

Fools Fables

Volume V, Fall 2002



MAMA

Kay, are you my mother? three year old Odin asked last week when we were caring for him and his younger brother.
Odin's question made me think of Mama.

Mama, (Lula Bell Seymour) who lived in her car in front of our building, died on August 21st. She was mama to every one of us who walked by each day as she sat in her van selling her wares on the sidewalk. She'd read the scriptures and pray with us or for us when we needed it, or when she felt we needed it. She brought comfort to us at night knowing she was keeping watch. When Mama would speak we all would listen. When Mama would pray we all would listen. When Mama would tell the truths of what was happening in our world that the threat of terrorism was not something new as every day was a terror for her we all would listen. When Mama would tell us there would be consequences for our actions harming ourselves or another we all would listen.

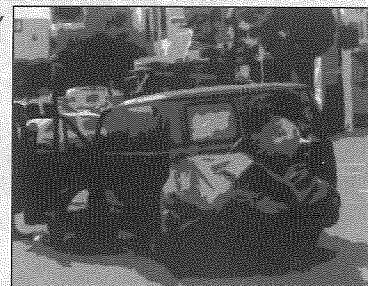
Like little Odin, we all long for Mama. Every mother, father and child longs for Mama, that presence that speaks with an inner authority that brings comfort rather than resistance. The embrace is so large it includes everybody. She blesses us when we go and she gives thanks when we return.

The day before Mama died she asked us to go with her to pray over her son who was in a hospital in Santa Rosa on a life support system. On the way home she told us stories of her own life. She told us how her faith carried her through the horror of losing her three youngest children when someone deliberately set fire to her house in the early 60s in Florida. She told us how she would reprimand the police who would tell her she needed to move when there was no where for her to go. We felt our own courage and determination for life increase as we listened. We did not know it would be our last time to be with her.

Odin's question to Kay, Are you my mother, resounded in the wake of Mama's death. Yes and no, answers Kay. She is not his mother but she is his Mama. The commitment and strength of Kay's embrace is as clear to Odin as Mama's was to us.

We parked Mama's van in our parking space where people could pass by and remember her. It brought comfort to all of us in the neighborhood who weren't ready for her to go. We all now are challenged to be each other's Mama, to care for and comfort each other. As Faithful Fools we are called to carry on Mama's presence at the corner of Hyde and Turk.
We will do so in her name.

Carmen Barsody



MAMA


The news of Mama's death instantly changed life on our corner. People and things got broken; our hearts, Mama's van. We are mortal. Without notice, our personal lives and the belief systems that hold us together get smashed and shattered. We relied on Mama to keep us related to each other. While the powers of privilege worked to separate us, Mama with her truth-telling personal authority kept weaving us into community, like it or not! At the time of our open house, two and a half years ago, she was doing what she did everyday, sweeping and cleaning up trash on the street. I was grateful and told her so. She waved her broom back at me and retorted, "You can just find yourself a broom and help out."

Recently, in agitation, she called me over; "Come here a minute, Sugar, and look at this letter I got in my mailbox from the wife of the President of the United States. Can you believe this? She wants me to contribute some money in order to protect this country from terrorists! She ought to be ashamed to ask us poor folks, white and black alike, to give money when we don't have enough to live on. They can just let those terrorists come, don't bother me none. I'm used to terror every day. She ought to be ashamed!"

She was homeless, black, 71 years of age and suffered from acute asthma. She worked for years at Children's Hospital while raising two sons. Four years ago the rented house in which she lived was sold, sending her to the streets because she lacked the resources, in the present economy, to rent again. She moved into her van. After the memorial service we held for her at the Fool's Court, we found in her things an application for Sec. 8 housing. She had received a notice from the Housing Authority telling her to attend an informational meeting where she was to come 5 minutes early, prepare to stay two hours and "We ask that your friends, children and/or additional family members remain at home. Remain where?"

