me the more well-off people on the street chipped in for toys this Santa was passing out for the more disadvantaged kids on the street.

On 38th St., Catholic Workers employ some of the more disadvantaged neighbors to work around their homes, some give micro-loans, or more often, "micro gifts" of money and the like to people in the neighborhood.

In a "Take Back the Night Fashion," these Catholic Workers, and others, are often out at night on the street talking in clusters, and the like.

And when necessary, some directly intervene on violent incidents.

The Storefront is a good example.

"CALL THE POLICE!"

Periodically, tempers will flare at the Storefront. And Catholic Workers there are a presence to help de-escalate things by dialoguing, and so on. Liz and I have

both been involved with a few of these there.

Sometimes, however, a fight will break out.

At those times, Catholic Workers, who are “non-violent,” will form a human chain and step in between those fighting.

While this is often successful, it takes guts.

The same type of guts Liz displayed one evening not long ago.

Liz was walking back alone early one summer evening from a market around the corner. As she rounded the corner onto 38th St., she heard screaming.

It was a Hispanic man and woman. The man appeared drunk and was wielding a pool cue and yelling at the woman.

Liz hollered for him to stop.

This made him angrier, and he turned the pool cue toward Liz and yelled some more.

Liz held her ground, as she has in several Storefront altercations, and continued to try to talk the man into stopping.

He wasn't relenting however, and turned back to the woman.

Liz then shouted to several neighbors who were behind their various front yard fences to **“CALL THE POLICE!”**

No one moved.

However, Liz's yelling about the police was enough to begin to de-escalate the situation. And the man eventually ran off.

If it hadn't been for Liz that day, who knows?

The woman might have ended up dead, the man in prison for life. And what about the woman's young son – who was watching?

After the incident died down, Liz went to the child to console him.

...to die for peace

Paul Neufeld-Weaver has children.

When living in Bluffton, I attended a talk by Weaver, who is a college professor and Christian Peacekeeper Team (CPT) member.

He had just returned from a CPT trip to Columbia, South America.

CPT goes into “hot spots” where there is war, political oppression and other potential for violence. They go there to facilitate dialogue, to help those who are being oppressed, and if need be to “...stand in front of whoever is being shot at.”

The CPT creed is that, as a soldier is willing to die in war, they are willing to die for peace. And they figure when Jesus said the greatest thing anyone can do is lay

down their life for another that He meant it.

Weaver had been sent with a group of CPT members to Columbia to advocate for peace on the streets of Bogota amidst some pretty volatile drug wars.

It was continually tense and at one point, Weaver said he was starting to seriously question whether being in harm's way here was the right thing to do with a wife and two young children back in the U.S.

He said he was having those thoughts while walking down a street in the city. And in the next moment, a mother, father and two young children appeared around a corner in front of him.

Weaver said he looked at the family and had another thought.

'Wasn't this family, these little children, entitled to be as safe as his family was back in small town America?'

It was an epiphany moment for him, and he stayed.

Somewhat like an epiphany moment I was to have.

death threat

It happened on a hot, muggy Sunday afternoon.

My daughter Sarah and I were walking home and had reached the corner of 38th St. and Lorain Ave. when Sarah excitedly called out:

"LOOK DAD!"

There was a young Black woman, looking to be in her early 20s, running down the middle of Lorain Ave., barefoot. Her eyes were wild with fear.

Following close behind was a Black man about the same age. He was hollering for her to stop, amidst a flurry of other yelling.

I told Sarah to head home *immediately* and then took off running after them. They had slowed by a nearby Hollywood Video Store.

The woman was now walking fast, still distressed. And the man was walking close behind her, continuing to shout for her to stop.

I moved in a couple steps behind him, not knowing if he had a knife, a gun... Actually, you *never* know down here.

The man soon noticed I was following him and loudly warned me to stay back, this was "his girl." I kept following however, trying to make sure nothing was going to happen.

In short order, the woman broke into a run again, heading down an alley toward 38th St. The man started to run again, as did I. We then passed one of our neighbors at the end of the alley.

I hurriedly explained what was happening and asked her to call the police, then took off behind them again.

Rounding the corner on Lorain Ave., I noticed a CMHA police car and quickly flagged the officer down.

Another neighbor of ours had joined the chase and explained what was going on to the officer, as I continued to pursue.

The officer sped to the next corner and cut the pair off. He hollered to the man to stop, reached him and threw him down on the pavement, sticking a knee in his chest while screaming at him and putting on hand cuffs.

Within four minutes, there were five squad cars there and some 50 people had congregated around the corner – including our Sarah and Joseph, who another neighbor had brought out to the scene.

In the crowd was now also a number of the man's friends, who watched him get roughed up some more and then thrown into the back of the police car.

Tempers were boiling, and with no recourse toward the officer, these friends excitedly asked who had called the police.

No one seemed to know.

This question was then followed by a loud angry statement.

"Whoever it was will be dead in two days," one said.

The next few days were tremendously tense, with me constantly looking over my shoulder everywhere I went. I also wouldn't let Liz or the kids out of my sight.

We had a short campaign tour planned that we decided to move up to get out of harm's way for a few weeks, hoping things would die down.

On the tour, Liz and I debated about moving out of the city. It seemed logical. It seemed so much safer.

But Liz lobbied hard for us not to.

And I kept thinking about the newspaper picture of those little kids huddled together in the apartment across from the bar.

I also thought of Paul Neufeld-Weaver's decision in Bogota.

The kids in Bogota deserved that it be safer. The kids in Cleveland deserved that it be safer. That simple.

So we decided to stay.

We had a friend at the Storefront who knew the guys making the death threat. I asked him to talk to them.

He did, explaining I was the guy who had flagged down the police (if they didn't know by now) and that I had just been interested in the welfare of the woman – who, it turned out, was the guy's girlfriend.

They said they understood, this time.

Things died down.

martyrs?

I'm Catholic.

And Catholic Church Canon Law spells out pretty specific, and lengthy, criteria for being considered an “official martyr” by the Church.

While I'm no Canon lawyer, or moral theologian for that matter, I gotta believe (from an “average Joe” in the pew perspective) that if you put yourself in harm's way because of your faith beliefs – whether you get killed or not – wouldn't God sort of look at you as a martyr?

An addendum: In regard to whether to ‘risk’ moving into the city... Author Shane Clayborn writes in his book *Irresistible Revolution*: “So many people tiptoe through life trying to arrive safely at death.”

Chapt. 14

'Invisible in Plain Sight'

“Whatsoever you do to the least of my brothers... you do to me.” –Jesus.

The way many in our society would look at that quote, the homeless would be considered on the lowest tier of this ‘least of my brothers’ thing.

And the homeless are everywhere down here, *everywhere*.

They stay in abandoned buildings and abandoned houses. They live in makeshift tent cities below bridge overpasses and in small patches of woods.

At night, between 700 and 1,000 people stay at the “2100 Shelter.” First thing in the morning they leave to stand in line at the temporary agencies, or to hang out at the libraries, or to “scrap” for metal and aluminum, or to...

When it’s cold, some will buy \$4 a day passes and ride the bus all over the city – just to stay warm.

They are the “invisible in plain sight,” Cleveland’s *St. Ignatius Magazine* recently noted.

John was one of those ‘invisibles.’

John

John, 53, is a Vietnam vet who did three tours of duty. He saw a tremendous amount of fighting. He also developed a strong case of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

He had a wife and two kids, but that was *years* ago. He’s not even sure where they’re at anymore. The PTSD ended the marriage.

John regularly has flashbacks to the jungles of Vietnam. A car backfiring, the look of a certain person he knew back then, a thunderstorm like one his battalion got caught in while camping in a rice paddy one night... will sometimes quite viscerally take him back to Vietnam.

Other times John awakes sweating and screaming because a dream has taken him back to an intense firefight.

It understandably haunts him.

We became friends with John through the Storefront.

One night when I asked John where he stayed, he said he'd built a little "hooch" that was concealed high up in a bridge abutment.

John has been over to our place for dinner, for coffee, and the like. He is engaging, quite bright, handy with practically anything... but has an extremely hard time being around people for any length of time.

He gets paranoid.

It's the PTSD.

One February night the forecast was for 10 degrees below zero. We insisted John stay with us.

But even in the face of life threatening weather, he adamantly declined. John did, however, borrow a propane tank heater from our camper/campaign vehicle.

For the past five years, John has been coming regularly to the Storefront. And over the years, he developed a good rapport with the Catholic Workers.

The Workers started inviting him over to the Whitman House. He incrementally began coming more and more for meals, for holiday gatherings, to watch the Browns in the TV room on Sundays, to just hang out and talk.

And while he couldn't move in, there were too many people and he was too claustrophobic, the Workers became like an extended family to him.

Eventually (about a year after that cold February night), through a subsidized housing program, John was able to get into a small apartment in the neighborhood. He also got a part-time job at a local gas station.

One night he confided to me that it was the consistent caring and concern of the Catholic Workers that helped him, in turn, care about himself enough to want to get back into the flow of life.

While John still has PTSD issues and would benefit tremendously from long-term, quality mental health counseling and from an extensive Care Team (mentioned earlier), the safety net these Catholic Workers, and others, provided for John down here has been tremendous step in the right direction.

Like Tony First has been pointed in the right direction.

Labre Ministries

Tony First's story, in some respects, was similar to John's. Yet each story has its own aspects of uniqueness – and it's own aspects of pain.

I met Tony one night at the Catholic Worker House where he'd stopped by to

watch some football. He's in his mid '50s.

He had been married.

He had had a job packing engine blocks in Cleveland.

The company moved to the suburbs, and Tony lost his job.

Then the marriage failed.

Tony couldn't find work and eventually became quite depressed, then homeless.

He stayed in a tent for awhile until some young toughs viciously attacked him one night. (That happens down here with some regularity.)

To be safer, Tony took up residence high up under a bridge abutment by Browns Stadium on the lake. Tony lived under the bridge for five years.

During this time, he was regularly visited by students and teachers involved with Labre Ministry. Labre Ministry is an outreach of Ohio City's St. Ignatius High School and was named after St. Benedict Joseph Labre who was known for working with the poor.

Samantha Musser, who is a member of Labre Ministry, told me members of the ministry fan out into the city every Sunday night in three vans bringing food, hot chocolate, blankets, coats... to the homeless. They also listen and develop ongoing rapport with the people they encounter.

(There are thousands of homeless people in Cleveland, according to the Northern Ohio Coalition for the Homeless.)

Each Sunday night after following three separate routes, the students meet back at St. Ignatius Chapel to pray (by name) for each person they met that night.

As the members of Labre Ministry got to know Tony, they were impressed with his sincerity. And when he said he didn't want to spend another cold winter outside, they connected him with the program "Stepping Stone," which is run by a combination of Cleveland's Care Alliance and The Jesuit Community.

Tony underwent a background check and was then asked to volunteer for a time at St. Ignatius's Arrupe House, which is an after-school outreach to low-income families in the area. Tony passed the background check and proved a conscientious volunteer.

He was connected with Reliable Maintenance Service which has a contract for janitorial work with St. Ignatius High School where Tony now works. He also got a small apartment.

Tony was recently featured in the *St. Ignatius Magazine*. The article noted that on most Sunday nights now, he goes out with Labre Ministry because he doesn't want to forget where he came from and he wants to offer hope to those still out there.



Another long line starts to form at St. Herman's House of Hospitality in Ohio City. St. Herman's serves breakfast, lunch and dinner seven days a week. There are also rooms for the homeless there.

Chapt. 15

More sports down here...

We had come off a late fall campaign tour just in time for the Michael J. Zone Indoor Soccer League.

Our kids play a lot of soccer at parks across the country as we travel and asked if they could play in the league.

We said sure.

While signing them up one day, the director of the Zone asked if Liz and I would consider coaching a team.

We said sure we'd coach.

That is, Liz who grew up in New Zealand playing soccer, "coached."

She worked out intricate passing plays for the forwards and alternating strategies for the left and right wings on defense. She taught the kids how to best play the "sweeper" position in front of the goal. She taught them fancy ball handling techniques...

