

FOOLS FABLES 2014



Accompaniment



Our Mission Statement

234 Hyde St.
San Francisco, CA 94102
415-474-0508
www.Faithfulfools.org

**We are called to a
ministry of presence that acknowledges
each human's incredible worth.**

Aware of our judgments, we seek to meet people where they are through the arts, Education, advocacy, and accompaniment.

We participate in shattering myths about those living in poverty, seeing the light, courage, intelligence, and creativity of the people we encounter.

**We discover on the streets our common humanity,
through which celebration, community, and healing occur.**

Accompanying A Neighborhood and a City In Times of Displacement and Gentrification

We are called to be present in this neighborhood and this city, not because it is alive with music and art and poetry (and it is indeed alive with all kinds of creative, restless energy) and not because it is booming economically (and it is--new businesses, new employees, new construction, all kinds of new things testify to the economic boom of these heady days). No, we are called to be present here because it is a moment when we can talk and wonder aloud about what development without displacement might look like; we can imagine and dream what the Tenderloin might look like if we take seriously the words of Bryan Stevenson (Executive Director of the Equal Justice Initiative):

The opposite of poverty is not wealth, it is justice.

So we ask ourselves: what would justice in the Tenderloin look like? For the men and women who sleep on the street, for the transgender teens who seek shelter here but find only exploitation, for newly hired tech workers looking for a place to live, for women walking to work dodging catcalls, for panhandlers dodging curses and disregard? For all of us, what does justice look like when we are living in a crowded neighborhood, diverse beyond measure--great wealth, great poverty, great joy, great sorrow, health and disease--it is all here and we are all here.

Too many throw up their hands and say, "I didn't cause homelessness, how can you expect me to cure it?" Others throw up their hands and say, "If only those rich people would stay where they are and leave us alone, they don't even begin to understand us." But Fools only throw up their hands when they are dancing and playing and laughing.

We don't know where things are going. We are seeing our neighbors displaced, and we are seeing new neighbors arrive--many new people are seeking to sleep in front of the Fools' Court these days--but our task is not to know where things are going but to walk with our neighbors and our beloved Tenderloin, faithfully and foolishly, with hope, seeking to create relationships of good will and accountability among those who might not meet otherwise, among those who might not ever even speak to each other if it were not for the Fools who ask them to gather and create together.

This is how we are living our mission as



Faithful Fools

When There Are Tulips in the Window . . .

Kay one day began to draw tulips with colored pencils and place them in the front window for Chucky. When we come upon live tulips in all their brilliant colors, we buy some and take them home to the Fool's Court and place them in the window. Now there is a photo of her mother near the tulips. As Chucky hangs out in front of our building she can talk to her mother. Her father killed her mother when Chucky was just 7 years old, and she misses her every moment of every day. The first time Chucky greeted Kay she said, "I just love your smile." Each time after that when they would meet she would ask Kay, "How's your smile?" and Kay would return the question. They then began talking, sometimes about finding shelter and then her family. Kay wanted to know more about her and asked her what her favorite flower was. When Chucky told Kay she loved tulips, it opened a place of connection, a pathway on which to meet and walk together.

We walk with people, "accompany" people every day and in many ways. The work of accompaniment is intensifying and requires more people and more financial resources. Housing, even in the single room occupancy hotels, is almost non-existent as landlords and corporations prioritize space for the tech company workers who have moved into the city and displaced low-income tenants. Finding clinics and rehab programs that have room for new clients is increasingly difficult. We can sit hours in waiting rooms with people at social service centers and fill out reams of forms in hopes of seeing someone who can help shed light on possible steps one can take. In these past months we have been subsidizing the cost of temporary housing in hotels that rent by the week while we work toward permanent housing in a residential hotel or a residential treatment program. We have been making more trips to the Food Bank to provide food for families and individuals whose Social Security checks or part time jobs don't meet their basic needs. Sometimes the request is for gas money for people who live in their vehicles. We have been active in working with other non-profits to advocate for and keep visible the people whose lives are being directly affected by all the changes in the city. It all takes time, and we are grateful to be here.

Our gratitude extends to all of you who support us with what we need in order to do the steady accompaniment that we do. There are so many people who generously give hours and weeks and years in leading the programs that bring people together. We are grateful for the families of individuals who work with us to accompany their child or sibling or cousin. Your love is faithful and real.

We ask each of you to continue to support us through participating in programs, volunteering, making a monthly pledge, a donation or bequest. Your generosity and trust allows us to be here for many and respond to individual needs.

As for tulips in the window, sometimes "accompanying..." "walking with..." "assisting..." means meeting a place within a person that they have lost touch with, a place where life and beauty and love still exist. To mirror back to Chucky, or to anyone, a place within where their genuine humanness is the golden thread we hold onto along treacherous paths. As Kay said when we were reflecting on the importance of the tulips in the window, "It is human relationship that will see us through!"



Carmen Barsody

Let Me Tell You about My Brother

My brother might feel the label “homeless” misleading since he considers much of San Francisco and Southern Marin to be his home territory. While he sometimes seems to find it challenging to stay in buildings or rooms or to follow certain conventions, he’s an energetic conversationalist on a wide range of topics, a teller of tall tales, a jokester, a hipster, a street-smart shape-shifter. And he can reflect more deeply than most of us on the emotional, physical, and spiritual challenges of carrying all his belongings wherever he goes.