She's gone. There is one less homeless person to ridicule or throw away. The corner feels empty, lonely, and broken now. As Mama lived justly, we Fools seek to act justly in the world. We seek always to close the chasms that separate us, at the peril of our own comfort and the recognition of our own suffering. As we walk with each other past her parking spot and the curb where she sold her wares, we will be reminded of the lessons we learned from our wise teacher, Mama. Praise the Lord!

Kay Jorgensen



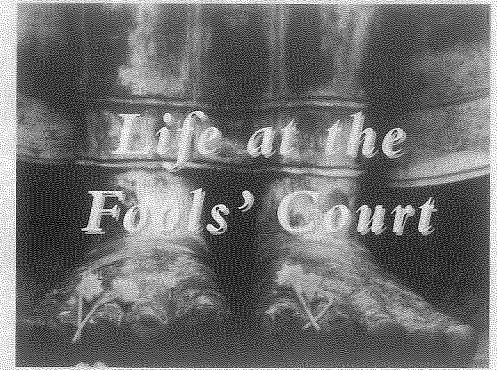
"To act justly in the world, we need to know how the world works. We need a better grasp of the interlocking structure of class, race, and sex/gender systems. We need to know how these systems mediate social interactions. Only then can we evaluate them in light of principles of justice and solidarity. Only then will we be in a position to form alliances with others and address unshared power arrangements and social injustice."

—Mary E. Hobgood

Fools Fables

MEDITATION

The Court of the Faithful Fools stands in the center of San Francisco surrounded by poverty and wealth in close proximity. Its purple facade, graced with grapes and vines, looks over Hyde Street, a busy one-way thoroughfare that leads to major highways. Inside the Court, a few feet from the bustling sidewalk, is a beautiful, peaceful cave-like room. On Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday mornings between nine and ten o'clock, people from many walks and stations in life sit together in quiet meditation, sharing a stillness before the day breaks out with fresh energy towards work to be done. You are invited to join us.

