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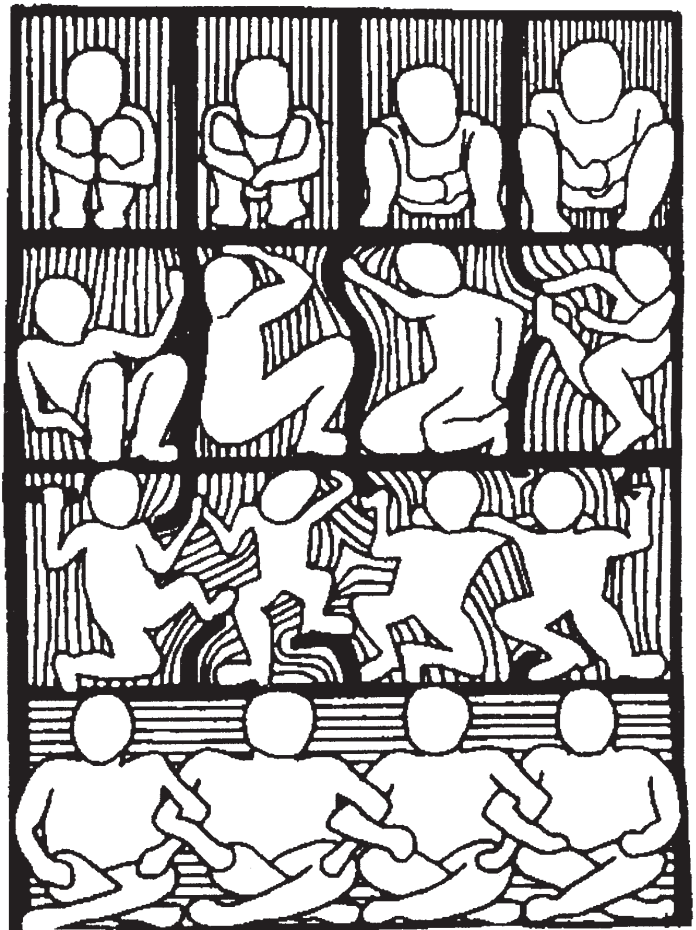
The Spiritual Gift of Friendship

Kelly Zazvorka
Church of the Sojourners

Friendships of character last because the persons work together over time to gain the kind of character that can sustain honest and truthful relationship. —David Janzen

One year at one of our covenant retreats, we talked about each other's spiritual gifts. I was affirmed to have the gift of friendship and I wasn't quite sure what that meant. Where in the Bible does it mention friendship as a spiritual gift? Jesus did say, *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.* (John 15:13) So as I thought about it, it seemed that if I could take the word *friend* and grow and mature in it myself it would be to find ways to make Jesus real to others—to be Jesus for them in a flesh-and-blood way.

Many years ago, I was listening to a radio program at work one morning and the show was on eating disorders. The speaker described an eating disorder called bulimia. I was shocked to hear a name given to a problem I was experiencing. I came home (we were living in a Christian community in San Diego) and asked Sue, my best friend at the time, if she had listened to that radio program and she said yes, she had. I had been afraid to tell anyone about my eating problems. But I said to her, "I have that disorder." I didn't know what kind of response she would give to me, whether she would judge me, or just not know how to respond. But she reached over and pulled me onto her



ARTIST UNKNOWN

lap. We were both sitting on the floor and she held me as I just wept and she wept with me. That was the beginning of healing for me in that area. I experienced Jesus in that it was an unconditional acceptance of being me, just loved for being Kelly. This was a tangible example for me of the kind of Christian friendship that can transform lives.

› *The Spiritual Gift* cont on p.11

Praying for My Mother's Death

Albert Steiner
Reba Place Fellowship

It's been about five years now that we have been praying for my mother Kathryn's death, for her to leave earth and go to be with Jesus. She has been hoping to go for at least that long. In October 2002, at the age of 101, she finally got to go home.