Since the death of our parents and my sister’s recent illness, I’ve been primarily responsible for overseeing a modest trust set aside on my brother’s behalf. I live in San Diego, but I try to come see him about once a month in San Francisco. We share a few meals, run errands, take walks, and sometimes shop for clothes or other necessities that meet the demands of life outdoors. Recently we’ve been using cell phones to talk and leave voice messages for each other.

Sometimes we drive a rented car out to Mount Tamalpais, where we spent much of our youth. Mostly my brother talks about life: how to make meaning out of it, what to do about it, how to live it within a set of parameters. My brother’s general intelligence and his flashes of compassion, humor, and angst make 10-15 hours of nearly non-stop conversation pass quickly, but I sometimes feel I’m bottled up in a theatrical event, like “Waiting for Godot” or back-to-back re-runs of “The Big Bang Theory.”

We usually begin our days together at Faithful Fools on Thursday mornings, sometimes after a Faithful Fools meditation session or group meeting. Every time I walk up the painted stairs into the Faithful Fools Great Room I feel invited into an atmosphere of love and acceptance and ongoing artistic exploration of life’s possibilities. Faithful Fools has accompanied my brother and my family for decades on his rough journey through life.

Accompanied: What I’ve learned gradually from five or six years of visits to Faithful Fools (and very much from



Our friend Alabama in front of The Fools Court



Portrait of Johnny V's Smile. Photo by Merida Wilson

my brother himself) are some beginner’s principles and dispositions about how to accompany him on his journey rather than intervene, lead, direct, teach, judge, cajole, coach, or harass him with demands to change or be different. The best parts of our visits are when we are active listeners, attending to each other, co-participants, co-adventurers whose paths cross periodically in acts of love and understanding.

Frater Anonymous

About the Cover:

Warmth of Giving 2 by Elizabeth King. This painting, a gift from Melissa Fafarman, lives at the Fools Court. The artist, Elizabeth King, says of this work, "My paintings emphasize selfless giving. . . . Altruism, to me, is not understood from the philosophical sensibility, but rather small acts of kindness that can alleviate others' poverty, cares, and concerns." (April 2006 *Street Spirit*, a publication of American Friends Service Committee)



Reflections & Shadows: Fostering Compassion With Youth

Those who encounter the Fools often ask, “How can I become a Faithful Fool?” As we are not a member organization, and as we are simple Fools, the answer is simply to follow these two steps: 1) Consider yourself a Fool; and 2) Grow in your relationship with one another.

Each year, hundreds of youth and adults embrace the practice of being a Fool for a day by joining us on a Street Retreat. We follow in Faithful Fools co-founders Kay and Carmen’s footsteps as we walk the streets, discovering who is there, what the joys and struggles on the streets are, and how each of us finds oneself in relationship to life on the vibrant streets. Some of us are inspired to action. Some of us are called to deeper reflection on how we live our lives.

Each youth (and occasionally an adult) who joins us on a Street Retreat is accompanied by a Shadower - an adult who has made a Retreat prior to volunteering to support the youth in theirs. This is it: your chance to make your own Foolishness a regular practice! Shadowers get to see the streets through new eyes each Retreat and to witness the impact a Street Retreat has on the incredible young people willing to commit a few hours to being on the streets. Contact us today to sign up to be a part of this valuable ministry of accompaniment, or to make your own Street Retreat!

Alex Darr



We are called to a ministry of presence that acknowledges each human's incredible worth.

A Fool Who Trusts Finds The Essence of Freedom



Thomas Atwood

What is the value of accompaniment? At Fools Mission, it begins with embracing a life of service. We celebrate when moms are reunited with their daughters, or undocumented immigrants burst into tears with gratitude for supportive companionship. Nothing can quite compare with connecting a homeless person with shelter, a grade-school kid with reading skills, or an immigrant parent with a green card. The lessons in humility and self-awareness along the way are legion, and the numinous quality of that occasional victory can transform your life.

What do middle class Fools like me get out of these kinds of experiences? For me, they expand my emotional range and offer an antidote to emotional paralysis. I agree with psychologists who say you can't suppress sad feelings without stifling happy ones, too. When I worked at a Silicon Valley software company, I knew plenty of co-workers who lived in quiet desperation, taking antidepressants and crying at their desks. Fear and isolation know no boundaries of class. Seeking comfort in monoculture isn't any better remedy in human society than it is in agriculture, so I seek out the company of people whose lives are different from my own.

Fools trust direct experience as a means to discover how the world works, so they can rely less on second-hand judgments. As human beings, we can't stop making judgments—good judgment is essential. On the journey of the Fool, we become aware of our judgments. We begin to distinguish the essential from the trivial; harshness from kindness; irritation from tribulation. By spending time with people whose lives are different from our own, we temper our judgments with direct witness of the experiences of others. This nurtures empathy, reduces ego-based behavior, and makes it easier to figure out the next right course of action. In later stages of the journey, radical compassion releases floodgates of joy.