My job was to say: "Nice kick kid," and make sure our players didn't get too unruly on the bench (a task in itself).



Liz and my indoor soccer team at the Michael J. Zone Recreation Center. We won some, lost some. And by the end of the season, I actually even knew some of the rules.

...he was *eight-years-old*

After one of our first games, a young Black boy on the team asked for a ride home. His house was a mile away through a rough neighborhood. It was dark. He said he usually walked it.

He was eight-years-old.

Driving down a street near his home, the boy pointed to some teenagers hanging out on the corner.

“Them’s the drug dealers,” he said almost in passing. “They always trying to get me to try some.”

Liz and I silently looked at each other.

Then, almost in unison, we looked at this *eight year old* child.

[I once told the *BG News* at Bowling Green State University that in a “saner America” every inner city kid would have a childhood, instead of having to grow up way too fast dodging drugs and bullets.]

GOOD!

The soccer season went pretty well. We won some, lost some. The matches were spirited and everyone got ample playing time.

Perhaps the most exciting incident in the season was: “the shootout.”

Regular play in one particular game ended in a four-to-four tie.

To determine a winner in a shootout, five players from each team get one kick apiece. They alternate.

The kick comes from the basketball court foul line against the opposing team’s goalie.

As it all see-sawed in our game’s shootout, the noise in the gym reached an absolutely fevered pitch.

At last, it was three to three – with one player left to kick, ours.

He readied himself, took a deep breath, approached the ball, and... *bam*, buried it deep in the upper, right-hand corner of the net.

GOOD!

Our kids danced around the court as if they’d won the World Cup.

That night at the Whitman House over dinner, I excitedly – and quite animatedly – told the story of the game, in detail.

When I finished, there was silence.

But only for a few seconds.

Then one of the Catholic Worker volunteers, Joe Mueller, who is on an International Christian Peacekeeper Team, spoke.

“All organized sports do is prepare kids for capitalism (cut-throat competition) and war (“shootout,” “bomb,” “blitz”...),” he started.

That took, oh, some of the wind out of my sails. (But what’s a Catholic Worker dinner without some counter-cultural analysis, huh?)

Through the rest of the meal, I actually thought about what Joe had said. And I had to admit he had some good points.

After the meal, Joe and I found ourselves together in the kitchen washing dishes. I asked him what he had planned for the weekend.

“I’m going over to some buddies tomorrow to watch the Ohio State / Michigan game,” he said.

I stood there mouth agape, or, well, open more than it usually is.

The look was not lost on Joe.

“Ok, so it’s a total personal failing on my part,” he smiled. “But I went to Michigan...”

Yet *another* demonstration of the existential depth of a Michigan fan.

Note: Incidentally, if you are looking for a version of a sport that doesn’t prepare you for cut-throat capitalism or war, then Catholic Worker “Social Justice Football” would be your ticket.

Chapt. 16

'Social Justice Football'



Social Justice Football: An old scuffed ball, no yard lines, no rules ... “and everybody goes out for a pass!” The Whitman House stands in the background as a metaphoric ‘goal post of hope’ for many who pass through.

Every fall in this fabulously big (for the city), green grassy field right next to the Whitman House is the annual Catholic Worker “Social Justice Football Game.”

The rules:

Anybody can play.

No keeping score (except in the heads of those of us who are still a little bit

competitive, but not ‘cut-throat competitive’ of course).

And anybody can play at any position most any time they ask.

Having played quarterback in high school, I asked to play quarterback first. (I’m one of the ones who would be keeping score in my head.)

I huddled everybody up.

Two of our players were my wife Liz who, again, grew up in New Zealand watching rugby and Marie from Germany, who was at the Whitman House for a year doing volunteer work.

“Liz, you and Marie split out on the right and run short pass patterns.”

They both responded in unison.

“What’s a pass?”

I now was someone who wouldn’t be keeping score in my head.

The magic of social justice football was Marie actually did catch a pass (eventually), Liz caught a pass, in fact almost everyone was given the chance to catch a pass, to throw, to block, to run... even Sparky.

Actually, Sparky liked running the best.

Sparky is Mary Grace Destefanis’s kind of spotted Dalmatian looking dog. Each time Mary Grace’s team huddled up, there would be Sparky standing in the middle. And when the play started, Sparky would just kind of run around with everyone without, amazingly enough, hardly ever getting in anyone’s way.

But a more amazing story than Sparky that day was: Gary.

Gary

Gary played football in high school too.

But that was a long time ago.

In his mid-30s now, Gary had been homeless and on the streets the past couple years.

He threw a number of pin-point passes to a rather fleet-footed Mike Fiala, who had played football in college. And Gary threw a number of nice passes to Paul Kapczuk Jr., who looks like a defensive tackle in stature, yet demonstrated some surprising acrobatic ability in a couple of the catches.

Gary also scrambled well (not even Sparky could corner him), and he picked off a pass on defense.

After the game – which we surprisingly won (But who was counting, huh?) – Gary approached me and said: “Thanks for inviting me. This was *a lot* of fun – and really helped me keep my mind off things for awhile.”

...didn't go off the deep end

We had met Gary at the Storefront a couple years prior.

He said he had a degree in engineering from a college in northwest Ohio. He'd lost a job and was having a hard time finding another.

He was staying at a shelter downtown and updating his resume at the library. There were other background things probably, but Gary was never too forthcoming about that.

But, *boy*, did he take to our kids. As our kids took to him as well, especially Jonathan.

When they'd see each other they'd just simply light up. He'd play checkers with Jonathan, read to Jonathan...

He'd never been married, never had kids. Again, the reasons could have been tremendously varied and complex as to why not.

But the byproduct was simple to diagnose. Loneliness.

Jonathan helped fill some of those holes for Gary. He helped lift him, if even momentarily, out of intermittent depression.

Liz and I spent a lot of time talking to Gary as well, as did our other kids. We sort of adopted him, if you will.

In all this Gary didn't go off the deep end. He kept trying.

And one day at the Storefront he approached us all smiles. He'd gotten a job in maintenance in a downtown hotel.

What's more, he was looking for a place.

We had recently moved from Mary Grace's place to one of Mark Pestak's units because we needed some extra space for an office. Also, we were just readying at this time to go out on a three-month campaign tour.

Because we'd gotten to know Gary, to trust him, we offered to sub-lease our place to him at a quite low rent – thanks to Mark's affordable housing concept. This would allow Gary to save some money to get his own place when we got back.

And that's, ultimately, what happened.

Chapt. 17

Storefront 2

The dynamics at the Storefront are many.

I mentioned, for instance, how our family sort of adopted Gary.

Actually our family's presence there, I've been told, has helped in a number of ways.

For instance, Paul Kapczuk Jr. told me he'd noticed with our family (especially the kids), there's a less edgy air to the atmosphere.

Some of the people who frequent the Storefront, oh, swear a bit like sailors – with rap music inflections, if you know what I mean.

However, I can't tell you how many times that I've heard as we've walked in at the middle of some of these four letter diatribes:

"Hey, cool it! There's children in here!"

The kids' presence, I'm sure, has also averted some fights.

But more, and on a deeper level, the family has helped some folks connect again with something they lost, or, like Gary, never had.

For instance, one of the homeless men had gotten divorced years ago and was totally estranged from his wife and four children who were still living in the Northeast somewhere. I never got the whole story, but there was a lot of pain, a lot of angst.

The one thing he clung to was a chess case that he carried practically everywhere. He said he was a "professional chess player."

One day our Joseph, who wanted to learn how to play chess (checkers is more my game), sidled up to "Mr. Mel" and asked him if he'd teach him.

Mel said sure.

And for the better part of a year, they'd often retire to a corner of the Storefront where Mel would give Joseph lessons – like, I'm sure, Mel would have wanted to teach his grandson.

Joseph, in turn, became quite a chess player and both of them established a

great bond.

Yeah, these guys need help getting back on their feet down here, the Storefront always needs money to help... but beyond all that, the promotion of human dignity and compassion is happening continually here – person to person in the moment.

cards

And as Joseph was learning chess, our son Jonathan, 4, was teaching some of the guys at the Storefront another game.

Cards are big here.

Over coffee, people play spades, euchre, hearts... and a new/old card game thanks to Jonathan.

One particular Thursday night, I stumbled across what can best be described as a take off of a classic movie scene.

I had been in the kitchen helping prepare some food when I walked out into the main room for a minute to talk to Liz. She and the kids were scattered about the room mingling with the guests.

Liz was with Jonathan at a cluster of chairs and couches. I arrived just in time to hear, above a rather loud din, this deep, gravely voice, attached to a tremendously large guy who could have easily passed for a Cleveland Browns linebacker, exclaim:
“GO FISH!”

And there was Jonathan and this man holding card hands, Jonathan now just starting to ‘fish’ as the man looked on intently.

Funniest, most endearing sight...

...lost in the moment

The people who volunteer down here bring a lot of different things to the mix. Each Wednesday night, John Carroll University students bring their youth, their vitality and a variety of sandwiches, fruits and cookies.

Catholic Worker Brian Stefan-Szittia, and a group of other regulars, usually do Friday nights at the Storefront. Brian is a great cook and even better piano player.

After the meal, Brian can periodically be found in a corner of the room on an old piano playing all kinds of tunes as people gather round to sing along.

This is another of those tremendously heart warming scenes where music serves as a common denominator to bring people together here and for those in rough situations to get lost in the moment forgetting about the street, about the

desperation, about the cold. . .

And as Brian is excellent on the piano, Catholic Workers Dick Webber and Kate Campbell (they're married) are excellent with, well, the mind. Kate and Dick's 'day jobs' are as counselors at a mental health center.

A significant number of street people have some sort of mental disability. The Cuyahoga County Office on Homelessness here estimates some 30% of the homeless have some sort of mental disorder.

And Dick and Kate are great at establishing rapport with guests at the Storefront, talking to them easily and helping discern some of the issues.

My wife Liz acts, in a way, like a wife/mother figure, passing out toiletries for showers, serving the food, also getting in frequent conversations. . .

It's the conversations and getting to know people that is most important here, says Catholic Worker Peter Quilligan who, like the other Catholic Workers, are forever getting to know the guests better and responding to an ongoing myriad of needs.

Out of the suburban "bubble"

Suburban churches around the Greater Cleveland area help the Storefront in a number of ways.

Some donate money. Others regularly donate clothing, food and other items.

My sister Patti spearheaded a winter drive at her suburban Methodist church to collect gloves, hats and scarves for people at the Storefront. And my other sister, Kathy, donates pastry. She owns a bakery shop in another Westside suburb.

Other suburban church groups come down regularly to volunteer.

For instance, Bay Village Presbyterian Church members volunteer on Saturdays.

"I'm down here because the Gospel message about helping the poor calls me here," one man told me. "That simple."

The comment called to mind a picture the Whitman House has displayed on its bulletin board. It is of a woman subsistence farmer in Africa. She's addressing a humanitarian aid worker as he approaches.

The caption:

"If you're coming just to help me, you can go home. But if you're coming to help me because your salvation is tied to mine, then please. . . pick up a hoe."

Some of the suburban church members at the Storefront bring their teenagers as well. Another member said to me one day that he was envious that, not only were our children here helping at the Storefront, but helping in the neighborhood at large.

I said, in turn, that it has been a major blessing for them. And I talked about a

high school student we'd met in Freehold, New Jersey, during one of our campaign stops.

Marie Feely went to a high school that required students to do 10 hours of volunteer work in the community. She did 137 hours.

She worked at a soup kitchen and at a home for unwed mothers with AIDS. She told me that up until then she had lived in a protective suburban "bubble," not realizing how desperate some people were.

It changed her.

Likewise, I told this church member that the Ohio City experience was indeed changing our kids – for the better.

In fact, I often say on the campaign trail that our education platform calls for much more student volunteering out in the community.

"I want our Sarah, Joseph and Jonathan learning as much about helping others as they do about math, science, English..." I say.

And as Ohio City has been a 'redemptive' experience for our children, our children have allowed for any number of redemptive experiences for the Storefront guests.

Like "Mr. Bob."