I saw in her the drama of life. We are born, we do a lot of learning, then doing for others and for ourselves, and finally we get older and the doing starts to fail. As she aged, my mother became more and more stooped with back pains and weakness. Then arthritis started stealing sensation from her hands so that she could no longer paint, sew and make things. She wanted to make things to sell for money so she'd have something to give to her favorite charity, Prison Fellowship. Then her eyesight went, her hearing became poor, and she eventually could no longer remember.

As she got older and more limited, I

tried to make the three-hour drive to visit every month or so. We were fortunate that my brother and his wife also lived in Goshen, Indiana, so that they could see her almost every day. I visited my mother to spend time with her, to know her better, and to get acquainted with old age and death. While I hated to see the limits that my mother was experiencing, I also knew that getting old was part of life. I wanted to participate in that process of aging, because aging is also my future.

Can my spirit look to Jesus even though my mind can no longer speak and communicate?

For the past two or three years my mother has not recognized me. As her memory failed she would apologize for not remembering names, or not remembering persons, or even not remembering who we had said we were fifteen minutes before. Each time I came to visit, I introduced myself as Albert, her son from Chicago. But she had set herself a task to remember four of her favorite scripture passages: Psalms 1, 23, 100, and 121. A friend of hers at the Greencroft Retirement Center had written out several scriptures on sheets of paper. When I would read these passages (mostly her childhood King James version) to her, she would begin to repeat them with me. Repeating these scriptures seemed to focus her mind. She particularly liked the end of Psalm 23: "And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever!" Sometimes, when I sang "Jesus loves me, this I know," she would gradually start to help me sing in her broken and crackly voice.

Even as her memory was failing and she wasn't certain just who it was she was welcoming, she would still greet us warmly and ask us questions. Only if I paid close attention would I recognize that she did not say my name or indicate that I was her son. The habits of hospitality were strong.

At times it seemed like she was living in a world we could not understand. Mother had been a schoolteacher, so she would be concerned about the "schoolchildren." At other times, she was just concerned about "the children." (When she married Dad, he was a widower with two young children, and later four more of us were born, so children had been an important part of her responsibility.) Sometimes she became very fixated on a task she thought needed to be done. Sometimes she became angry that we could not understand what she meant. We saw aging and memory loss cause personality changes that were difficult to reconcile with the mother we had known.

In some ways, death is less scary than old age. I saw old age at work—the loss of being able to do. I saw the indignity of losing contact with the world with loss of sight and loss of hearing and finally loss of memory. How do I trust God to be with me when my strength and faculties begin to fail? Can my spirit look to Jesus even though my mind can no longer speak and communicate?

Death is the final defeat. There is no way to call it a victory. But in Jesus, I have hope of the same resurrection. I have hope that I will again live in my new body with him. This is why I could pray for my mother's death. This was the death and resurrection toward which she was looking, and towards which I must look also, and I give thanks that she and I will both "dwell in the house of the Lord forever!"