The lifestyle of the Fool offers no guarantees of comfort, security, or perfection. What lifestyle does? Yet it can liberate you from unceasing chatter in your head about accomplishment, self worth, or a false sense of superiority. At its best, the way of the Fool leads you to that "Aha!" moment when you recognize that nothing can cut you off from human love and connection unless you create alienation on your own. For the Fool, this state of awareness is the essence of freedom and fulfillment. Then the real party begins.

Thomas Atwood



Andrea Dolin & Thomas Atwood

So, Andrea Dolin, What Does Accompaniment Mean to You?

I guess I have learned about accompaniment formally at the Faithful Fools. But I have received help and helped all my life. Like my mother fighting for my right to have a special education to fit my needs. Or when I supported my mother when she had breast cancer. Those are examples in my family life way before I became a Faithful Fool. An example after I joined the Fools is when I visited one of the people I know from around the Fools in the hospital many times for short visits (he contracted a flesh eating virus on his legs while living on the streets). Even just getting him a bottle of Coke from the cafeteria was accompaniment.

Then there were the many times when I needed help with appointments; a bug infestation my home; getting enough kitty litter for my cat when I had to have my knee replacement. Actually I had many people help when I got my knee replacement--taking me out for a break, shopping for food, going for rides just to get out of the house for a while. Usually to Lands End to see the ocean at that time (a very intense time for me) and so much more. Then there is just attending Bible study and hearing others' beliefs, and sharing mine as well.

I guess accompaniment means someone cares enough about you and wants to help better your life.

Andrea Dolin



Andrea Dolin & Nieves Morales

The Institute for Street Level Learning

Faithful Fools began as a way of learning. Street Retreats and reflection formed the foundation for accompaniment, advocacy, and even for engaging in the arts. Learning, street level learning, is at the heart of what the Fools do. In 2004, Starr King School for the Ministry named Kay Jorgensen “Steward for Street Level Learning,” and in 2014, just last spring, Catholic Health Initiatives awarded Faithful Fools a 3-year grant to fund The Institute for Street Level Learning.

What does that mean? Well, for starters it means that we have the funds to bring greater depth and consistency to the educational programs that have meant so much for so long. We will be bringing more interns to the Fools in the coming semesters, but we have already had several groups of service-learning students come to work with Fools and learn about what Fools do in the Tenderloin.

Non-profit Organizations & Communications: Taking on Street Retreats

Damien Weldon, long-time Fool & Board Member, wanted to celebrate his 50th birthday at the Fools Court, but he knew that many of his friends and his family (visiting from Ireland for the occasion) didn't know much about the Fools, much less about Street Retreats --be it a retreat for one day or seven, here or in Nicaragua. So five students from Dr. Brandi Lawless' class on non-profit organizations & communication did a Street Retreat, talked with all kinds of Fools, looked through stacks of photos, and curated an exhibition of images and quotes. Guests for Damien's 50th had the chance to enjoy music and dancing and learn about Fools, thanks to the students' hard work.



Martin-Baro' Scholars: Partners in Poetry

They are students living & learning together for a full year. With their faculty, Kara K and David H, they are studying the poetry of the Tenderloin. Their poetry textbook? It is the five volumes of “Living in the Land of the Dead”--the Fools' publication of writing and visual arts. The project for the year? They are creating the “Anthology of Anthologies,” bringing together all five past editions into a new edition. They are learning about poetry, coming to know the Fools' poets, and producing a book.



Damien works with USF students creating the exhibition for his 50th birthday party

Aware of our judgments, we seek to meet people where they are through the arts, education, advocacy, and accompaniment.

Nicaragua: A Mirror of Creativity & Strength



Fools and Franciscans alike—be they in Nicaragua or the US—feel the strength and joy of one another every time we get together, whether we are in the village of San Diego, Condega, or in the Fool's Court of San Francisco. Each one of us is fueled by our own experience of being accompanied at some point in our life, and we know what it means to be encouraged in the face of discouragement.

The last time I travelled to Nicaragua, Fernando Navarro asked me to bring him some things he could use for clowning. I gathered up some face

paints, some red noses, and a few other odds and ends, and gleefully took them to him. Soon I began to see pictures of him—with a red nose or dressed as a clown—show up on Facebook. I noticed one of the pictures was in the Children's Hospital in Managua, so I asked Fernando what drew him there. He told me he went with some of his classmates from the university where he is studying psychology. He said, "What motivated me were the stories of the children, the level of economic needs they had and their determination to live a long life. I simply looked for what I had within my power to do and set out with the other students to bring joy to the children."

Fernando was just two years old when I arrived in Nicaragua with my Franciscan Community. He used to come to the Soy Kitchen where a meal of soybean-based food was served to pregnant women and malnourished children. Fernando's mother, Daisy, was the coordinator of the Soy Kitchen at one point, and his father helped to build the simple structure that housed it.

Fernando grew up watching the people around him take action to meet the needs of people and the neighborhood. He has witnessed women learning together and growing in their own sense of dignity and worth. He saw them stand up in the face of domestic



violence and work together to address economic misery. He has seen the Soy Kitchen become a primary school, founded by a neighbor who is committed to providing a quality education in the neighborhood. He has seen the youth of the neighborhood go door-to-door to seek provisions for the survivors of a volcano eruption and when people on the coast lost homes to a tsunami. He has seen neighbors, including his own parents, work to bring water and lights to the barrio and advocate for legal title to their property. And now 24 years later we see fruits of these labors, including Fernando who is fueled by a deep love of life and service.