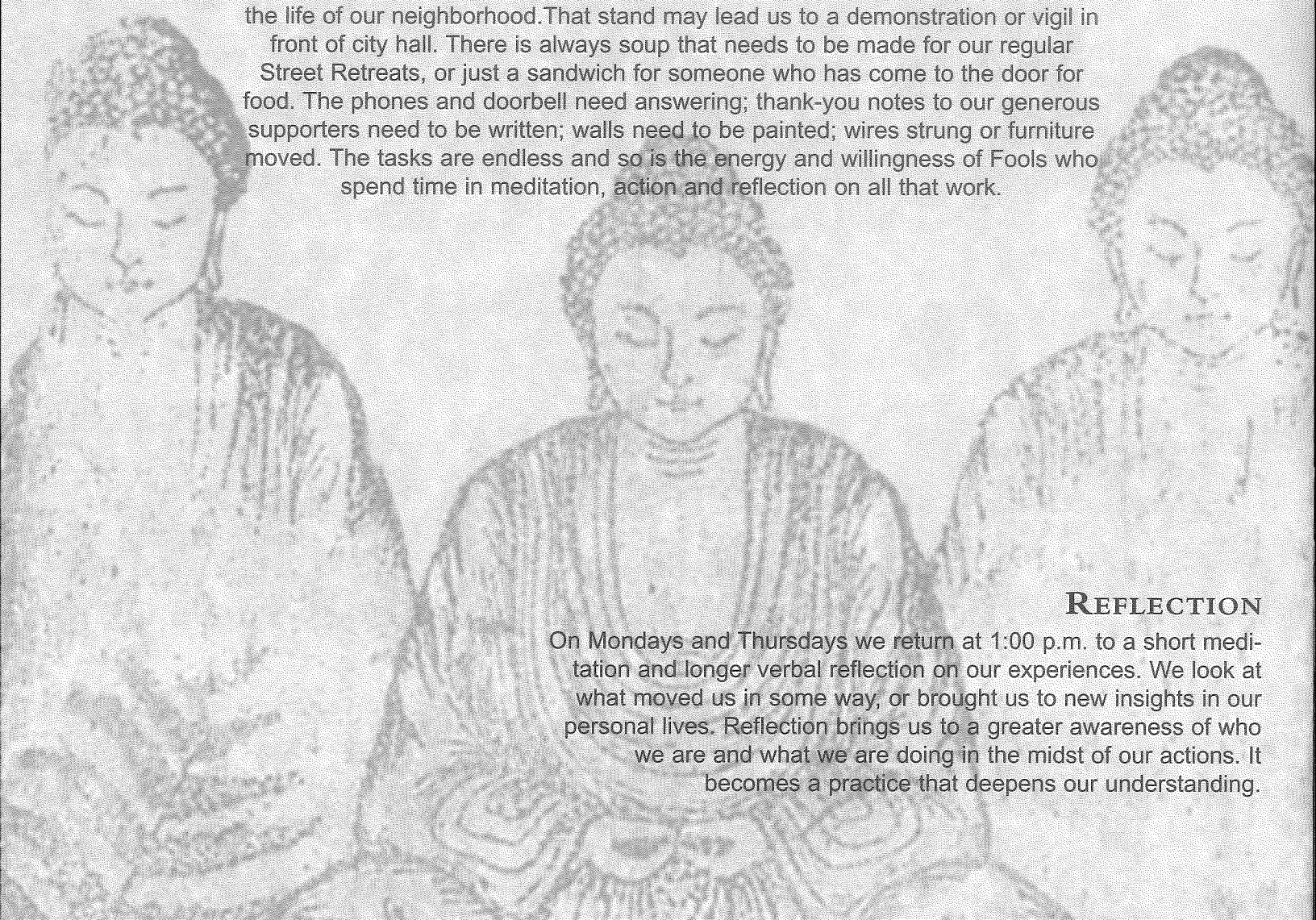


ACTION

Leaving the quiet room behind, we climb to the second floor to be greeted by the aroma of coffee and a colorful bright ambience in the large front room. We gather there to greet one another and preview the day. The agenda might include a need for one of us to companion someone to a clinic or social service appointment. The Up On Top After-School Program may need us to run to the Food Bank for hearty snacks for extra-hungry children. Our Faithful Fools Copy Shop could need hands to fold and stuff an order. It is election time and we need to research and formulate our stands on the issues and candidates that will effect the life of our neighborhood. That stand may lead us to a demonstration or vigil in front of city hall. There is always soup that needs to be made for our regular Street Retreats, or just a sandwich for someone who has come to the door for food. The phones and doorbell need answering; thank-you notes to our generous supporters need to be written; walls need to be painted; wires strung or furniture moved. The tasks are endless and so is the energy and willingness of Fools who spend time in meditation, action and reflection on all that work.

REFLECTION

On Mondays and Thursdays we return at 1:00 p.m. to a short meditation and longer verbal reflection on our experiences. We look at what moved us in some way, or brought us to new insights in our personal lives. Reflection brings us to a greater awareness of who we are and what we are doing in the midst of our actions. It becomes a practice that deepens our understanding.



Fools Fables

ABUNDANCE?

One day during reflection the question was asked, What is abundance?

A response was given by Kay: *"It bursts every container, spills over. It is its own source and flows freely. Unless it's not really wanted, of course. What an idea that we might not want too much of something — Too much money? Too much energy? Too much health? What is sharing too much? I share a lot in the abundance of others. But the fullness of spirit and the beneficence of overflowing love is never too much or never enough."*

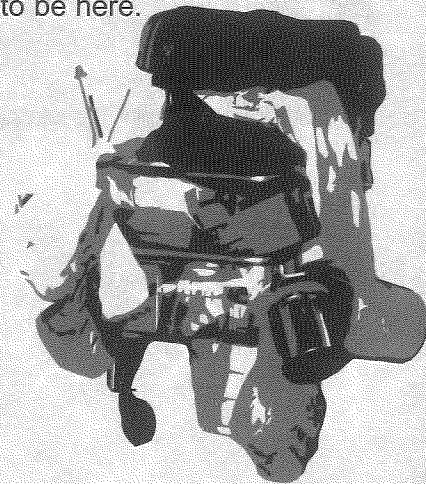
In the Spirit of Abundance!