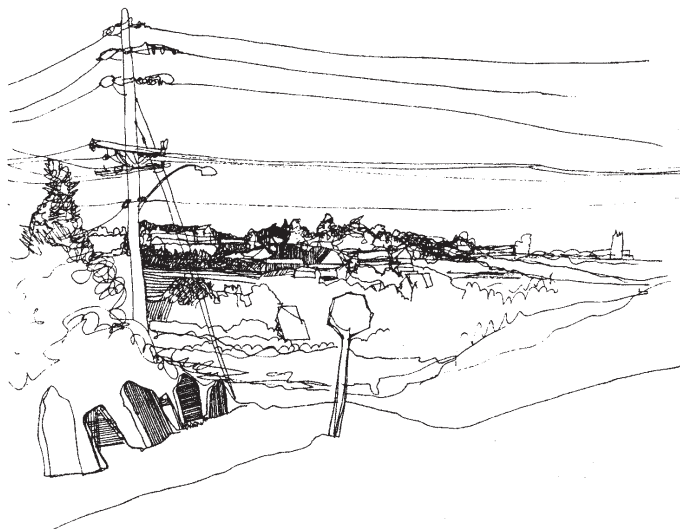
About This Issue

As iron sharpens iron, so one friend sharpens another. —Proverbs 27:17

In this *Shalom Connections* newsletter we want to begin a season of reflection on the theme of our upcoming Shalom 2003 Gathering, Friendship in Christ. We hope you can join us in the July 31 to August 3 Shalom Gathering where we can also hear your stories and reflections on friendship.

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Joseph Matose

Shalom Connections

Shalom Connections seeks to glorify God and provide a means of fellowship and inspiration among sisters and brothers of the member churches of Shalom Mission Communities, and the wider network of intentional Christian communities. *Shalom Connections* is published quarterly in March, June, September and December by Church of the Sojourners, 866 Potrero Ave, San Francisco, CA 94110-2841. Subscriptions are free. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official position of *Shalom Connections*, Church of the Sojourners, Shalom Mission Communities, or its member churches. **Postmaster:** send address changes to the Publishing Office address, below. Non-profit standard mail postage paid at San Francisco, CA 94188.

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Good News from Valle Nuevo

Jim Fitz, with some additions by David Janzen
Plow Creek Fellowship

We just returned from a week with our sister community Valle Nuevo in El Salvador, encouraged by reunion with our long-time friends and by signs of new unity in the community.

Growing unity

Over the last decade, several cooperatives and corporate structures have been formed to title the 265 acres of land that Reba and Plow Creek helped Valle Nuevo buy a decade ago. None of these groups, however, seemed to be able to rally or sustain a consensus of the community in the complex and controversial task of how to title the land. In recent months, as leaders of these various groups have been meeting together, they have reported a movement of the spirit amongst them, a sense that God has been bringing reconciliation for the sake of the common good. Instead of titling only the agricultural lands, the community wants to make one unified project to title the houses, ecological reserves, common areas and the fields all at the same time. A land project promoter sponsored by CoCoDA has been visiting the community regularly to facilitate this process. Though

many concrete decisions remain to be made, community issues look more hopeful than they have for many years.

A passion for peace

Even though the impending war in Iraq did not affect them directly, we were surprised everywhere we went among the *campesino* population to hear their grief over another war. "We know the suffering of war, and the pain of every one involved. The poor are usually on the receiving end, and there is nothing good about it." Many, many people went out of their way to explain why it is of such grave concern to them, and then ask us how we felt. On March 19, several hundred teachers, students and parents held a silent march and gathered in the chapel to pray for peace. Andy Horst, one of the youth in our group, said it well: "I've been against war all my life, but now I know why and why I need to do something about it."

March 18th pilgrimage

We always time our delegations to be in Valle Nuevo on the 18th of March, the day the community commemorates God's deliverance when more than five thousand *campesinos* in 1981 fled the Salvadoran military into exile in Honduras. Like the Hebrew slaves escaping Egypt, this experience of deliverance and wilderness living in refugee camps forged the communities we have come to know.

This year we joined the communities for a three-hour pilgrimage in the midday sun, stopping at the fourteen stations of the cross in fourteen *colonias* (neighborhoods) of El Rodeo, Santa Marta and Valle Nuevo. At each station we heard scripture

› *Good News* cont on p.10



A stop on the *Via Crucis*, remembering God's deliverance and the martyrs of the Salvadoran civil war.

Hilda Carper

Forty-Some Years of Friendship with Julius and Peggy Belser

*As told to David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship*

On a cold January day in 1959, Reba Place leader John Miller drove me down to the Chicago West Side to meet Julius and Peggy Belser. They needed someone for the summer to organize vacation Bible school in the Black neighborhood around Maxwell Street. That day the Belsers had just moved all their stuff in from Lawndale. Nothing was unpacked. Peggy just cleared a little space, dug out some cookies and things for tea, and we talked around the table. That's how I got to meet Peggy as a ready and resourceful hostess—the beginning of more than forty years of friendship with the Belsers.