Thank you, Fernando, and all you faithful ones wherever you are. You remind us that red noses and laughter are essential in all that we do—service, fun, and living.

Carmen Barsody

Celebrating People

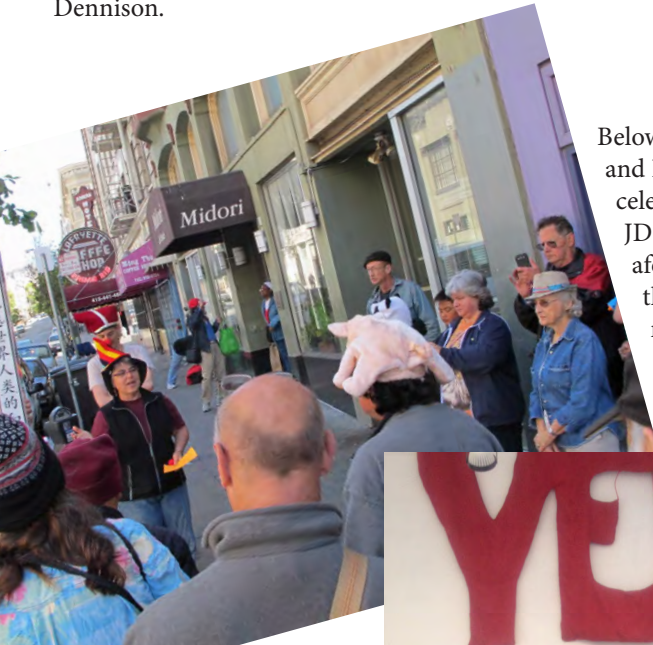


Fr. Vitale and Meg Whitaker-Greene consider the Algie Abrams' photograph "Bent but not Broken."

Algie Abrams shared 30 years of photographs celebrating life on the streets--here and around the world. Front row (L to R): Algie Abrams, Fr. Louis Vitale, Kay Jorgensen, Back Row (L to R) Francis Lee and Sam Dennison.



We Fools planted a peace pole on Interdependence Day (July 4th). William helped his dad, Alex Darr, with the cement, Carmen led us in fun and thoughtful preparation, and Patty O'Luanaigh led chanting for peace. A neighbor passes by the Peace Pole early in the morning.



Below: JD Benson and Kay Jorgensen celebrate "YES." JD is newly re-afoliated and the YES is newly revitalized by a dip in red dye.



Celebrating the Streets

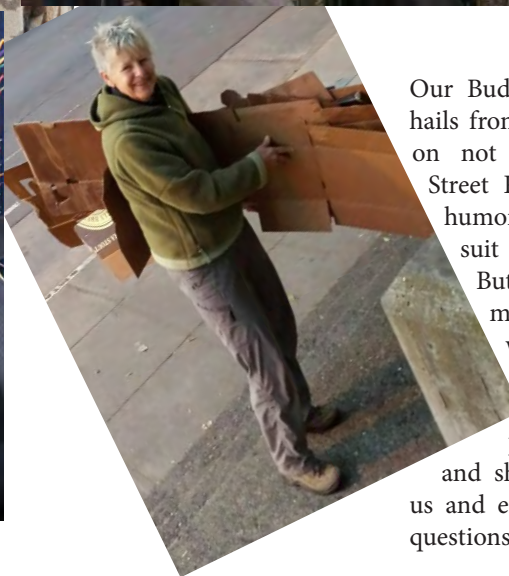
The Fools Court has hosted parties, peace pole plantings, Street Retreats, and creative work from writing, to painting, to photographic shows. Students, neighbors, friends, family and volunteers have made this a year of rich, joyful celebration. Here are just a few moments for you to share with us.



Kirsten Hove clowns with Mr. YooWho and Mr. YooWho clowns with a College of St. Benedict student during a "Find Your Funny" Workshop kindly offered by Moshe Cohen (who is never in the room when Mr. YooWho is--Coincidence? We think not!).



Below: St. Ben's students sport noses on their last night with Carmen, Sam, Kay, and Jackie.



Our Buddhist Intern, Jackie Hider, hails from San Diego. She has been on not one, but two seven-day Street Retreats. Jackie's sense of humor and sense of reflection suit her nicely to being a Fool. But it is her drive to learn that makes her timing for being with us this year spot-on appropriate. She began by writing an extensive paper on Street Chaplaincy, and she continues to learn with us and engage us in the important questions of "What separates us? What connects us?"

Our friend David Morris, a UU Minister, began with a month long sabbatical and then he did the seven-day Street Retreat.



Bible Study: Robert, Jay, and Alex



Honored Guest: Yeilbonzie Johnson spent part of his summer with us. A long-time friend of the Fools and especially of Kay Jorgensen, he created peace crane ritual for us to honor August 6th and commemorate Hiroshima.

Ed Bowers, What Do the Fools Mean by Accompaniment?

I don't know, but I am now going to put the question into my thinking cap and see what comes out the other end. We are born surrounded by people. Life is never alone. It is always surrounded by itself.

Accompanying us at all times is the presence of others, even if it's only a mother who never wanted a child or a group of indifferent individuals who could not care less.