...because of that truck

There was another man who took a real liking to our Jonathan at the Storefront. "Mr. Bob" was in his mid-60s.

His wife and kids were a distant memory.

Now it was just him, the shelter and a bottle.

Every time Mr. Bob saw Jonathan at the Storefront, or on the street, he'd instantly come over and talk to Jonathan. Jonathan, in turn, really liked Mr. Bob.

Jonathan, at four years old, didn't see skin color, didn't see poverty, didn't even see Mr. Bob's continually disheveled clothes. (For that matter, Jonathan's clothes – as most four-year-olds' clothes – were disheveled more often than not.)

A couple weeks before one Christmas, Mr. Bob promised Jonathan he'd get him a "toy truck" for Christmas. Jonathan was ecstatic and talked about it often in the following weeks.

As Christmas Eve got closer, I told Liz that because of Bob's alcoholism there was a good chance he wouldn't follow through on his promise to Jonathan.

Christmas Eve afternoon I went to a thrift store around the corner and got a small truck. That night at the Storefront before Bob had seen Jonathan, I took Bob aside to give him the truck to give to Jonathan.

He looked surprised and said there was no need.

Bob walked to the corner of the room and picked up a rather large (a good seven times the size of my truck) package and gave it to Jonathan.

It was a “monster” remote-control pick-up truck, complete with headlights that worked, a horn that worked, a loud engine... Jonathan’s eyes almost popped out of his head. (He hasn’t yet totally grasped our ‘end global warming platform.’)

That night Jonathan and Mr. Bob played with the truck on the floor, joked, laughed...

Bob died of a heart attack at a bus stop the next spring.

And you know, I have to believe he’s in heaven right now because of that truck.

Are there Steelers fans in heaven?

Now while it’s easy to believe Mr. Bob is in Heaven, it’s much harder to believe any Pittsburgh Steelers fans are going to Heaven, except maybe Patrick.

Patrick, who is as ardent a Pittsburgh Steelers fan as I am a Cleveland Browns fan, would be homeless if it weren’t for the Whitman House. And several days a week he comes to the Storefront to wash dishes.

Patrick is disabled, which includes major problems with his legs.

Yet these nights at the Storefront he’ll stand most of the two hours while performing his duties, as painful as that is for him.

The only thing being more ‘painful’ is hearing him go on, and on, and on... about the Steelers while I’m back in the kitchen drying the dishes. My own form of mortification.



“Sing us a song you’re the piano man...” Brian Stefan-Szittia is as at home playing oldie’s from the ‘60s at the Storefront as he is playing contemporary church songs at St. Patrick’s. He also heads up the Inter-Religious Task Force, a non-profit involved with promoting social justice and peace throughout Latin America.

Chapt. 18

The Elderly

It was a hot summer night in the Storefront.

There was an older man, maybe in his late 60s, sitting in a corner. He was relatively thin, his clothes dirty and threadbare.

He sat by himself. And he clung to a section of a wrinkled, discarded *Plain Dealer* newspaper.

He seemed lost in a story he was reading as the sky turned a burnt orange through the window behind him. It would soon be dark.

I sensed this old man was trying desperately in the racing approach of night to hold onto the light and to stay immersed in any story other than his own.

The Storefront would be closed soon.

And there's no 'social security' on the back alleys, or under the bridges around here, once the sun goes down.

she lived in her station wagon

There's a significant population of elderly who are homeless on this side of the "chasm." No family, few friends... just desperately trying to survive.

Like Lynn.

Lynn, too, was in her late 60s. She'd been married. Her husband had died several years prior.

They had been on a tight budget living in a small home in Cleveland. After the husband died, Lynn couldn't make ends meet on her own and the home was foreclosed on.

She ended up on the streets of Cleveland, living in her station wagon – year round.

Lynn would park on side streets at night. She would take showers at the

Storefront or at the Michael J. Zone Recreation Center.

Lynn would go from church to church for their regular weekly meals.

She was pulled over one night because a headlight was out, and the police found her car registration had lapsed. The car was impounded and Lynn didn't have the money to renew the registration or get the car out of impound.

We got a call from Pastor Horner at St. Paul's Community Church. Lynn was there and desperate. She was afraid of going to a shelter.

Could she use our Christ Room?

In the few days Lynn was here, my wife and daughter Sarah befriended Lynn, heard her story, and we all tried to offer as much hospitality as possible.

We also observed the streets had hardened Lynn considerably, but below the veneer was a high level of anxiety and loneliness.

Lynn, like so many people down here, was a perfect candidate for a comprehensive Care Team. But, again, one didn't exist.

While with us, Lynn raised enough money from some acquaintances to renew here registration and get her car out. She then moved in with a friend and found some temporary employment as well.

extended and hospice care

While there isn't a full Care Team here, there is a fairly comprehensive safety net for the elderly in Ohio City.

Beyond the Storefront and the church meals mentioned earlier, the Catholic Worker House is doing its part.

There have been a good number of elderly residents over the years, including George, who is also a man in his late 60s. He's been at the Whitman House for many years and is now experiencing the onset of gradual dementia.

The other residents and volunteers treat George like a tremendously respected, aging parent. They continually look after him, take him to all sorts of places and are vigilant about what he eats (he has diabetes as well), how much he sleeps, and so on.

At some point, George might even need more supervision and a priest at St. Coleman's Church here is looking at a model to help provide that.

St. Coleman's Fr. Bob Begin and Catholic Worker volunteer Betsy Knestrick, who has run nursing home facilities, are looking to start an extended care facility similar to the Silver Sands Home in Ashtabula, Ohio. (We had researched this facility several years prior for a position paper on Social Security.)

"Silver Sands" is an assisted living facility with a twist, or rather a discount. St. Joseph's Church in Ashtabula has leased an old convent to Jane and Margo Stuart for the past 20 years.

The cost per month to residents is about half of what an average assisted living facility would cost, Jane told me. What's more, the care is ultra-personal.

There are four full-time staff, several part-time staff and a number of people from St. Joseph's who volunteer in various ways. Another reason the cost is so reasonable is because Jane and Margo don't take a salary, they look at it more as a ministry.

What's more, they hospice the dying residents on site as well.

However, a population of the elderly on Cleveland's near Westside are indigent and can't even afford a "low-end" nursing home, much less hospice care.

To fill this need, the Malachi House was established.

This facility is quality non-profit, in-patient hospice care for the indigent without any type of family down here.

A row house was converted to the hospice. It is funded by grants, local churches and individual donations. Besides qualified medical personnel, the Malachi House is also staffed by a wide cross-section of volunteers.

Fr. Paul Hritz helped spearhead the project and told me the Malachi House had admitted some 1,300 patients to date.

One of these patients was Paulette.

Paulette was in her late 70s and in the last stages of dying from cancer.

She had lived in a small apartment in the neighborhood, gotten by on a minimal monthly Social Security check and had no healthcare insurance or family in the area.

Paulette was a member of St. Patrick's Church and included in a prayer intention during Mass one Sunday morning.

After Mass, the kids and I went out into Liz's backyard habitat at home and transplanted a fern and some flowers into a pot for Paulette, and anyone else who'd be in the room in the future.

With the hopes the plant would stand as a symbolic sentinel, like Mary Ellen Eickman-Fiala's flower pots, to the sense of neighborhood caring that is so palpable in Ohio City.

End note: On a recent campaign tour, we stopped at an assisted living facility in Oberlin, Ohio, to meet with someone.

The facility, like so many these days, was like a country club with *all* the amenities. Beautiful, rather spacious living units. An impressive recreation center and social hall. New golf carts that ferried people around the grounds...

Having just had the Malachi House experience, I couldn't help but think if these retirement people on this side of the chasm, so to speak, cut their lifestyles at these facilities in half, how many more of the marginalized people down here could have just the basics in extended care in their old age?

Chapt. 19

Speaking Peace to the Violence 2

An ethos that's strong in Ohio City is peace-building, at every level.

For instance, the majority of Catholic Workers believe in non-violence. They believe some forms of violence emanate from people who are continually frustrated in not having enough (adequate housing, nutritional food, access to quality healthcare...).

So they try to meet these needs at every turn through the Corporal Works of Mercy: giving food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, visiting the prisoners...

And actually, the Catholic Worker goes one better on the latter. Not only do they visit those in prison, they're part of a nationwide "Books to Prisoners Program."

Catholic Worker volunteers solicit new and used books, have developed a significant library of these in a room above the Storefront and many Sunday afternoons they meet to fill prisoner requests for books of various subject matters.

Mediation Program

And as the Catholic Workers are striving to improve the quality of life of everyone around them, Cleveland's Community Development Corporation Project is working to do the same.

Cleveland has 21 CDC programs throughout the city, and Ian Heisey is involved with the one in Ohio City.

He told me the CDC project focuses on safety issues, affordable housing, education, employment assistance... What's more, Heisey said his CDC project is the only one in Cleveland that has a Mediation Program.

Heisey, who helps coordinate this project, said neighbors sometimes develop friction with other neighbors over such things as persistent loud music, troublesome dogs, and the like. And instead of getting the police involved, the court involved...

some neighbors in Ohio City opt for voluntary “conflict resolution,” which is facilitated by Heisey’s office.

Note: Our administration would promote a U.S. Department of Peace, and a component would include similar Mediation Projects in communities nationwide. The process gives people more tools in conflict resolution, which can carry over into family disputes, friendship disputes, etc.

So often relationships are destroyed simply because people don’t have the knowledge of how to do healthy conflict resolution.

encounter groups

The school system here also employs people trained in conflict resolution and other peace building techniques. Kathleen McDonell is one. (She is also a Catholic Worker living on W. 38th St.)

Ms. McDonell works at Euclid High School here helping oversee a Student Peer Mediation Program. Trained students help orchestrate mediation sessions between fellow students having problems with each other. The intent is to head off potentially dangerous situations, while teaching those involved better, long-term coping skills -- including healthier vents for their emotions.

I attended an informational evening at Ms. McDonell’s place that featured some of these Euclid High School peer mediators. One teen who was rather large in stature said before the program he didn’t know how to express his feelings around some rough situations at home. So he would take his anger out on the football field and with his friends. He described himself as being continually “mean.”

Since being involved with the program, however, he said he has learned better ways to express his feelings, is considerably calmer, friendlier, and volunteers as a peer mediator to now help others.

One of Ms. McDonell’s other jobs is to go from school to school conducting seminars for teachers, parents and students on a gambit of peace and trust building topics. Projects similar to what we researched at Ohio’s Wilmington College Peace Center.

Staff members from the Peace Center go into area schools for things like weekend trust building exercises. As an example, student leaders will be picked from various peer groups like athletes, honor students, toughs...

They then are put together in weekend encounter groups to get to know each other better, to break down barriers, to discover common denominators... all to promote more peace and camaraderie in the schools.

peace worldwide

The Catholic Workers are not just interested in peace in the neighborhood, they are interested in peace worldwide.

Catholic Worker Tim Musser is tremendously active in the Peace Movement and is part of a Peace Vigil on the streets here every week. Liz and the kids stood in solidarity with the group on a recent Saturday morning.

Tim said he bases his non-violent activism on Jesus' edicts to love your enemies and do good to those who would harm you.

How this should translate to American policy, said Tim, is that we should become an *entire* nation of "humanitarians not warriors."

In regard to U.S. policy, Tim said he'd like to see the current military infrastructure (planes, trucks, ships...), turned into conveyances of humanitarian aid going out all over the world.

This way, many more people in need would get the help, hot spots around the globe would start to cool and there would be a lot more positive sentiment toward America.

What's more, perhaps other First World countries would follow suit.

The belief about actively promoting peace has taken Catholic Workers all over the globe to promote peace.

From the Whitman House, Catholic Worker Joe Mueller went to war torn Iraq as part of a Christian Peacekeeper Team.

They traveled that country chronicling human rights violations and tried to stand in solidarity with those being victimized.

During a "Soup and Substance" presentation at the Whitman House after he returned, Joe described in detail the conditions he saw in Iraq and said several times that he and his team members believed they were being followed by an insurgent group.

(The next Christian Peacekeeping Team into Iraq was not only followed, but abducted. And one of the members was eventually murdered.)