I agreed to come that summer to work with Julius and Peggy. I had been in Akron, Pennsylvania, working at the Mennonite Central Committee office. My plan after the summer was to go on to Reba Place Fellowship, a Christian intentional community experiment in Evanston, then in its third year. But when fall came, I found that I really wanted to stay with Peggy and Julius, and keep working with them. So that's what I did, staying on for the next six years. I lived in their house in a tiny little room. Their third child, Ann, had just come home

as a newborn. They included me as a part of their family. The first couple of years I taught in the public schools, and then I was Julius' associate pastor in the Westside Christian Parish. In 1965 the Belsers left for Reba Place because they needed renewal. I stayed on at Peoria Street another year. Those years of living and ministering closely together forged our friendship.

When I got to Reba I requested to have an apartment by myself—a big thing to ask for in those days. I got what I wanted as long as I wanted it, for a few months, and then I moved into a larger household of single women. I've never looked back. We lived upstairs at 727 Reba Place, with the nursery school on the ground floor. That was the first Reba household.

Meanwhile, the Belsers started up the Clearing household at 722 Monroe. Our friendship continued. We kept talking over the bigger issues of our lives. About 1980, the Belsers took me back after I had burned out from leading Hallelujah Household. My mother had come to live with me, so we moved into the Clearing together. By that time Julius and I were on the council of elders in the church, often working together. Gradually, Peggy, Julius and I became a team in leading the household. Our gifts seemed to mesh. Peggy is great at hospitality, but doesn't feel comfortable with administration. Julius also has the gift of hospitality and often invites folks to meals—often at the last minute. I am a more private person who needs space and order, so I exercise my gifts of administration. Our abilities worked together smoothly, largely because Julius and Peggy are such tolerant people.

Julius and Peggy have been an important part of my discipleship, not because they tried to disciple me, but because of who they are. Sometimes living together strains friendships, but for us the closer we have lived together the better it has gone. I'm not the kind of person who particularly wants to be around people a lot. I'd rather crawl up into my room in my spare time. But by being around them, I have learned to be more gracious than would be my natural tendency. Their willingness to just serve people, to serve me and put themselves out for people in a way I'm not willing to—that has always been before me as an example. Though I haven't always followed, it nudges my conscience.

**By being around them,
I have learned to be
more gracious than
would be my natural
tendency.**

I enjoy being with Julius and Peggy, but none of us particularly enjoy “having fun.” If they wanted me to play games, or do entertainment things, it wouldn't work. All three of us find joy in doing things side by side, working together to serve others. In that way we are alike. Peggy and I working in the kitchen together, teaming up to care for Mildred who is elderly, planning events with Julius, arguing through our different ways of seeing things and coming up with a common way—it's like having family for me.

I have a blood family with whom I'm close, too, but by now I've lived many more years with Julius and Peggy. I imagine the kind of relationship I have with Julius and Peggy could be difficult if the husband and wife were not in close unity as the Belsers are. Otherwise a third person could be a complicating factor. I think in the beginning, some of that was hard for Peggy. Julius and I worked closely as co-pastors. Peggy was the mother at home, while I was professionally “out there” in public as Julius' assistant. I was not so sensitive to that as I should have been, and Peggy was not able to say how she felt until much later.

In our household life in the Clearing we have been a more equal threesome. Peggy is household manager. I support her in that and Julius supports us both—and everyone else, for that matter. We have learned to appreciate each other's various quirks, so



Hilda Carper (right), with Bob Lembke.

➤ **Hilda Carper** cont on p. 9

Friendship Matters at Plow Creek

Enduring Friendships

David Gale

In the spring of 1957 I knocked on the door of the parsonage at a Brethren church on Chicago's West Side. That's how I met Julius and Peggy Belser. I, two years out of college, was an intern in the youth program of the American Friends Service Committee; Julius, just out of seminary, was interim pastor.