This presence is like an ocean current. Sometimes its waves gang up on us and float us to where we don't want to go. We might end up in Stockton, CA, and wonder why, oh, + why. But this ocean is big and has interests of its own, and if you don't want to go where it floats you, well....

At other times, though, the current accompanies you on your journey, assisting you, comforting you with its rhythmic motions. Its calm may even allow you, in your fear and trembling, to calm down long enough to see the shore, articulate a goal or a destination, or at least relax long enough to be able to enjoy life for a few minutes before returning once again to a normal state of panic.

So, when accompanying a person in a crisis it is only necessary to smooth the waves of his or her journey to be an effective and affective accompanist. It's sort of like being a bass player in a band. Or a little warm wave in the ocean. It's not your job to solve the problem. It's only your job to be there.

The world is a huge ocean that makes its individual waves feel like less than nothing. But for some reason, when one wave hooks up with another, a little ocean is created that actually feels like it has a chance to float its cargo to the stars reflected by the light of a full Moon on its surface.

What confidence and hope a person can feel when someone agrees to accompany him on his life's journey! So much of a person's energy is used up feeling lonely that when that feeling is diminished then all sorts of possibilities open up.

At the Faithful Fools we have the desire to offer this accompaniment when and where it is needed and without judgment. Offering company to someone who needs it is a privilege and opportunity, because accompanying someone is not a one way street. The accompanier is being helped by who he or she is accompanying. To assist someone on a journey means that you allow your relationship with that person to teach and assist you on your own path, perhaps more powerfully and effectively than the person you are accompanying could ever imagine.

Accompaniment, it turns out, is one of the most mutually educational relationships that can be cultivated. It is a core ingredient in any institution of learning, especially the Faithful Fools Institute of Street Learning in the San Francisco Tenderloin. To simply set foot inside the zone of another person's life and accompany him or her on a difficult journey takes the courage and the willingness to learn from that person's perspective and situation.

As The Faithful Fools have found out many times, what at first appears to be the wreckage of a person's life could actually be in fact the entrance to The Palace of Wisdom, not only for someone in need, but also for those who aid and accompany someone on what otherwise would be a long and lonely and terrifying journey.

So, if accompaniment is an essential part of relating to your species and being human, this is also an essential part of what the Faithful Fools do.

It's as simple as that.



Ed Bowers puts the question in his thinking cap



Ed Bowers

We participate in shattering myths about those living in poverty, seeing the light, courage, intelligence, and creativity of the people we encounter.

In the Shadows, Soft Movement and Soft Voices . . .

Shadow Puppets Tell the Story

Kasey Asberry – dancer, puppet master, artist, gardener, community organizer. Kay Jorgensen – minister, clown, co-founder of the Faithful Fools. Together, they have been engaged in an adventure of mutual accompaniment, creating shadow puppet theatre in Kasey's Thunder Puppet Playshop. They are creating a sea story based on a poem by Pablo Neruda; from time to time, they are joined by children. Kay and Kasey sat down together one afternoon this fall to talk about the puppets and about themselves. This is a small part of their conversation, which begins with them marveling at the way one child in particular responded to working with shadow puppets.

Kay: Take Aaron [not his real name] – it was magical, [how] he was completely attuned with you.

Kasey: The real secret is that it's not me. It's the environment. Low light, focus on the silhouettes; I suppose you could say it's sensory deprivation, but it's not: it's sensory selection. Children like Aaron who are on the spectrum, you give them less -- and in some way we're all on the spectrum. We've all got too much. With children in particular who have not learned to shut themselves down, I've discovered that rather than telling them to stop moving up and down, tell them: focus on your fingers; use your voice in a whisper; just focus on the small things. It's a huge strength to know a quiet purpose. We have so much going on and we're on the edge of panic, all of us. To reduce the things we have to deal with, we can say that for just 15 minutes, it's going to be low light. In that short time, we can tell a little story, and agree on the story we're going to tell ... [there is] the experience of small success, and maybe we can translate that to other areas of life as well.

Kay: We, at the Faithful Fools, look at the arts as one of the means where individual artists in a classroom setting are teaching and learning simultaneously -- which is exactly what street level learning is all about. Kasey, you manifest this ability to create as you go along, becoming more and more knowledgeable. Using what you've got, you turn the [basement Playshop] space to make something else.

Kasey: Using brown paper -- using the stuff people throw away -- is very liberating, I think. Art could be blowing across the street in front of you [if only you could see it].

Kay: Here, grab a drum, grab the bells . . . use whatever you have, transform it into something else.

Kasey: The thing I discovered, working this way, is the more lowly it is, the more magical it is when it takes flight. There was a time I was a real serious theater person, not on Broadway but in experimental theater. Then I got so ill, I couldn't walk, and all I wanted was to be able to dance again. But as soon as I got well -- really, as soon as I woke up from the surgery -- it just came to me: I wanted to build a puppet theater. In the recovery room, I asked my husband to get me PVC pipe so I could build this puppet theater I was imagining.



Kay Jorgensen at shadow play

When I met you, Kay, I wasn't sure what work we would do together, and then it dawned on me: of course! Puppets! Your personality suggested it to me; you're so in the moment; that's what it takes, being in the moment. Some people come with a lot of story, a lot of content, but they're not happy, because they're not in the moment with it. What I want to do is with what is right here with us today. I'm so thrilled you like to spend time with me like that. It's so much better with friends!