And as the Catholic Workers decry insurgency violence, they decry military violence in general.

Each year at the Cleveland Air Show held not far from here, military planes are featured. Across the fence from the airfield, the Catholic Workers stage a shadow "Peace Show."

"WAR IS NOT ENTERTAINMENT! THESE PLANES KILL!" One protest sign says.

Tim Musser added that if we have the technological smarts to develop the Stealth Bomber and Trident Missile, couldn't these technological smarts be better used in getting desperately needed clean drinking water to the Third World?

Chapt. 20

Painter's Plus Pause

A Needle. A Knife.

I was painting the interior of a place on 38th St.

In the bathroom was a calendar with daily thoughts from around the world.

The June 27th entry was a Ugandan proverb: "Before you throw the knife, look for the needle."

The analogy in Christian circles would be (and I'm paraphrasing): "Before you endeavor to take the splinter out of your brother's eye, you might want to remove the plank from your own eye."

Now, onward to North Korea...

At the time I read this Ugandan proverb, newspaper reports indicated North Korea had one, long-range Taepondong 2 missile fueled and ready for a test launch.

One missile.

A needle, metaphorically.

Meanwhile just in Montana alone, we probably have some 2,000 long-range nuclear missiles aimed all over the world!

2,000 missiles.

A 'knife,' metaphorically.

On *National Public Radio's Diane Rehm Show*, I phoned in and got into a debate with former Secretary of State Howard Baker.

He was on a tour promoting his new book and at one point in the show said that he believed in the doctrine "peace through (military) strength."

I said by amassing nuclear weapons and aiming them at all these other smaller countries, wouldn't it be common sense that these countries, in turn, would try to *develop their own nuclear weapons to protect themselves?*

Mr. Baker, however, held to his position, saying that we'd never used our weapons of mass destruction.

Hiroshima and Nagasaki came to mind.

I also mentioned that it would just take one push of that proverbial “red button” by a president who wasn’t too stable.

Richard Nixon came to mind.

Again Mr. Baker held to his position.

And I went back to my house painting.

Chapt. 21

Eco-Ohio City

Ohio City is perhaps the most eco-friendly place in the country.

Our platform calls for America to shift from being the leading ‘Society of Consumers’ to being the leading ‘Society of Conservers.’

And that’s evolving here, in spades.

keeping in ‘step



City Wheels hybrid car. For each one of these babies, it’s estimated 20 people in Cleveland will forgo owning their own cars.

One of the eco-initiatives Ohio City boasts is the “City Wheels” project. City Wheels has a fleet of hybrid cars (combination gas and electric powered) that are

available for rent to area people.

Project representative Meagan Wilson, who is a Catholic Worker as well, told me often those in the city get places, within a certain radius, walking, bicycling or on bus. However, they keep a car just for those rare occasions when they have to, say, move something, or pick someone up at the airport, or...

“It’s the sense we have to *have* a car, just in case,” said Ms. Wilson.

She also said many people sink a “huge amount of money” into a car (insurance, car payments, etc.), and again, they may use it quite infrequently.

Ms. Wilson added figures show that for every City Wheels car, some 20 urban residents will decide not to own their own car.

Over at the Catholic Worker House, all the residents share just one pick-up truck, but it’s managed in such a way that it’s generally quite workable. (Each resident using the pick-up Co-op pays a mere \$10 a month.) Residents here also often take the bus, walk or bicycle.

At one of the urban farm gatherings, I met a man who said he was one of a growing number of “Yes We Can” people who have intentionally gotten rid of their cars altogether and bicycle, walk or take the bus everywhere.

And Cleveland’s “Clean Air Buses” are excellent as well. The buses run on clean, compressed natural gas and have outside bike racks on the fronts.

Cleveland is also looking at a “Bus Transit Center Model” in nearby Akron that has 432 solar panels, the largest single array in Ohio. And it has a geothermal heating and cooling system.

Rain water is stored to use in restrooms and on landscaping. In addition, there are no parking spaces at the Center. Even the employees have to take the bus to get there, according to a Cleveland *Plain Dealer* article.

Trying to keep in step (pun intended) with all this, our family walks and bicycles some 90% of the places we go within a five mile radius of home, even in the Cleveland winters. (The Fridrich Bicycle Shop across the street sells winter bicycle tires, even some with studs.)

For those not able to afford the newer stuff at Fridrich, there is the Ohio City Bicycle Co-op. The co-op refurbishes donated bicycles and other bike equipment. They then sell them at tremendously reduced prices.

Catholic Workers Clarence Walker and Ryan Whitman spend time volunteering at the co-op and took our son Joseph under their wings, helping him with an “Earn a Bike Program” that the co-op sponsors for area kids.

Kyoto Protocol Home Zone

When it comes to the environment, our platform is left of the Green Party –

and that's hard to do. We think the issue of climate change is a clear and imminent threat.

“What sane parent wouldn't want to do everything necessary to ensure their kids were going to have a world to live in down the line?” I often ask in my talks.

And to that end, our family established a “Kyoto Protocol Home Zone” at our place. (The Kyoto Protocol was a United Nations generated treaty to set uniform standards among participating nations for the reduction of greenhouse gases.)

Besides walking or bicycling practically everywhere locally, we collect rainwater in a barrel, don't use air-conditioning, close some rooms off in the winter...

Instead of central heating, we use a small, portable heater that we take around to the rooms we primarily use during the day.

And at night, in a reconfigured, rather big bedroom with portable, collapsible walls, we all sleep in this one heated room – leaving the rest of the house unheated. (When you think about it, to heat a living room, dining room, den... with central heating, while you're sleeping is a *tremendous* waste of energy.)

Some Catholic Workers house-share in order to share expenses, heating, lighting, etc. And in Winona, Minnesota, while out campaigning, we learned this city has a “House Share Program” to help connect people who want to house share.

Liz dries practically all the clothes on a line out back, or on lines in the basement in the winter.

In addition, we recycle practically everything and live simply with few material items. (It takes the burning of fossil fuels to make most of the items.)

And as all this is happening residentially, to one degree or another throughout Ohio City, it is happening in the business community as well.

roof vegetation, etc.

The Green Building Coalition in Ohio City helped convert an old historic office building around the corner from us into one of the ‘greenest’ buildings in the country.

The four-story old bank building uses geothermal heating and cooling. It has low-flow water fixtures. The landscaping is irrigation free to reduce water usage.

There are motion sensor lights in the hallways, so the lights aren't on when unnecessary, according to Coalition literature.

There are low E-glaze double pane windows and non-toxic and low-fume emitting furniture.

And then there's the roof.

Energy Star-approved Pyramic coating reflects solar radiation, thereby cutting

the roof temperature in half from that of a typical black, rubberized roof.

In addition, the Garland Co., Inc. in Cleveland designed a “green roof.” That is, about 25% of the roof surface is planted with living native vegetation such as wildflowers and plants that increases the roof’s life-span by decreasing ultra-violet light exposure and freeze-thaw cycles.

Indoor air-conditioning loads will also decrease as a result.

And finally, another 50% of the roof surface has photo-voltaic roof panels.

The only thing missing is a wind turbine.

Chapt. 22

Practiced With Oranges

We coached another winter indoor soccer team at the Michael J. Zone Center in 2008. We'd just lost our third presidential run (go figure), and we needed to get our mind off things.

The kids, as usual, were spirited, competitive, and a number of them were *awfully* good this year as well. These particular kids were referred to as: “the Africans.”

A group of these boys, and their families, were recent immigrants to the U.S. They were from the country of Burundi and had come here via a refugee camp in Tanzania – where they had fled to from the fighting.



The guys just in from the country of Burundi in Africa, via a refugee camp in Tanzania. Ohio City has welcomed them with open arms.

These kids, for the most part, were so much more advanced soccer players than their American counterparts.

“We couldn’t always get soccer balls, so we practiced with oranges,” one boy said.

After one of our games in which one of the boys from Burundi played superbly, all he could talk about (with grave notes of concern) was a brother who was still over in the fighting.

When the people from Burundi arrived in Ohio City, while they could play soccer, they couldn’t speak the language. It was a totally foreign culture. And many needed financial help.

In turn, churches, other organizations and individuals rallied to help – as they did with a group of Liberian refugees several years prior.

Chapt. 23

Ohio City ‘Welcomes Strangers’

According to U.N. figures, there are some 13 million people living in refugee camps around the world.

They have been driven out of their homes, sometimes their countries, by civil war, by political oppression, by natural disaster...

The refugees, for the most part, live in tents with no running water and little sanitation. Children and adults swelter, or shiver, in refugee camps in Afghanistan, in the Sudan, in Liberia...

A group of refugees from war torn Liberia arrived in Ohio City several years ago. The Migrant Refugee Office here, working in tandem with such non-profits as Catholic Charities, arranged safe passage and help once the refugees got here.

The new arrivals were connected with social services like Medicaid, food stamps, language classes... Homes were also arranged.

Bill Merriman (mentioned earlier) has taken the lead for St. Patrick's Church in helping the Liberians, and he gave me a tour of one of the homes that was provided for them. The home came from the "Bridge Foundation," a non-profit set up by some politically progressive Catholics who believe strongly in social justice causes.

It is a three-story house with 10 bedrooms, three bathrooms and two common kitchens. It's also been furnished.

Bill said he has, in an ad hoc fashion, solicited furniture, appliances, clothes and food for these families.

He told me it's often boggling for the refugees. They've come from rather primitive surroundings in rural Liberia to a place where you merely flick a switch and a light goes on.

"Electricity? What's electricity?" Bill said he heard more than once when they first arrived.

Besides the formal social service help and donated items, Bill said a number of individuals in Ohio City have stepped up to help the Liberians in various ways.

My wife Liz and our daughter Sarah, for instance, volunteered at an after-school tutoring program at St. Patrick's for the Liberian youth. (The program was coordinated by Denise Rowland, who is also involved with St. Patrick's choir.) Liz helped tutor math and Sarah, 9, helped with some of the younger children on basic reading skills.

Without this type of help, assimilation into the school system here would be extremely hard, at best.

Eventually, as Bill has seen time and again, the refugee youth start to assimilate quite well, and the adults get jobs, get off welfare roles and start to give back to the neighborhood. What's more, they start reaching out to other refugees just arriving.

Bill said the rallying around these new arrivals initially is, ultimately, what the Gospel message calls for: "...to welcome strangers."

Chapt. 24

Local 'Healthcare for All' Plan

Ohio City's safety net for those without healthcare insurance is pretty extensive. If anyone knows about being uninsured when it comes to healthcare, it's our family. In fact, I probably was the only presidential candidate in 2008 without healthcare insurance.

When it comes to the general populace these days, our family is in no means alone. As I write this, there are some 48 million Americans without healthcare insurance.

When we landed in Cleveland, we found out about Neighborhood Family Practice. (Mary Ellen Eikman-Fiala is on their board.)

Neighborhood Family Practice

Neighborhood Family Practice (NFP) is a non-profit community health center. They accept Medicaid, Medicare, and there is a sliding fee scale for people without healthcare insurance.

NFP has been federally funded since the year 2000. According to agency literature, a vast majority of NFP's patients are below the poverty line.

One of those was a hot dog vendor.

NFP Executive Director Jean Therrien talked about this man during 2006 testimony before the House Committee of Ways and Means in D.C.

She said this man had been discharged from a local private hospital with a diagnosis of heart failure. He needed additional treatment and studies done, but it was explained they wouldn't be available to him unless he brought in a cashier's check for \$1,000 as a down payment.

"It might well have been a million dollars!" Ms. Therrien said the hot dog vendor exclaimed.

Ms. Therrien also cited the case of a man in Cleveland who had a reoccurrence of a blood clot in his leg. Because his healthcare plan included a deductible of \$2,000, he put off going into the hospital for a week – and almost died.

Lakewood, New York’s Dr. Rudy Mueller knows about that. He is the author of *As Sick As It Gets* about healthcare in America.

On a stop in Lakewood, Dr. Mueller told us that he had a woman patient who had a cut on her leg that got infected. Because she didn’t have healthcare insurance, or the money, she put off getting help – hoping it would get better.