Two years later I was traveling through Chicago on a bitter cold winter night, and thanks to Julius and Peggy I got a good night's sleep. They had moved, with their two children, into one of Chicago's poorest neighborhoods, just off Maxwell Street Market and Roosevelt Road. This wasn't gentrification—it was living with the poor. That was the beginning of Church of Hope, which quickly connected up with Reba Place Fellowship, which had just begun in Evanston, not far away. That must also have been the beginning of Shalom Mission Communities—without the name.

Another two years passed and I, with my new wife Margaret, moved from Reba Place Fellowship to Church of Hope. There we found a thriving community, not just Julius and Peggy, but also Hilda Carper and Albert Steiner. A few years later Allen Howe showed up, fresh out of college, and Jeanne Casner (later married to Allen), who was teaching in an inner city high school, joined us.

By 1966 Church of Hope closed its doors—done in by “urban renewal” and changing race relations. Now, thirty-six years later, Maxwell Street Market is gone and a university gymnasium stands where our homes once were. Reba Place Fellowship has flourished and even Plow Creek Fellowship has a thirty-year history. Probably a thousand people have come, been nurtured, and gone through Reba Place and Plow Creek. But that core group of people from Church of Hope—Julius, Peggy, Hilda, Albert, Allen and Jeanne—remain at Reba Place. They have each had significant leadership roles there. Margaret and I have spent

thirty years at Plow Creek.

College friends—even cousins—have dwindled and become reunion friends and Christmas-letter friends. But the core group from Church of Hope remain very close and committed to each other and to Christian community—no change there in all those years. Just a few days ago we got word from Allen and Jeanne: “We want you to stay with us at SMC conference time...” Some things never change. Thank you, Lord!



Ade Bethune

Community Support

Meg Foxvog

In April of last year my mother was diagnosed with ovarian cancer. She has since had chemotherapy and been in and out of the hospital. This is a very serious matter. I've shared with folks during our worship service, sharing group meetings, and individually about her health, which has usually been followed with prayers for Mom, Dad, the family, and myself.

Mom is confused now and is not adjusting to medicine well. I don't know whether she'll die soon or get better. All of the community has been supportive with prayer, advice, arms for hugging me as I cry, and lots of love!



Clifford Harper

Friendship in Community

Louise Stahnke

When I think about friendship, I think about relationships that form when two people are naturally drawn together and feel an easy comfort and understanding with each other. This doesn't seem to happen very often in community, though it can.

I suspect the Lord is often stretching us, challenging us to grow and understand our brothers and sisters who often think and feel and experience life in ways different from ourselves. I've also found that the most painful experiences in community life can come when a friend who is particularly close to us moves away. But there is something that transcends daily life together that continues in our friendships when that happens. I've had friends before community to whom I was close, yet a move away would leave little in common. With those who have moved away after several years of shared life in community, it seems we are able to simply “pick up where we left off.” The bonds of love and caring are still there.

Those same bonds can grow very deep with those who have challenged us, especially as we walk through periods of personal or group pain together.



Friendship as Gift

Ruth Anne and Richard Friesen

A very close friend with whom one can share deeply about all the soul's yearnings and more is truly a gift from God. Our relationship started because of a common interest in herbs. But it soon grew to sharing more and more, and building trust that allowed

› Friendship Matters cont on p.9

Church News

News from Evanston and Rogers Park

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Char's birthday bash

In honor of Charlotte Oda's 58th birthday on April 4, Fellowship members gathered for a big supper with Char's sister and brother-in-law and with the Sonshine Group (including persons with mental disabilities and their friends). Later that evening, many more of Char's friends came together for a celebration with a slide show, favorite songs, storytelling and more food as we gave God thanks for Char's life and ministry among us. Usually this kind of celebration happens at a round-number wedding anniversary or when someone has died. Char is a single person who has poured herself into many other people's lives. We thought it was "about time" to celebrate her, and Char was humble enough to just enjoy it all.