We ask you to join us in the spirit of abundance to consider making an annual pledge of financial support to the Faithful Fools. When Mama died, the Faithful Fools was the family that made arrangements for the body and held the memorial service. When Karina got out of jail we provided the funds for her to be in a hotel where she could be safe and clean while looking for work and longer term housing. The Fools Court is a place where many people find safety and compassion. We received a note with a donation this week that said, *"Here's some money to apply to your debt reduction program on the building. The best way you can serve the neighborhood is to BE THERE for a long time!"* Your monthly pledge, whatever the amount, provides us with the resources needed to be here and do the work of building relationships, envisioning routes to social change and actively working with others to make it so.

The Faithful Fools

IN GRATITUDE,

WE TIP OUR HAT TO: Tenderloin Neighborhood Development Corporation (TNDC) for making it possible to improve the facade of our building into beautiful shades of purple, with great new windows and doors, and banners announcing our presence; Catholic Health Initiatives (CHI) for a generous two-year grant to develop our ministry in the Tenderloin; The Greenville Foundation for a grant in support of our ministry of accompaniment and making it possible to offer stipends to interns; Elan Foundation and Society for Community Work (SCW) for grants which support our daily ministry; and to all of you in your faithful contributions which make it possible for us to be here.



CHIAPAS PEACE HOUSE PROJECT

The mission of the Faithful Fools encompasses both local and global realities. Colin Bossen and Roxanne Ukahri

Rivas have joined efforts to open a Peace House in Chiapas. The Peace House is a response to the leaders of indigenous communities that have called upon the international community to monitor human rights abuse and hold the Mexican government accountable to their demand for land reform, better housing, adequate food, education, democratic elections and access to safe drinking water. We go to bear witness.

If you are interested in knowing more about the Peace House Project, contact Colin Bossen by e-mail at cbossen@mindspring.com.



From Each One Life

From each one life draws a face.

*I'm not talking about cheekbones,
perfect noses, eyebrows, eyes,
wrinkled foreheads
sagging cheeks or
eyelids
but of what is impossible to hide
Or fix with surgery or make-up.*

*I'm talking about the misery and horror
meanness and joy,
the cruelty or compassion
we see, without warning,
on someone else's face
surprisingly our own.*

*By Daisy Zamora
a Nicaraguan Poet*



"We must understand that solidarity and new alliances forged within concrete projects for social change are not a utopian dream. Rather, solidarity is the extension of our fundamental interdependence, as inherently social beings, as members of one body... Perhaps most important of all, solidarity and alliance building provide the means for us to recover our fundamental humanity. Our very humanity is at stake when we see how profoundly damaged we are by internalized superiority and by systems that exploit and oppress most of the people on the globe today."

—Mary Elizabeth Hobgood



NICARAGUA

Nicaragua is embraced from east to west by the Pacific and Atlantic oceans. Its rivers, lakes, land and people struggle for life and dignity with a passion as intense as the fires that burn deep inside the volcanoes which make a corridor from north to south.

Kay and Carmen spent the month of July in Nicaragua in preparation for taking a group of faithful fools in 2003. Those who will go are participants from the 4-day street retreat last March. We will live with Nicaraguan families in the barrio where Carmen lived with other Franciscan Sisters for seven years. We will meet with people who work in the sweatshops that produce clothing for US department stores. We will meet with coffee farmers who are hungry and losing their land while coffee consumption in the US is at an all time high. We go to understand the effects of free trade and globalization. We go to share stories.