It didn’t.

Gangrene set in.

By the time the woman did go for treatment, the leg had to be amputated.

Note: Our family has used Neighborhood Family Practice several times (at a reduced, sliding-fee scale rate) for an ear infection, the flu, our daughter Sarah’s allergies... And our regular physician Dr. Eric Kauffman has been *absolutely* excellent in every respect.

The reason I write this is that Dr. Kauffman, I’m sure, isn’t making anything even near as much as the doctors at, say, the Cleveland Clinic across town. Yet you’d think he was with the expertise he displays, attention to detail, and so on.

‘We Are the Uninsured’

Some two million (of seven million) Ohioans are without healthcare insurance. And some of the staff at Neighborhood Family Practice here helped form a chapter of the statewide “We Are the Uninsured” movement to lobby for ‘healthcare for all’ in Ohio.

To familiarize local legislators with more about healthcare issues, the area chapter of We Are the Uninsured sponsored a dinner. Besides literature and conversation, on display was a photo-montage depicting scenes from the area that represented poverty.

Being a former photo-journalist, the kids and I volunteered to capture some of these scenes.

We took some pictures of a man lying in a doorway at mid-day, an empty wine bottle close by. And, I’m sure, no money for a detox facility.

We took pictures of a rather emaciated, dirty looking man who is continually going about the neighborhood in a wheel chair. Talking to him beforehand, we learned he had been a shooting victim and was paralyzed from the waist down.

We took some pictures of young kids playing football in the front yard of a

rather dilapidated home. The father told me he's barely able to get by with a low paying job at a nearby factory, and healthcare is a major issue for him.

We took some pictures of cheap headstones at a local cemetery. A place, I'm sure, where more than a few people down here end up – prematurely.

During this time, I gave a presentation to the We Are the Uninsured Group. I talked about tremendously creative programs we'd researched around the country to get more healthcare help to those on the margins.

'community healthcare models'

I explained during the presentation that in Monroe, Louisiana, there is a "Community Pharmacy." The pharmacy, which is a non-profit effort coordinated by the local chapter of the St. Vincent De Paul Society there, provides affordable medication to low income people in the area.

The Pharmacy gets financial donations from the community. It also receives donations of sample medication from area doctors, and left over medication, often from area nursing homes after someone has died.

Dr. Myron Glick has rolled up his sleeves and moved his "Jericho Road" medical practice, and his family, into the heart of the inner city of Buffalo, New York. With Buffalo being a port city, there is a large concentration of new immigrants there. (Dr. Glick has treated people from 50 countries, so far.)

On a stop in Buffalo, Dr. Glick told us he's a Mennonite and believes his faith calls him to help the poor with the talent God has given him. What's more, he said his practice has been featured several times in the Buffalo newspaper, which has inspired some suburban doctors to volunteer regularly at Dr. Glick's practice.

During the talk, I also explained that the uninsured in Grand Junction, Colorado, have also found a healthcare safety net. On a stop in Grand Junction, Dr. Carl Malito told us local doctors and nurses volunteer time at the Marillac Clinic (a two-story hospital with complete services) here. Likewise other local people volunteer here as intake workers, secretaries, janitors...

The "Medical Access Coalition" in Marquette, Michigan, believes everyone should have access to quality health care. On a stop there, Dr. Fritz Hoenke told us the Coalition provides medical care and medication for low-income, uninsured people at little, or no, cost.

He said most doctors in the area are involved with the Coalition and have set aside various weekly time slots for these low-income, uninsured people.

Cleveland has a similar initiative in Care Alliance.

Care Alliance

Care Alliance is also a non-profit, federally qualified health center for the homeless and other extremely low-income people here. (The main office is located right around the corner from Cleveland's main homeless shelter.)

The agency gets significant funding from Human Services and Health Resources and from the Services Administration Bureau of Primary Healthcare. They also regularly get private donations as well.

The staff includes some paid and some volunteer personnel.

One of the volunteer personnel is retired dentist Leonard Galicki. He told me he sees his work here as a ministry.

Among the three Care Alliance Community Health Centers, there was some 60,000 patient visits the year before. What's more, according to agency literature, treating a patient in a Community Health Center for a year, is less than the cost of one single visit to the emergency room – which is where a lot of uninsured, low-income people go if they are desperate.

Metro-Health System

In the category of hospitals, Cleveland has the Metro-Health System. This is a city hospital with a full compliment of outpatient services, including dental and optometry.

It, too, accepts Medicare, Medicaid and has an extremely reasonable sliding fee scale for low-income people without healthcare insurance.

It receives both philanthropic and government support.

As an example, Metro recently raised some \$30 million for a Senior Health & Wellness Center, the funds coming from both private donors and government grants.

Chapt. 25

Creative Churches

The fulcrum to a lot of the helping here in Ohio City are the churches. In fact, the creative array of programs to help those on the margins, and the actual synergy between the churches in combination could well be the best in the country.

One of *so* many examples here, is Project Afford. This is a Westside Ecumenical Ministry Program that has built 13 new houses and rehabbed five, all for low income people.

Another ecumenical project is a Food Pantry that is run out of St. Patrick's Church five days a week. In addition, St. Patrick's has two evening meals for the poor every week. (As mentioned earlier, these meals are every night of the week at various churches down here. And St. Augustine's in the nearby Tremont area has breakfast and lunch for the poor seven days a week.)

Deacon Bill Merriman said that in the last year alone, some 30 suburban churches helped at various times with just the meals at St. Patrick's.

St. Patrick's also sponsors an "Urban Plunge Program" (mentioned earlier), that includes presentations, tours of the neighborhood and the opportunity to volunteer at various outreach programs for suburbanites to get more of a feel for how they can help down here.

College students and others also come for week-long Urban Plunge experiences, with Fr. Mark Dinardo opening his Rectory to accommodate these people for the week.

Fr. Dinardo, who is extremely progressive when it comes to creative church programs, is responsible for renting St. Patrick's Convent, at a nominal fee, to the Catholic Workers. And he has been tremendously supportive of their work in general.

In addition, Fr. Dinardo has opened the Rectory for tutoring programs for the Liberian Refugees, and he has turned a three-story Social Hall Building into a tremendously creative space.

The top floor is reserved for the Near Westside Community Theatre production offices and stage. Plays featuring all local thespians are regularly put on here, giving many area adults and youth an outlet for their talents.

The second floor has an office for Cleveland's Earth Day Coalition, a group trying to promote forward thinking environmental awareness in the area.

The second floor also houses the Inter-Religious Task Force, which is a non-profit involved with promoting social justice and peace throughout Latin America. (Again, Brian Stefan-Szittia heads this dynamic program.)

Like with the convent, all the rents are extremely nominal, and their proximity to the church helps members, not only be aware of the programs' existences, but this proximity helps promote more volunteerism.

And as St. Patrick's is on the social justice cutting edge, if you will, so is St. Paul Community Church here.

...multi-dimensional and dynamic

St. Paul's Community Church has a tremendously dynamic outreach to the poor here. What's more, half the congregation is homeless people, literally.

I attended one of their services on a Sunday morning and because of our family's work on the streets, I was, indeed, able to identify some 20 homeless people at the service. What's more, it's a relatively small worship space.

To create more seating, Pastor Doug Horner had a van seat taken out of an old vehicle and positioned against a side wall.

I loved that.

And that's not the only thing happening in this worship space.

The seating (except the rather cumbersome van seat), are portable chairs. These are put in a store room during the week.

On Tuesday and Thursday evenings, a neighborhood tumbling class is held in the sanctuary, mats and everything. Our children participated in this for several years and the instructor, Todd Kennedy, is a former gymnast with a strong faith.

He prays with the kids each session, and the fee is nominal so the kids in the neighborhood can participate in this tremendously healthy outlet.

After the tumbling class, also in the worship space, is a self-defense class for those in the neighborhood as well.

Up the hall is a gymnasium that the church rents to neighborhood adults (for a small fee) for basketball games almost every night of the week.

In addition, the church sponsors an after school program for latch key kids and others, that utilizes the gym and an adjacent room that has computers and other

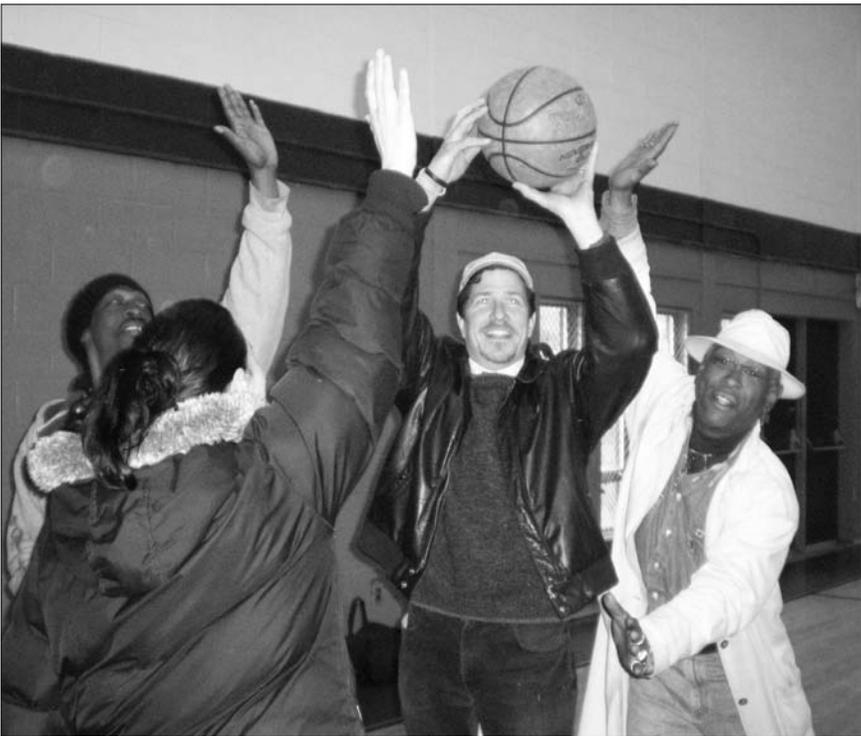
spots for studying, art classes and the like. (The church has a coordinator for this.)

St. Paul's also has a food pantry. And it opens a lounge area (including coffee, donuts...) during the day to those on the streets.

St. Paul's has a number of suburban sister churches, and Pastor Horner said these churches provide donations (food, clothing, etc.) and a significant amount of their operating capital as well.

As mentioned earlier, St. Paul's also sponsors a Community Garden across the street and various evening Coffee Houses to promote peace and social justice programs throughout the neighborhood. Some of the Coffee Houses, complete with a Christian band featuring Pastor Horner on lead guitar, are also fundraisers for St. Paul's.

And the church has a "Community Meal" twice a month on Sundays after the church service. St. Paul's also provides the lounge area for AA and NA meetings, as does St. Patrick's and a number of churches down here. And St. Paul's has a thrift store – low cost and no cost – on the property as well.



St. Paul's Pastor Doug Horner wears many different hats and a well-worn pair of sneakers. While not the left-handed answer to LeBron James, he holds his own on the court.

Pastor Horner has a Masters Degree from Yale Divinity School. And he has embarked upon a journey from ‘the Ivy League to the Inner City’ because he believes that not only is there a need here, but that “church” here, and everywhere, should be as multi-dimensional and dynamic as possible.

Pastor Horner ended by saying that he sees the heart of the ministry here a dual purpose. One is to train people to be “urban ministers.” And two is to help those living down here on the margins.



St. Patrick's Choir sings Amazing Grace. The lyrics: "I once was lost, but now I'm found" could well be an anthem for many who would have otherwise fallen through the cracks down here. (From left to right: Jim Frazer, Brandon Traud, Rob Sommerfelt and Dan Dragony.)

“...there was a need.”

St. Malachi's Church in Ohio City has a “Back Door” ministry to the poor. Besides a meal for the poor every Monday evening (usually attended by as many as 300 people), they also have a Rectory kitchen window and enclosed outside room where they serve sandwiches and coffee during the day.