Kasey Asberry releasing a Painted Lady Butterfly

Kay: When the inspiration comes from someone to someone, and back, you want to do it right away. [I was so inspired that] I had to get up early in the morning to work with the puppets on the wall so I could learn the directional qualities. Then I began to see everything around me in a different way. There's a possibility of being anything that is permitted, that is allowed; the possibility is infinite, the realization of that. My body . . . it seems I can't do so much anymore but that doesn't stop my consciousness.

What you've provided . . . the language of this ancient life, sitting by the sea, here are words, and an environment we could participate in, and the sounds of the sea, and the music . . . You provided an environment, a seascape, a place to play.

Kasey (referring to an earlier conversation): What you said was so moving to me -- working with the puppets, instead of Parkinson's being an obstacle, it is a help. With the shadows, it's really true that less is more. When people start out with puppets they do way too much. The way you move with puppets: your gaze, your touch -- it's exactly right. Little things make the biggest difference.

Kay: This is my experience too. It's such an alive thing.

Kasey: I was a conceptual artist, and I thought about a lot of things, but I didn't make very many things. But there's something very powerful about changing matter, even if it's light. I like doing stuff. And I like doing things with you.

It Was Foolish Work, To Be Sure

I began learning about accompaniment 12 years ago as a seminarian, when I did my first Street Retreat. The Faithful Fools accompanied me, a middle class, middle aged, white, privileged woman who wanted to have an authentic encounter with the poverty that exists in San Francisco, alongside great wealth. I wanted to learn to bear witness to the whole of that painful reality that so defines the life experience of everyone in this country and maybe everyone in the world. I was asking to be broken open, and when you do that, you need someone to walk beside you.

There are many stories I cherish from my time with the Faithful Fools. This is a story of Bruce, whom I remember as one of my greatest teachers.

Imagine an apartment, on a bright, sunny afternoon. A group of us are sipping wine on the balcony; a few steps away, pasta bubbles on the stove. We are there to congratulate Bruce, who has most literally come in from the cold. Bruce is beaming. He shows us the coffee table, points to the TV, the sofa, the bed. On the wall hangs a familiar object, a crudely lettered cardboard sign, now carefully framed.

There are four lines on his cardboard sign:

This was the sign Bruce had held as he begged for change during the last several of the 31 years he'd lived on the streets. Nearly every day, he'd stood next to the grave of Thomas Starr King at the corner of Franklin Street and Starr King Way, flashing that sign at motorists stopped at the light. He was well known to members of the First Unitarian Universalist Society, not just for his presence on their corner but for his terrifying outbursts – directed sometimes at church members or staff who didn't have change for him that day, or who offered him food he didn't like.

Present on his new balcony that June afternoon were some of the ministers who had kept faith with Bruce over nine months of patient walking and reflecting. They had accompanied him as he struggled off of heroin and onto methadone, and then off methadone. They had shown up with him again and again in a protracted court battle to get Social Security Disability Income for his HIV-positive and dual-diagnosis mental health status. They had helped him look for an apartment, and had stood up for him when questions arose about his lengthy criminal record. It was foolish work. Bruce was not easy to walk with. He fell off the wagon, again and again. When he fell off, he would turn on his friends. **Then he would return, ask us to walk with him again. Most of the time, we would say yes.**

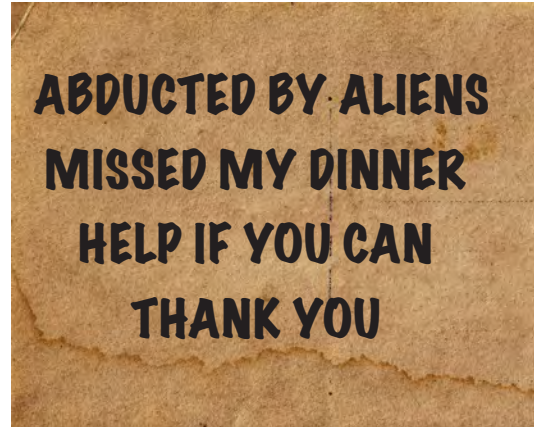
Alex was the first of the Faithful Fools to get to know Bruce, who was panhandling in the Tenderloin neighborhood where Alex lived. Pointing at Alex's long, red beard, Bruce would call him "the Amish guy" and regale him with tales of his life on the streets.

Alex had learned a way of listening with no agenda, without trying to "fix" anything, and these were the ears he used to listen to Bruce's stories. One day, Alex heard something new. "I kept listening until finally I could see something I

could do that might be of help to Bruce," Alex remembers. "I told him I would go with him when he cashed his welfare check every month, and hold it for him -- give him ten dollars a day so he could get his fix and not have to panhandle from a place of desperation, where he would be yelling at people on the corner."

That was the beginning. There were many twists and turns to come both before and after that sunny celebration day at Bruce's new apartment. I remember Bruce with gratitude. He told me once that it was Alex's nonjudgmental listening that helped him change his life. Watching Alex and the other Fools accompany Bruce and others has changed mine.