We go to bear witness



FOUR DAY STREET RETREAT

I remember my energy and excitement on the first evening joining four others in the UN Plaza to eat soup that was delicious and warming in the cold air walking over to look for Bonnie and Kevin at the transbay terminal and finally settling to sleep on the street. To feel cold and safe and uncomfortable and yet to be able to sleep to appreciate Bonnie and Kevin's proximity. I became aware that to have companions on the street is a necessity to survive and give some meaning to my existence. Susan Knutson, OSF

We invite people who have made a one day street retreat to join us for a four day retreat from April 13th-16th, 2003. (In the Christian calendar this is during Holy Week.) If you are interested in knowing more about the 4-day retreat please call us at 415-474-0508.

*"For one human being
to love another human
being: that is perhaps
the most difficult task
that has been entrusted
to us, the ultimate
task, the final test and
proof, the work for
which all other work is
merely preparation."*

Rainer Marie Rilke

THE WITNESS

The Witness is a preamble to understanding the meaning of accompaniment. A glimmer of the real experience of knowing another, being moved by another.

Based on the Ten Ox-herding pictures of Zen Buddhist teachings, The Witness follows the journey of a young woman onto the streets, who comes to understand that she must look at the assumptions of her own mind before she can enter whole-heartedly into the community of all living beings.

This 50-minute, one woman play can be performed almost anywhere: in your home, church, school or meeting hall. All performances are followed by a discussion led by a member of the Faithful Fools Street Ministry.

Look for upcoming performances on our web page at www.faithful-fools.org. If you are interested in having the play performed in your church or school or at a gathering of friends, please call Martha Boesing at 510-530-6188 or The Faithful Fools at 415-474-0508.

STREET RETREATS 2003

June 14

July 19

August 16

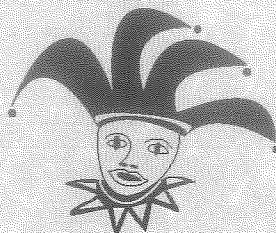
September 27

October 25

November 22

December 13





Faithful Fools Street Ministry

Rev. Kay Jorgensen
Sr. Carmen Barsody, OSF
230/234 Hyde Street
San Francisco, CA 94102-3324
www.faithfulfools.org



WAYS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE VISION AND WORK

We believe that the human and financial resources are abundant and we invite you to be with us in our vision and work. High Priority need is to pay a \$134,000 on the Fool's Court, a place of safety, compassion and healing for many people near and far. Crucial is the need for funds for emergency food, shelter and rent supplement.

Direct Donations: Donations can be made by check or credit card. They can also be made through Pay Pal at www.faithfulfools.org.

Stock: Gifts of stock can be made by calling Anton Jungherr at 510-799-1141.

Bequests: Name Faithful Fools Street Ministry as a beneficiary of your estate in your will or trust. Call Julia Wald, LLP at 415-482-7555.

Copy Shop: Bring your copy, design and layout business to the Faithful Fools Copy Shop. We also bind, fax, print, cut, staple and more. Call Saleem at 415-673-4567.

Street Retreat: Come on a street retreat. For information on upcoming dates call the Fools at 415-474-0508.

Volunteer Fool: There is always something to do, people to be with and streets to walk. Be a tutor at the Up On Top After-School Program; Companion people to appointments; Join us for meditation in the mornings; work with Saleem in the copy shop; serve and visit with people at the Welcome Center on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Give us a call at 415-474-0508.

Thrift Store Items: Used clothing and household items can be taken to the Community Thrift Store at 625 Valencia in San Francisco's Mission District. Designate Faithful Fools (Agency #204) and we will receive part of the proceeds. Call them at 415-861-4910.

Recycle Cartridges: From your work place, home, family and friends collect empty laser, inkjet and fax cartridges and bring them to the Fools Court at 230 Hyde Street or contact Michael Dean at 650-755-9420 or sfomike@pacbell.net to pick up a large quantity.

LET PENNIES FIND AND INSPIRE YOU!