It's a wedding

The next day was an even bigger bash. Sally Schreiner and Orwin Youngquist were married at the First Presbyterian Church of Evanston because by middle age they have each accumulated so many good friends that no Reba facility could hold them all. Sally Schreiner is pastor of Living Water Community Church, so all those folks were present, along with the children's choir and various other outstanding musicians. Orwin has been deeply involved in the Reba Church for decades, along with his daughters, so



this brought another contingent, choir, and liturgical dance troupe to the event. Shalom friends came from San Francisco and Plow Creek to add their hugs and voices. For many of us the worship was as enthusiastic as we are likely to meet this side of heaven. By now Orwin and Sally have returned from their honeymoon on the Florida Keys and are settling into Orwin's erstwhile digs at 810 Reba Place.

Visitation

Reba Fellowship had its biannual spiritual checkup with a visitation by Joe and Nancy Gatlin from Hope Fellowship in Waco, Louise Stahnke from Plow Creek, and pastor Ric Hudgens from Reba Place Church. They gave us a lot of listening time, a few suggestions, and much encouragement to stay on the course as disciples of Jesus. They were specifically helpful in preparing us to discern new Fellowship leadership, now that Greg Clark's three-year term is ending. Who will be next? Come visit us soon and see, or read the next newsletter to find out.

Several times this winter vanloads of Greenville College students have come through Reba to see, up close, why and how a Christian intentional community exists. More recently, a group of students from the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminaries of Elkhart, Indiana also came by for a time of spiritual encounter.

We are looking forward to y'all's visit at the Shalom Connections Gathering, July 31 to August 3. Until then, Shalom.

News from San Francisco

Zoe Mullery
Church of the Sojourners

Farewells

We are once again facing the sadness of saying goodbye to beloved members. Conrad and Margaret Yoder will be moving to Ohio on June 7, where they will be a part of Lafayette Christian Fellowship with Conrad's parents, and where Margaret is thinking about starting up an egg farm. Steve Wayne will move out around the same time to an apartment here in San Francisco; he has made St. Gregory's Episcopal his home church but we hope to see him often.

Travelers and Visitors

We get frequent emails from Steven Braney in Guatemala who is learning Spanish and volunteering at Candela, a center for disabled children. Tim, Jenny and Alexina Lockie braved the SARS scare and flew to Taiwan to visit Judy (Tim actually was on a work-related trip to Cambodia). Kevin Casey is leaving soon on a road trip which will take him through Waco, where he will pick up Hannah Zazvorka. Dan Piché has returned to us again with plans to stay in San Francisco for awhile. Debbie Gish is in Plow Creek as of this writing on a visitation there with Greg Clark. Peggy Gish was here recently, giving several talks to various groups about her time with CPT in Baghdad.

New leadership

We affirmed Laura Hare, Tim Otto and Dale Gish as Overseers, and created two new leadership structures—a Preaching/Teaching Team consisting of Dale, Tim Otto and Jeff Hare, and a Pastoral Care Team consisting of Laura, Mike Creeger, Debbie, Tim Lockie and me (Zoe). We are still getting used to the new structures and trying to understand how they will work and how they will work together. We are depending on God being able to work through us in this at the same time that we are well aware of our frailty and continuing sense of loss. We are in the midst of an ongoing discussion on the vision of the church.

Job news

Kelly Zazvorka, Lily Martinez, and Matt Creeger all got new jobs which they like. Louise Harris' job is in a state of transition since her back problems prohibit her from the strain of regular nursing duties; her employer is looking to find her a desk job.



Patty Peebles

Kathy Schreiner (far left) and Martie Dreisbach (far right), both sisters of the bride, stand up for Orwin Youngquist and Sally Schreiner at their wedding.

Please keep her in your prayers.