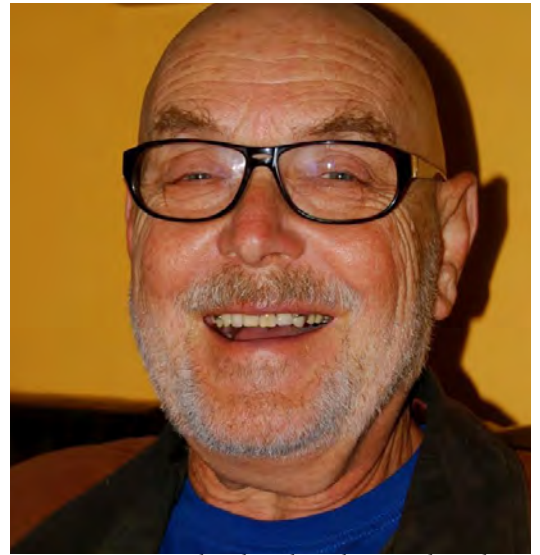
Mary McKinnon Ganz



**We discover on the streets our common humanity
through which celebration, community, and healing occur.**

Quentin Olwell

Quentin was among the first Fools I came to know . . . he had a big laugh, so of course he was among the best and biggest of Fools. I was interviewing Fool after Fool, making archival videos of the people who formed the life of the Fools early on. There are many tales to be told of Quentin and his life at the Fools, but he is remembered deeply as someone who learned how to walk with people, how to be present. It wasn't easy for him; he had lots of judgments to become aware of and to let go of . . . but he did it. He did Street Retreats, went to Nicaragua, he sat on the Board, and he helped give birth to the Fools. The first time he saw the building 234 Hyde St (long before it was the Fools' Court), he said, "It's not a matter of 'if' but 'when.'" And he was right about that. Like all good Fools, he was constantly learning. "You know what I learned on my first Street Retreat? I learned how exhausting homelessness is. I'll tell you what, I never feel impatient any more when a homeless person is taking his time crossing the street. I used to honk my horn if I was in a hurry. But not any more. I know exactly what that guy is feeling. His feet hurt and so does his back. I can spare a couple of minutes for that guy to take his time."



Quentin laughs. Photo by Merida Wilson

Quentin died peacefully 5 months to the day after his beloved wife, Linda, passed away. They were so very close that way: You really couldn't imagine Quentin without Linda or vice versa.

We miss you, Quentin.

Sam Dennison

IF TODAY

HE DID NOT LOOK AT ME
I STARTED TO WALK BY
THE GAZE RETURNED
UNSURE

YOU SEE HIS EYES

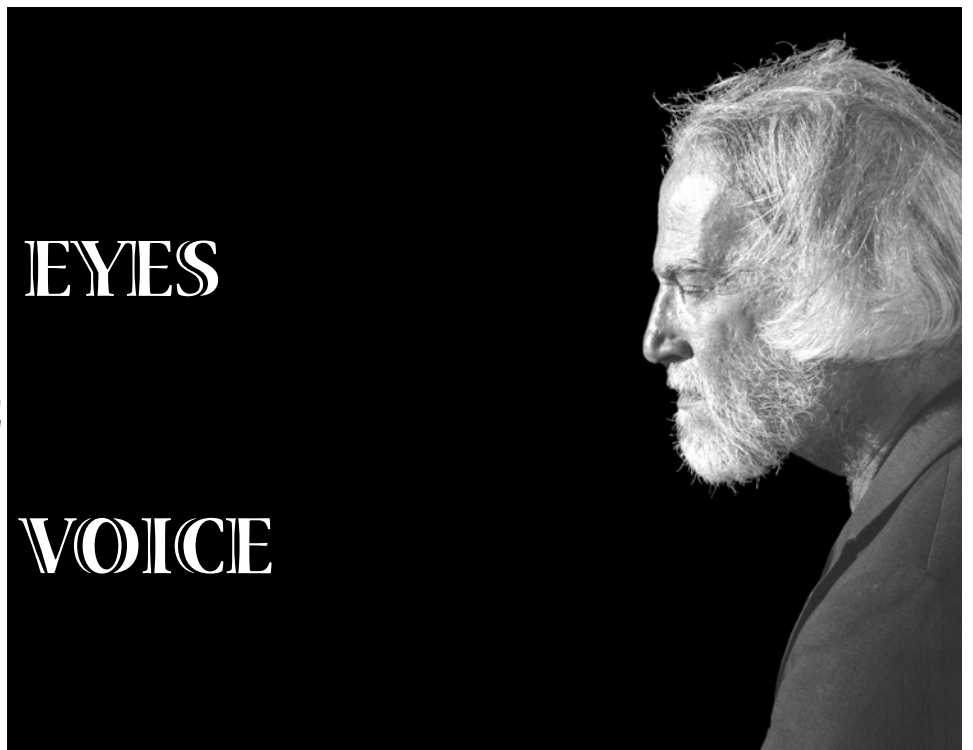
GAZING
DEEPLY RICH
MAGNIFICENTLY LINED FACE
AN ARTWORK OF LIFE

YOU HEAR HIS VOICE

HIS LIFE CHORDS
TOUCHED MINE
UNSPOKEN

HARDEN NOT YOUR HEART

MY HEART CRACKED
OPEN AND
STOOD STILL



Poem by Ade Kroll
Photo by Algie Abrams

When I think about accompaniment, I think about relationship

It can be the relationship between a singer and the person playing the piano. It can be a tugboat helping a container ship negotiate through a busy, dangerous harbor. It can be one person helping another person. For example, during the last year my friend has accompanied her elderly mother-in-law on weekly food-shopping excursions. When I did my last Street Retreat, I encountered a woman pushing a heavy garbage bin of recyclables. She was obviously exhausted, so I helped her push the bin to her living space on the street. It took about fifteen minutes. These are examples of accompaniment.