In addition, the church has a two story building on the grounds that is called

the Malachi Center, which is a non-profit. It is staffed by both volunteers and paid staff.

The Center has a “Shower Program” that serves as many as 30 people a day. And in tandem, they pass out all kinds of donated clothes as part of the program.

They also have a “Partners for Progress Program” that includes tutors to help women and men study for the GED exams. There’s a Sewing Program so people can learn to mend their clothes and, perhaps, even start a cottage business.

The Center also has an “After-School Reading Buddies Program” which includes adult volunteers who tutor neighborhood youth.

And down the street from the Malachi Center, is the Malachi Mart. This is a store that sells donated and other deeply discounted items. The store helps fund some of the Malachi Center projects and provides an excellent opportunity for neighborhood people to gain retail experience.

As a further illustration of how committed to social justice causes the “community” at St. Malachi’s is:

Some 20 years ago, El Salvador was in the midst of a bloody civil war with a tremendous amount of violence and political oppression. Some “Salvadorian refugees” escaped and came to this country, illegally.

Even though it was against the law, the community members voted as a group to take these refugees into their homes.

What’s more, St. Malachi Community members Gary and Stephanie Pritts took in a large family of Somolians who had been in a refugee camp in that country.

“There was a need, and I just wanted to get more in touch with the poor,” Gary told me.

Chapt. 26

Vacationing in Cleveland

You know how at the beginning of this book I said Ohio City is the best urban neighborhood in the country?

It is.

Or darn close.

It is indeed a phenomenal synergy of social justice, care for the environment, community building and promotion of peace.

It's a model.

A model of what a neighborhood can become if people put their minds, and hearts, to it.

A model that people from all over the world, or at least as far west as Indiana, will come to see.

They may even include the trip as part of their vacation.

Vacationing in Cleveland?

Sounds like an oxymoron, doesn't it?

Yet there they will be at Edgewater Beach swimming in Lake Erie until, well, the pollution gets to them.

Then it will be off to the Storefront for an outdoor café dinner of: hot dogs, potato salad and anything else that's been donated that particular day. If they're lucky, Brian will be entertaining on piano.

Cleveland's *Rock n Roll Hall of Fame* pales in comparison.

And if these 'tourists' are luckier yet, they'll have the opportunity to serve some food, talk to the guests and wash some dishes with a bona-fide Pittsburgh Steelers fan. (Just don't ask him about the 'Steel Curtain' defensive line of the late '80s. He goes on, and on, and on...)

The next day itinerary might include a 'scenic view' of Mary Ellen's flower pots, in season of course. Then a stop at the nearby urban farm to 'name a chicken' and do some weeding.

Then it might be over to St. Herman's House of Hospitality to serve some more lunch and hear about how cold it gets in Cleveland in the winter, on the streets.

This might be followed up with a day coaching gig, or just shooting (or kicking) the ball around with kids just in from war torn Burundi, or for that matter kids just in from the war on the streets of Cleveland.

Then it might be cycling to St. Patrick's to serve some more food and give away some of the "mad money" you brought along, initially, for your own good time.

And that evening, maybe someone could come back to our place to sleep in the non-air conditioned Christ Room. Of course, you might have to share it.

With, say, "Dave."

in the end...

We met Dave at the Storefront. He had slept outside the night before. The temperature: 20 degrees. We invited him to our apartment so he didn't have to sleep outside again that night.

Dave was in his mid-30s. He said he'd been hit on the head while being robbed a couple years prior and was subject to fairly regular seizures.

Although his condition wasn't bad enough for him to get Social Security, he said his condition makes it hard to hold down a regular job. He works sporadically with a handyman. (He graduated from a vocational school in Cleveland years ago.)

Dave is just primarily trying to survive down here, day to day.

Without help, he's going to freeze to death one night. Or lack of adequate nutrition is going to slowly kill him. Or in desperation he's going to rob someone and end up in prison, or dead.

A few days before meeting Dave, I heard a sermon by Deacon Bill Merriman talking about the 'Dave's' of this world, and what happens if we don't help them.

The talk revolved around *Matthew 25* in the *Bible*. It is a story about the "Final Judgment."

In this scene, Jesus is saying to one group of people that when He was hungry, they didn't help feed Him; when He was naked they didn't help clothe him; when He was a stranger they didn't take Him in. . .

As a result they are condemned to Hell for eternity. (Which would even be worse than having to vacation in Cleveland for a week.)

Conversely, as modern day examples of people heading toward Heaven because they're helping, Deacon Merriman talked about volunteers at Malachi House for the dying, about Labre Ministry volunteers going out to the homeless on the streets,

about people coming in from the suburbs to volunteer at the church meals...

Now you might laugh about my ‘vacationing in Cleveland’ idea (especially those who usually go to, say, Martha’s Vineyard every summer). But there’s a young couple in North Carolina who probably wouldn’t laugh at it.

We met them on a campaign tour of the South.

They told me they would be marrying soon and for their honeymoon: they were going to Latin America to do humanitarian aid work.

“We decided to consecrate our marriage by doing service work,” the woman said.

Then there was this guy in northern Minnesota...

two barns?

Phil Solem and his wife lived in a modest, one-story ranch style home in suburban Minneapolis, Minnesota, in the late 1970s.

He worked.

She worked.

They had children.

Everything was going ok.

Then Phil said he started getting somewhat of a gnawing feeling.

It was coming from the reading of his *Bible*.

There was a passage about a farmer who had a really good crop one year and he fills up his barn, with a lot left over.

Instead of taking what was left over to help the poor – he built another barn to store the extra food for himself.

God calls him a “fool” because he’s going to die soon and that decision is going to land him, not in Cleveland, but... that’s right, the *other* place.

Phil Solem told me he equated sitting on “\$15,000 of equity” in his home, while people were in dire situations around the country, and world, to storing the extra food for himself.

So he and his wife sold their home and sent the \$15,000 to an outreach to help poor, subsistence farmers stay on their land in Mexico.

Then in the tradition of the Catholic Worker Movement, Phil, his wife and children moved to an old converted convent in the heart of Minneapolis. They adopted “voluntary poverty,” lived in community with other suburbanites who had done the same, and the community opened it’s doors to let homeless people live there as well.

During talks and media interviews, I often stress that we should “make war on poverty and social injustice.”

And people like the Sorems are on the front lines of this fight – rather than, oh, ‘tiptoeing through life.’

And so it is with a good number of people down here in Ohio City, the *best* urban neighborhood in the country.

Chapt. 27

Painter's Plus Pause

Could Even Be Better

While Ohio City is the best urban neighborhood in the country, it could even be better...

While doing some painting at the Storefront recently, I began to muse (something I do a lot when I'm painting) about Ohio City and the city of Cleveland in general.

The geopolitical dynamics of Cleveland, as with most metropolitan areas in the country, is it is divided into Wards.

Cleveland has 21 Wards. (Ohio City is in Ward 14.)

Each Ward is represented by one Cleveland city councilperson.

Since these Wards cover relatively big areas, these city council people are stretched pretty thin.

Besides the councilperson's representation to help maintain, or improve, the quality of life in each Ward, there is also a Cleveland Neighborhood Development Coalition.

The Coalition has satellites throughout the various Cleveland neighborhoods, including in Ohio City, that focus on improving the quality of life as well.

Coalition "Block Clubs" meet to discuss things like neighborhood safety issues and a lot about housing or zoning issues.

In fact, Ian Heisey, who, as mentioned earlier, works for the Cleveland Community Development Corporation, told me housing and zoning issues are often the *primary* topics of conversation at these Block Club meetings.

This, I believe, is rather narrow in scope.

It would seem to me on a grassroots level, from neighborhood to neighborhood, that you could tap into much more citizen energy to tackle social justice issues, environmental issues, community building issues... like they have in

Wichita, Kansas.

On a campaign tour that took us through Wichita, I met with Wichita Inter-Faith Ministry Director Sam Muyskens.

He told me some 100 congregations throughout the city are represented at Interfaith. And Muyskens said a significant number of these have rallied around the relatively new “GoZones Project.”

Six 10-block city areas have been chosen and revolve around “congregation clusters” in Wichita. Members of these churches work together with AmeriCorps (a federal program) to help build “healthy, caring neighborhoods.”

In essence, each of these 10-block city areas has become a ‘small town in the city.’ Each Zone elects a small council from the various churches. While this doesn’t trump the things the Wichita City Council people do, the new small councils here tend to enhance it.

This dynamic creates more camaraderie, an increased citizen’s sense of being represented, and it makes it easier, and more manageable, to mobilize GoZone groups to address neighborhood environmental concerns, social justice issues, and so on, to Wichita city officials, or offending companies that may be polluting, etc.

In addition, Muyskens said things like a homeowner need might be brought up to the small council, and they would work to help fill it. For instance, Muyskens used the example of a low-income family whose old refrigerator might quit. The council, being apprised of the situation, might help mobilize people in the GoZone to do some fundraising for a new refrigerator. Or they might contact a church in the GoZone whose sister church in the suburb might have access to a good used refrigerator, as another example.

Muyskens told me in Wichita, each of these Zones are safer now and have stepped up tutoring and civic programs for youth, many more sister churches with outlying suburban areas and more links to community services and resources.

In this case, ‘small’ is indeed better.

And there’s more...

benevolent fund(s)

In Cleveland, there is a “Cleveland Foundation.” Started in 1914, it was set up to develop the first metropolitan benevolent fund in the country.

It became a model and now there are more than 700 such funds across America. Cleveland’s is currently the third largest fund in the country with assets of \$2.2 billion and grants totaling \$85 million.

The fund is a pool of money from charitable resources of Cleveland’s wealthier

philanthropists and others of all income levels.

It has helped fund such projects as the extensive Cleveland Metro Parks System, Cleveland hospitals and other healthcare providers, the arts, schools, economic development programs, neighborhood public safety programs. . .

It funds a lot, but there could definitely be more help.

And as the GoZones would be a tremendous supplement to Cleveland city wards, I believe the model of a fund in tiny Atwood, Kansas, would be a tremendous supplement to the Cleveland Foundation fund – when it came to financing even more things in each GoZone.

At a stop in Atwood in 2000, we learned the “Second Century Fund” there was started by two local town bankers who kicked in \$10,000 a piece at the fund’s inception. The idea was to grow the fund and help seed things that were beneficial to the community.

It worked, in spades.

Hundreds of projects have been financed the last 20 years the fund had been in existence, and at the time we were there the fund had a phenomenal \$932,000 – in a town of merely 1,500 people!

Only the interest on the fund was being disbursed at the time we researched it. And that year, the Second Century Fund was slated to finance \$71,000 in local projects. This included a local playground project, the Atwood Arts Council, Economic Development projects, Chamber of Commerce expenses, the Good Samaritan Center work, the Rotary Club, roadway improvement projects. . .

Both town residents and businesses regularly donate to the fund out of a sense of charity and civic responsibility and a small town ‘neighbors helping neighbors’ orientation. People have even left money to the fund in their wills.

Again, it is my belief each city GoZone would benefit tremendously from this type of fund as well, drawing people even closer together.

Chapt. 28

“...where planning meets people.”

Ohio City Near West Development Corporation (OCNW) is a non-profit organization that oversees community development activities in Ohio City, “one of the oldest and most diverse neighborhoods in Cleveland,” according to their website.

I met with OCNW’s Abe Bruckman.

He said the agency is concerned about the economic viability, arts, culture and assistance to homeowners in Ohio City.

Bruckman said, for instance, one of the “assistance to homeowners” is OCNW’s “Paint Program.” This program provides free paints and supplies to lower income residents. (The Sherwin Williams Company donates some of the paint.)

One of my painting jobs the summer before was an OCNW project on W. 38th St.

OCNW has also started a “Painting Partnership Program.” They are soliciting individuals, businesses, block clubs, churches... to volunteer to help paint some of these homes.

In turn, I told Bruckman about an initiative we’d researched in northern Maryland where an ad hoc group of citizens would go door-to-door in a small town every Saturday asking people if they, say, needed their porch painted, or driveway repaved, or gutters cleaned... for free.

It was just the “neighborly” thing to do.