Other news

We are excited that the Guatemala family, Lizbeth, Manuel, José, Antonia, and Steven, will move into the Potrero house in July. Anne-Marie Saxton, Laura, Naomi, and Leo Hare, Tim Otto and I drive up to Portland at the end of May to the Ekklesia conference on Discipleship. As a different sort of Summer Sojourn this year, we're planning a trip to Fresno to build a Habitat for Humanity house this July—we get to build a house for Jesus! (Jesus Vasquez, that is.)



Ade Bethune

News from Tiskilwa

Ruth Anne Friesen
Plow Creek fellowship

Spring is here with changeable weather, thunderstorms, tornado watches, beautiful flowers, colorful sunsets, and the greening of the earth. It's wonderful and hopeful!

Gary Dean and Neil and Tutuk Horning are our main farmers this summer, with Gary responsible for the berries and the Hornings working on the produce. Jim Fitz is retiring from farming to follow his calling to peacemaking. He has been particularly active on the local scene, encouraging dialogue and understanding about various world conflict situations. He also was part of the El Salvador visiting team in March.

The Plow Creek Bakery run by Boo Graham and Louise Stahnke will be in high gear for their first summer in business. They started baking breads, cakes, cookies, and rolls last fall after receiving a food service license in October. They have already developed a lively business. Most of the time they're baking only on Tuesdays but expect to bake twice a week as the summer

markets open.

We have selected Neil Horning as our new elder and he is already at work. We are glad for his willingness to take on added responsibilities as he serves the church.

The Foss family is learning how to relate to all the changes when two daughters plan to be married in the same summer! (Wonder who's arranging the details...) Donny Hackworth, Hannah's fiancé, plans to be baptized on June 1 at Plow Creek. Hannah is planning a June 21 wedding in Elkhart, Indiana. Heidi plans to be married at Plow Creek on August 16. Woju, Heidi's fiancé, is from Ethiopia, so it will be a Plow Creek/Ethiopian wedding! It should be an eventful summer at the Foss household.

After every member completed a Natural Church Development survey and we heard results, it seems that worship is an area to which we need to give some attention. As a church we have listened to what each of us hungers for in our worship time together. Further follow-up is being done by Rich Foss and Lyn Fitz as they are reading and making suggestions to various persons responsible for leading worship and teaching times.

Michele Cutts' family joined us in a special worship and remembering time as we gathered for her funeral on March 22, about a week after her death. It was an important time of celebrating her life and giving thanks for the gifts of quiet hope and peace that she was granted as she prepared for death. She is buried here at Plow Creek and a lilac bush has been planted near her grave as she requested. David Gale designed and built her coffin and Boo Graham lined it. Since it was completed about a year ago, Michelle had the opportunity to approve it!

Helena Graham finished her high school course materials on the computer and sent them to the Alger Learning Center in Washington State to be graded. She completed her senior year in January and earned her diploma in two months by taking two required classes, writing lots of papers, and doing a final project. We rejoice for Helena's successful completion of high school!

Melissa Hochstetler, daughter of Lois and Wayne, is living upstairs at the David Gale house this summer and is working at Coneflower Farm where the Zehrs live. Her father is our Illinois conference minister. Erin Kindy plans to join Melissa in the farm work in August to free the Zehrs to travel to Mennonite World Conference in Zimbabwe and to visit in Lesotho where they served in MCC.



Rita Corbin

News from Waco

Barbara Bridgewater
Hope Fellowship

Jesus' journey to Jerusalem as described in the last six chapters of Luke was our Sunday teaching emphasis during Lent. We have continued focusing on the theme of humility.

We hosted a Peace Seminar in April and it went well. We know a great peace song we'd like to teach the rest of Shalom communities! We invited Art Gish to come and speak with us and to different groups around Waco.

The Gatlin girls

Gabriela graduates from college this spring and goes on to Georgia for a year with Jubilee Partners. Analí graduates from high school and will go to college locally. She and Hannah will be moving into their own apartment.