So, to accompany is to pay attention to what is needed and to take some action. It can be a one-time event, or it can be part of a long-term relationship. Sometimes the need is obvious, as in the situation of the woman needing help with the garbage bin. Sometimes a person requests help. Other times the need may not be obvious or known to the person needing help or to the person doing the accompanying.



Jackie Hider and Damien Weldon reflecting for a Street Retreat

The relevant question here is how does one know what to do? It is easy to enter a situation with a fixed agenda. It is easy to think, “I have been in this situation before; I know exactly what is going on and how to fix it.” In fact, this kind of thinking is almost automatic. But, how do we really know if our agendas are in alignment with the situation and motivation of the person who needs help? Often, this is really tricky.

I have found a set of companionship practices described by Craig Rennebohm in his book, *Souls in the Hands of a Tender God*. These five practices outline a way of being that build a depth of relationship between the helper and the person needing help. They are Offering Hospitality, Neighboring, Walking Side by Side, Listening, and finally, Accompaniment. My thinking and hopefully my actions are deeply

informed by these five practices.

Hospitality and Neighboring are ways of being. Hospitality creates a space of friendliness, both safe and welcoming. It can be created with a casual hello on the street or with a sincere smile for the person standing on the corner with the “Please Help” sign. Neighboring implies an ongoing relationship and the intimacy of living, and/or working in the same neighborhood. Being neighborly is finding common ground, and staying current. Walking Side by Side is literally and figuratively walking or sitting beside someone. It is facing the world together, side by side, as equals.

Listening is at the heart of companionship and accompaniment. In one of our early conversations, Carmen said to me, “When we listen deeply at an individual level, what the person wants begins to show up. We can help a person articulate what he/she wants, but we have to get out of the way and leave behind our own agendas.” So, as listeners we have to avoid interrupting and giving unasked for advice. Skillful listening takes a lot of patience, presence, and often a lot of time.

So, in the end, accompaniment is not just about action; it is about relationship and companionship. The action is a natural outcome of friendship, knowing something about the other person, experiencing life together, and careful listening.

To take this a step further, in the act of accompaniment, there is the possibility that the line between the helper and the person being helped disappears. Rennebohm captures this possibility when he says, “Companionship, in this sense of acting in collaboration with the Spirit, is not a task or assignment. It is a calling rooted in our common humanity, arising out an inherent care and concern for one another. The aim is not to fix things; it is simply to be together, to be present for one another.” When we take these words to heart, the whole idea of accompaniment becomes irrelevant. We are just doing what friends do to help each other.



Raychell and Margaret on a sunny day

A Tale of Witnessing and Waiting

Reflecting on the Prodigal Son, Henri Nouwen once wrote “Truly accepting love, forgiveness and healing is often much harder than giving it.” Nouwen went on to write “I am loved so much that I am left free to leave home. The blessing is there from the beginning. I have left it and keep on leaving it. But the Father is always looking for me with outstretched arms to receive me back.” There from the beginning. The Father is always looking for me.

There is much about the moment of leaving/returning that may be saddening or joyful, or both. But in accompaniment we have gratitude for the companionship of a fellow soul on that journey, for a mitigation of the uncertainty of leaving/returning. In the Gospel story of Emmaus, Jesus appears not to one person but to two. It's a recognition of the value, the gift, of journeying with another. When we are accompanied we have a witness, a simple witness of presence. St Francis says “Preach the Gospel at all times and when necessary use words”. The witness of presence is a richness of silence.

“I am simply a witness,” Kay Jorgensen once shared with a group of us Fools returning from Nicaragua. In a witness of accompaniment which Kay and I have shared with each other during this year we've really shared a silence of reflection, gently punctuated by words ... where necessary. Kay reminded me to use words that are true, words that are necessary and words that are kind. To guide my words between these three gates, to shepherd them. Nouwen wrote once “No man can stay alive when nobody is waiting for him.”



Kay, Damien, and Carmen walking together

The world often doesn't wait, I just want to say a simple “Thanks for waiting, Kay, thank you.”

Damien Weldon

If you have come to help me, don't waste your time, but if your liberation and well-being are bound up with mine, then let us walk together.

Aboriginal Activists, Queensland, 1970s
As quoted by Lila Watson



We are here at the corner of Turk & Hyde because you are here with us. You are walking and working closely with us when we spend time with someone, assist with rent, transportation, food, and medical expenses.

We ask you to make a monthly pledge or a donation in cash or stock. Consider naming Faithful Fools Street Ministry as a beneficiary of your will or trust.

**Person-by-person, encounter-by-encounter
the Faithful Fools family grows.**

**We invite you into a personal relationship with our work
by making a donation or a Street Retreat,
by volunteering or by participating in our programs.**

Thank you for being a part of the Fools.