Bruckman also said OCNW has developed a Business Storefront Program, with grants for renovation and landscaping. (OCNW will pay up to 40% of the renovation cost.)

He said one grant of \$25,000 was given for the renovation of a storefront – and a “period bus shelter.” The bus shelter is in front of this business and the owner petitioned Cleveland’s Rapid Transit Authority to renovate the bus shelter on his own.

The shelter will be transformed into an old-fashioned (circa 1950) one, with

old wooden benches, old-fashion light fixtures, and so on. Bruckman said this particular store owner is an advocate of riding the bus for the environment's sake, and he wanted to do something to make it more attractive to others.

Under the Storefront Program, OCNW also recently awarded a \$5,000 grant to *Gather Round Urban Farm*.

This is the kind of story that would be featured in OCNW's brand new newspaper.

OCNW had just printed their first edition of the *Ohio City Argus* ("Covering Cleveland's Premier Historic Neighborhood").

In introducing the "neighborhood newspaper" in an opening editorial: "The *Argus* will not engage in investigative journalism, attempt to hold public officials accountable or expose abuses and injustices. There are plenty of publications out there doing that. Instead, our feature-driven coverage will highlight and celebrate the most interesting aspects of Ohio City – from businesses and residents to new housing and commercial developments to important community initiatives."

Bruckman, who has a Masters in Urban Planning from Cleveland State University, has also had to serve as a mediator between people with conflicting interests in Ohio City as part of his OCNW role.

He, for instance, was involved with talks between a local funeral home and a group of Ohio City citizens. The citizens were concerned about the funeral home's proposal for a crematorium, which would mean the release of some mercury (dental fillings) into the neighborhood air.

Bruckman said his role in these types of discussions is to try to remain as neutral as possible and facilitate healthy discussion where everyone gets a chance to talk about their concerns. The neutrality is sometimes hard for him personally because "...my hair is a lot longer on the inside than it is on the outside," he smiled.

"At the end of the day, the business community and the property owners are all neighbors, and we want to come up with the best possible solution for everyone," Bruckman said.

And he added what he particularly likes about his job is that it puts him "right on the line of scrimmage where planning meets people and change happens."

And speaking of the "line of scrimmage," -- which is probably the only thing he *didn't* invent in football -- Ohio City is the birthplace of the famous John Heisman. (College football's illustrious Heisman Trophy was named in his honor.)

His birthplace is on Bridge Ave. here, with a prominent *Ohio Historical Marker* out front. It explains that Heisman was born on Oct. 3, 1869 and the College Football Hall of Fame has enshrined him as a "Superior Coach."

Heisman was an important pioneer and game innovator, the sign boasts. He

is the father of the: forward pass, center snap, hidden ball play (something the Cleveland Browns have yet to perfect), dividing the game into quarters, and the quarterback “hike” to start a play.

Well, just think how cumbersome the quarterback “*You can give me the ball now Harry!*” would have been each play. They might have had to divide the game into: days.

Note: It’s my opinion that historical markers, like the one on Bridge Avenue, go a long way in highlighting and better preserving the memories of an area,



Ohio City’s Near West Development’s Abe Bruckman poses by the Heisman Historical Marker. While Bruckman, unlike Heisman, didn’t invent the forward pass, center snap, interference on end runs...he, indeed, is on “the line of scrimmage” each day in Ohio City.

bringing meaningful generational continuity and thus a stronger sense of place. In Lakewood, New York, we noticed they have more than 100 historical markers all over the town (a Chamber of Commerce initiative) to preserve the memory of an old deli that was on the corner for years, an old factory that employed many, a citizen who maybe wasn’t as famous as John Heisman, but nevertheless contributed significantly to the community...

If Ohio City had more historical markers, I’m sure Urban Community School would be featured on one of them.

Chapt. 29

Outside the lines education



Urban Community School, set in the bustle of Lorain Avenue in Ohio City, is one of the most creative, non-traditional schools in the country. There's no grade levels. No test grades. Yet the school has won one of the most prestigious national awards in education.

The educators in Ohio City are some of the best in the country. And there is no school more creative or social justice oriented than Urban Community School (UCS) here.

UCS is pre-school thru eighth grade. It is a “Catholic/Christian” school that was founded in 1968. The school has received the prestigious *Excellence in Education Award* from the U.S. Department of Education.

I talked with UCS Director Sr. Maureen Doyle.

She said UCS is relatively unique. That is for one, there are no real “official” grade levels and students learn at their own pace.

This considerably diminishes elements of competition and senses of “failure,” which, ultimately, lessens stress in students. With less stress, students often start enjoying the learning process more and consequently, well, learn more.

Sr. Maureen said a significant number of students are “inner city kids” who are

in tough home situations and haven't, say, had the same learning advantages as other kids of similar age. So not having formal grade levels helps "meet students where they're at" in a non-shaming way, said Sr. Maureen.

The environment at UCS also fosters a good deal of "independent learning," she continued, as opposed to a lot of the collective rote learning that goes on in many traditional classrooms these days.

This, in part, is also fostered by the lack of an "A, B, C..." grading system at USC. In fact, they don't grade at all.

"Grades can be so punitive," said Sr. Maureen, "Especially for kids already experiencing failures in life down here."

This philosophy psychologically frees students to explore more diverse things, to allow for making more mistakes – all key ingredients in, again, learning more.

And while UCS doesn't grade in a traditional sense, they do have a system to evaluate the general progress of a student moving along a learning continuum. In addition, the school's data tracking shows over the past 40 years a phenomenal 91% of UCS students have gone on to graduate from high school and 62% have gone to college.

Some have been Presidential Scholars at Boston University, the University of Notre Dame, Georgetown University... Significant numbers of these students are now giving back to their respective communities as social workers, teachers, businesspeople, artists, blue collar workers, church and community volunteers...

At the time that I write this, UCS's enrollment is 450 students.

Sr. Maureen said another quite creative, and tremendously effective, school component for these students is "experience related learning."

As an example, often in a traditional school math course there will be an exercise to find, say, the average between three numbers. Three rather sterile numbers from a text book will be added together then divided by the number three.

At UCS (which is about a mile and a half from the Q Arena where the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team plays) students might be encouraged to take LeBron James's point totals for the past three games, add them, then divide them by three to get the answer.

Sr. Maureen explained this becomes a lot more interesting, and memorable, to some students. And it is a technique applied across-the-board here, by both teachers and parents alike.

UCS student parents are encouraged to lend their expertise, or just time in general, to the education mix.

For instance, one parent who is a speech therapist volunteers each week at the school. Another parent with some science background, regularly comes in to

help the biology teacher with lab experiments, and so on. Yet other parents help supervise field trips.

“In the last year there were 41 field trips,” said Sr. Maureen.

During the course of the interview, I mentioned to Sr. Maureen that in our cross-country research, we had learned about a school in Rhode Island that had “teams” formed around each student. Parents, a school teacher, a couple neighbors, a town businessperson . . . would meet once a month to discuss the student’s goals, his or her progress, and so on. Not only was this an excellent support for the student, but it helped increase community bonding and heightened the interest of others (besides just the parents) in the school.

From a social justice angle, when UCS first started some kids from the suburbs came in to sit side-by-side with the inner city kids. This helped break down socio-economic class barriers, prejudices and the more advantaged students were often in positions where they could help the students who were struggling.

Now the demographics have changed in Ohio City, as more and more suburbanites have moved into the area. Consequently, Sr. Maureen said UCS has morphed into a highly diverse “neighborhood school” with all the students now coming from the immediate area.

Being a private school, UCS has tuition. However, it is an extremely reasonable one based on a sliding-fee. The school is also funded by grants and has just started taking vouchers as well.

Yet a majority of the financial support for the school comes from individual donors who are vested in supporting this kind of education, said Sr. Maureen.

authentic learning

And the “outside the lines” education continues with another teacher who lives in Ohio City.

Judy Hokky is a high school art instructor who works with inner city kids. She told me she believes in “authentic learning.” That is, she is continually trying to set up the art lessons to connect students to the outside world – in the most creative of ways.

For instance, she recently did a unit on “eco-art.”

She started by showing the students the documentary *An Inconvenient Truth* with Al Gore. The gist of the documentary is that global warming is, indeed, real. And that people should not only be aware of the crisis, but that they should become as conservation oriented as possible.

In an attempt to raise student awareness, Ms. Hokky designed an art project

that revolved around making art out of “recycled and found objects.”

Students collected bottle caps, lost board game pieces, aluminum cans, plastic juice bottles... The young artists then creatively arranged them in a series of art sculptures, collages, and so on.

What’s more, the pieces were exhibited at Cleveland’s City Hall Building .

Our platform actually calls for entire classes on the environment taught at both elementary and high school levels to instill a stronger sense of environmental consciousness in youth. In addition, we believe there should be *way* more attention to Service Learning projects where students are regularly volunteering in the community.

I often say as we campaign: “I want our children learning as much about helping others, as I do them learning about math, science, English...”

Chapt. 30

Time's Short

One day as I was finishing writing this book, I went to the Carnegie West Public Library in Ohio City.

I wanted to use the computer.

I was seated at a bank of six computers.

This particular day, several of the people at the computers had relatively loud rap music on. The lyrics, for the most part, were quite explicit and very violent.

Out of anger, desperation... people down here resonate to this. Especially the guy seated right across from me.

He was a Black man in his early 20s. He was seated next to a woman using a computer. They were talking loud.

At one point, the man said: "I'm *so* angry right now that money's not going to fix it. A woman's not going to fix it. I feel like I just need to shoot someone!"

Having been down here for awhile now, while I would never condone it, I could sure understand it.

So could Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

An excerpt from a speech he gave in Atlanta, Georgia, on December 24, 1967, hangs on the Catholic Worker House wall here.

It reads:

"In 1963 in... Washington D.C... I tried to talk to the nation about a dream I had had, and I must confer... I started seeing it turn into a nightmare.

"I watched that dream turn into a nightmare as I moved through the ghettos of the nation and saw Black brothers and sisters perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity – and saw the nation do nothing to grapple with the Negroes problem of poverty.

"I saw that dream turn into a nightmare of anger and understandable outrage in the midst of their hurt... and turn their disappointment to misguided riots [drugs, gangs, crime...] to solve that problem."

King and his family moved into the Projects of Chicago to live in solidarity with these Black brothers and sisters in 1967.

He knew the poverty intimately.

He knew the frustration intimately.

He heard the gun shots in Chicago.

Just like Starkesia Reed heard them one day in Chicago.

It was on March 3, 2006 that Martin Luther King Jr.'s 'nightmare' continued yet some more.

Starkesia went to the window...

According to an article in *Ebony Magazine*, Starkesia Reed was 14-years-old. She lived with eight other brothers and sisters in the rough Englewood area of Chicago.

Starkesia had a 3.5 grade average at school, was on the track team and wanted to be a doctor some day.

Starkesia's mom had just gone off to her secretarial job March 3 and several of the children were still at home getting ready for school, when the shooting started.

Starkesia went to the window of their apartment.

A stray bullet from an AK 47 assault rifle killed her.

The title of the *Ebony* article was: "*Slaughter of the Innocents*".

The article noted there are currently some eight children killed by gun violence *every day* in America, most in the cities.

That's 235 children killed each month.

That's more than the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq each month.

And it's not just gun violence in the cities.

drowned her children

The same day that I read the *Ebony* piece, I also read an article in the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* about Amber Hill and her two children.

Amber, who lived in Cleveland, was on trial – for killing those two children, Janelle, 4 and Cecess, 2.

According to a transcript of her interview with a psychologist, Ms. Hill saw the children as extensions of herself and wanted to put them out of their misery.

According to the psychologist, Ms. Hill suffered from depression, suicidal thoughts, hallucinations...

Some of the same dynamics (also including anger, frustration, hopelessness...) that many people regularly experience living in seemingly dead-end situations in the city.

Ms. Hill had drowned her two young children in a bathtub.

fears for his wife's safety.

That same day in the *Plain Dealer*, there was also a story about a shooting in a Hungarian bakery in Cleveland.

Marika Feigenbaum was shot through the shoulder and then pistol whipped by a robber. Marika's husband Michael, 54, was interviewed a few days after the event.

Lucy's Sweet Surrender Bakery had been there since 1957. And according to the article, Mr. Feigenbaum talked about when this part of Buckeye Road was a "thriving Hungarian enclave."

He talked about bakeries, butchers, tailors and restaurants that made up the core of a vibrant, close-knit community.

"It was rich with culture and history," said Mr. Feigenbaum.

(The atmosphere he describes is very similar to the atmosphere Deacon Bill Merriman described was prevalent on the near Westside – before White flight.)

Now the Buckeye neighborhood is run down, violent. Only Lucy's, with its '50s motif, remains from the old days. And Mr. Feigenbaum said he was now thinking about closing the bakery because he fears for his wife's safety.

A lot of people down here fear, and wait.

make it better

They wait.

All the city bakers' wives skittishly looking up to see who will be coming next through the door, wait.

All the 14-year-old Starkesia's going tentatively to the window to see where the gun shots are coming from, wait.

All the little innocent children who could be next to wildly look up through the water at another inner city mom who has lost all hope, wait.

They wait for us.

They wait for us to give up our comfort.

They wait for us to face our fears.

They wait for us to roll up our sleeves.
They wait for us to come down here to help.
They've been waiting a long time.
Yet each day, tragically, there are less of them.
Some eight young gun shot victims a day, for example.
Yet all this can change.
One neighborhood at a time.

Instead, he stayed.

Bob Shores moved to Ohio City with his family in 1982. While walking through a neighborhood park one day, two men approached Shores and asked for a hand-out. When he reached in his pocket to help, they attacked and knocked him down. Amidst a hail of punches and kicks, they took all his money. Shores could have taken his wife and three boys and left Ohio City. Instead, he stayed.

“I wasn’t going to give up my neighborhood,” he asserts.

Shores became active at a neighborhood Block Club meeting and then got involved with an ad hoc “CB Patrol.” That is, members of the Block Club would patrol know rough areas in Ohio City, radioing in crimes and suspicious behavior to the police.

Shores went on to become the Chair of the Ohio City Near West Development Corporation’s “Safety Board.” And eventually he became a full-time OCNW community organizer.

In the past four years, he has helped organize citizens who wanted to stand up to crime in their neighborhood. He has also helped organize Ohio City residents who had decided to protest proposals for questionable night clubs, strip joints and the like.

And Shores has established a “Court Watch Program.” This entails, among a number of things, Shores regularly going to court on behalf of the community. For instance, he said there was recently a series of “brutal rapes” in Ohio City. The alleged perpetrator was eventually caught.

Shores attended the trial, and at one point, presented the judge with 33 letters from Ohio City residents demanding that justice be done in the case. The rapist, who was labeled a “dangerous predator,” was given 54 years in prison.

Chapt. 31

Pedro

The other night a friend called and asked me to meet with a buddy of his who was in a bad way.

I did.

Pedro was in his early 20s, somewhat tall (maybe 6' 3") and well-built the way, say, a small college linebacker would be well-built.

Pedro seemed a nice enough guy who was in a dilemma, in part, way beyond his control. And he spoke in earnest about his plight, with inflections of some street bravado (a front). But reading between the lines, there seemed way more genuine fear.

Pedro was living in his car and parking at night in a friend's driveway on the east side of Cleveland. The friend would sometimes let him come inside to shower.

During the day, he would sporadically work for a handyman. On other days he would just drive around, maybe stopping at the library, working out and showering at a Rec. Center, finding a church that had a free meal...

Pedro got about \$450 in Social Security payments each month for his "disabilities." He said he had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and manic-depressive disorder. And while the price of the medication for these disorders was somewhat nominal because of his medical card, between his car insurance, cell phone payment, food and other necessities – there wasn't much left over for rent.

And thus, understandably, he was living in his car.

When I explored a bit more, I found Pedro had a felony and had recently gotten out of prison. When off his medication, he, just as understandably, becomes unbalanced and easily excitable in stressful situations.

In unbalanced states he self-mutilates, and Pedro rolled up a sleeve to show me the patchwork of knife marks on his arm.

He also said he will sometimes react in an out of control fashion in threatening situations, describing, for instance, a quite violent fight he had one night with

another man. Pedro was charged with felonious assault in connection to this, which is why he had been in prison.

What would be ideal for Pedro, would be a supervised group home where his medications were monitored and where he had a sense of security and daily structure. In addition, he would benefit tremendously with a “Care Team” (mentioned earlier) of volunteers. And for him to heal significantly, he would also benefit from long-term, quality psychotherapy to help Pedro work out some of what is at the root of his mental disorders.

(This often includes getting in touch with, and cathartically working through, memories and repressed emotions tied to issues of childhood trauma, peer trauma, war trauma. . .)

If all this support doesn’t materialize for Pedro soon, he might kill someone(s) in one of his episodes off medication. Or some night that knife he uses to self-mutilate is going to slit, not the fleshy part of his arm, but a vein in his wrist.

And yet another statistic gets tallied on this side of the ‘chasm.’

What’s more, as Pedro tragically falls *all* the way through the cracks, many of those on the other side of the chasm who chose not to try to help Pedro -- move that much closer themselves to falling through the cracks: of eternity.

To tangibly care for Pedro, we need to fund local mental health levies to the hilt to allow for more group homes. These group homes need more volunteers. And the volunteers need to be earnestly focused on befriending Pedro, tutoring him (he wants to go to college), mentoring him. . . taking him to the movies for that matter.

or...

Throughout this book, I have exhorted people to move into the city to help. Some won’t, for any number of reasons.

Another idea for being ‘part of the solution’ could be. . .

Some people could take some of the urban poor to the suburbs, or the country. For instance, while campaigning in Picayune, Mississippi, we talked with a couple who had converted their garage into an apartment for the husband’s mother and aunt.

How many in suburban or small town America could convert a garage?

“We shelter cars in this country, while little kids sleep on back alleys in the city,” I told the *Mansfield (OH) News Journal*.

How many people outside the city could open up a room in their home for someone(s) from the city who needs help?

Again, they do it in Winona, Minnesota. While there, we talked with a young, single woman who was house sharing with an elderly woman. (The young woman

was working off part of the rent doing things around the house for the elderly woman). And they also freed up one of the rooms for a “Christ Room” and started taking people in.

Another solution is to take some people from the city out to the country. That is, “House of Hospitality” farms could be set up where people from the city would go to live and work. (There are some Catholic Worker farms around the country operating on this model.)

During a stop in Augusta, Georgia, I interviewed a man who had started a farm about an hour from Augusta specifically for people in the city who were in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction. He said for some, the cloistered environment and work on the land was just the ticket they needed.

In addition, Pastor Doug Horner told me he used to live in Maryland and there was a farm there that he and his wife used to volunteer at. Pastor Horner said the farm was set up by Catholic Charities “for individuals and families who needed to get out of Baltimore.”

He added there was a Catholic priest who oversaw the farm, which included crops, chickens and cows. Pastor Horner said the priest was always hustling to get funding.

Another option in helping could be to sell one’s home and go to these farms as live-in volunteers, taking the money to help fund the operation. Or if one wasn’t disposed to live on the farm, they could still donate significantly to such facilities.

In all this, the chasm between the advantaged and the disadvantaged closes considerably, bringing the disadvantaged closer to real social justice and the advantaged closer to: salvation.



about the author: “average Joe”

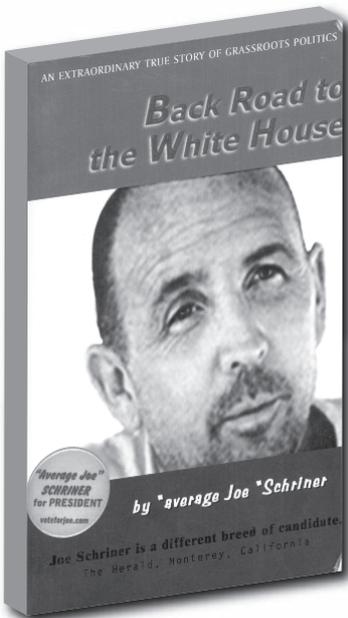
Schriner has been a small town journalist, perennial independent presidential candidate (www.voteforjoe.com) and a house painter of some repute. ‘Joe the painter,’ if you will. While writing this book, he and his family lived in Cleveland, Ohio, where they tried, along with others they worked and lived side-by-side with, to be ‘part of the solution.’ Schriner is also the author of: *America’s Best Town*; *America’s Best Town 2*; and, *Back Road to the White House*.
***For more about these books, see the following pages...**

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by “average Joe” Schriener



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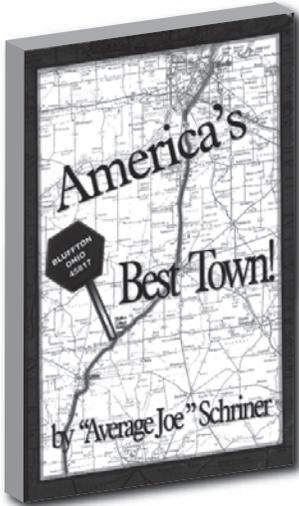
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by "average Joe" Schriener

If there was ever a town that embodied Joe's political platform, it would be Bluffton, Ohio 45817.



The author's groundbreaking first book about Bluffton (pop. 3,877), explains why it has the best "quality of life" of any place in the country. A quality of life that has led one of America's top TV journalists, an internationally known doctor, a super-star comedian, a professional football legend, a U.S. presidential candidate, and a host of others to call this small Ohio town "home."

A quality of life that's not about affluence, climate or scenery (unless you like corn), but rather it is about community spirit, environmental awareness, outreach to the disadvantaged... and this rather odd college mascot.

Bluffton is an *Oz*, Dorothy or no Dorothy. It is a *Field of Dreams* that still boasts "free-air" at all the town service stations. And with just the right touch of small town charm, poignancy and humor, this book introduces the reader to an absolutely fascinating (yet admittedly quirky) cast of "Blufftonites," and what they're up to in making the town what it is – the *best* town in America!

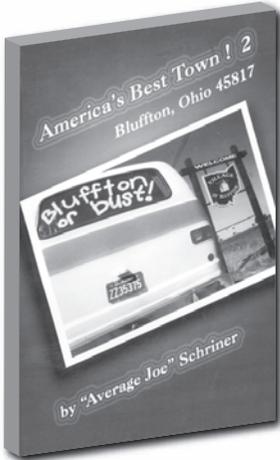
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America's Best Town! 2 *(Bluffton, Ohio 45817)*

by “average Joe” Schriener



What's the best town in America? Is it Carmel, California, Lake Tahoe, Nevada, Jackson Hole, Wyoming, or Bluffton, Ohio? If you answered Bluffton, Ohio, you were right.

And “average Joe” Schriener is at it again, seconding his claim that Bluffton's community esprit de corps (whatever that means), peace building, civic involvement, political activism, environmental consciousness and a small town Christmas pageant next to none... all combine to make it the *best* town in the country.

If that isn't enough, Bluffton (pop. 3,877) has the most poets per capita of any American town, the best coffee shop, the best university and a furry little mascot that is trying – apparently with some success – to take over the world!

And all this is told with just the right touch of small town charm and humor.

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There's graffiti. There're gangs. There're drugs. There's pollution. There're homeless people. There're homicides... And there's a scenic (cough) view of Lake Erie that's next to none.

So why would Cleveland's "Ohio City" area be the best urban neighborhood in the country?

Because in the midst of all the deterioration, a high-energy group of people has taken a collective deep breath, rolled up their sleeves and moved here from small town and suburban America, to help.

And *boy*, have they!



Imperial Valley (CA) Press photo

about the author: "average Joe" Schriner is a journalist, perennial independent presidential candidate and a house painter. (In fact, he says he does some of his best thinking on a ladder.) He and his family moved from rural Bluffton, Ohio, to Cleveland's Ohio City to be 'part of the solution.' And because the chili

dogs at the Old Fashion Hot Dogs place here are still only a buck and a quarter. Schriner is also the author of: *America's Best Town*; *America's Best Town 2*; and, *Back Road to the White House*.

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