Nancy and Joe Gatlin went to Reba Place Fellowship in Chicago the last weekend in March to be part of a community review and visitation.

Dr. Lauren Barron has started a new job and loves the extra time off. ☺



Tree of Life

Meinrad Craighead

Our Friendship in Christ

Fruit that Will Last: An Editorial

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

A healthy Christian community is a school of friendship, training us in the virtues that make us capable of long-term reconciled relationships. Here are a few of my reflections on that journey of learning. We hope you can join us in the July 31 to August 3 Shalom Gathering where we can also hear your stories and reflections on friendship.

I remember my grade school days often filled with tension over who would or would not be my friend on a given day. I don't think I ever succeeded in having a "best friend," but I tested several theories on how to get friends. One strategy was to rally "friends" to gang up on an unpopular kid—sort of like U.S. foreign policy. Then on another day they would gang up on me. I tried to excel in sports, so when we'd choose up sides, I'd get picked early, but that didn't win me any friends. I learned to crack jokes and snap off sarcastic comments so that peers would laugh with me. But the only way to keep them around was to tell more jokes, which never amounted to friendship. I tried to develop my intelligence, which impressed my teachers, but drew no one closer to me than they were before.

In high school I saw the usefulness of making friends among the "best" people because they would help me get ahead. I tried to be popular, to get into the "in group." By my junior year I realized I had succeeded, only to discover that no one was really there but other insecure people trying to get in. I saw some kids attract attention by dressing smart or dancing well, but that didn't pan out for a Mennonite kid, and anyway, my heart wasn't really in it. Competition for attention, fantasies and possibilities of seduction along with the hope of friendship all seemed part of the same confusing game. The thrill of being chosen was often followed by a painful experience of exclusion.

In college I did enjoy some solid friendships, often forged in earnest late-night

conversations where we searched for truth among all the things we were learning, and we challenged each other to deeper authenticity in words and deeds. Jesus' radical insights and integrity of life, in defiance of what the religious and political authorities threatened, had won our respect. The church, however, had not, since we saw it as too compromised in its pursuit of a tepid respectability.

Except for my relationship with Joanne, the end of college meant that most of my friends gradually fell away because of intervening time and distance. However, Joanne and I had been exposed to enough Anabaptist theology and experience of community to hunger for a gathering of friends more committed to each other and to Jesus than to the motives of academic or professional ambition.

We are in a bucket brigade, with love coming from the Father to Jesus, to us, to others, resulting in networks and communities of discipleship, friendship that will endure—not just in this life, but for eternity.

Aristotle, that great systematizer of all things, classified friendships in three types: friendships of pleasure, friendships of use, and friendships of character. Friendships of pleasure, I understand, are for the sake of having a good time. And when conflicts arise, as they inevitably will, this is no longer pleasurable and one moves on to other friends. I must say I did this many times.

Friendships of use are cultivated for the sake of other ends than friendship. A popular book in my early years by Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, illustrates how to make friendships that are useful to maximize our influence in and through others. I am embarrassed now to see how elitist my friendship ambitions used to be, focusing almost exclusively on those who would maximize my gifts and future success.

Friendships of character are intentional about "growing" those virtues that will sustain enduring friendships. Unlike friendships

of pleasure and use, friendships of character tend to last because one is committed to the friend and to transformation of character for the sake of friendship. Such friendships, Aristotle concluded, are few because good people are few.

In looking back over the attempts at friendship in my life, I can see how I was grasping for self-esteem, for influence and intimacy, even while other motives of genuine commitment to the welfare of my friends and to truth were present. But it was not until Joanne and I had lived for several years in intentional Christian community that I discovered I could stop trying to impress my friends. Why? Because they already loved me—not because of any quality in me, but because of the love God has shown us in Jesus. Our commitment to one another over time allowed us, in a profound way, to remain in God's love and be transformed. I realized that I could stop trying to "win friends and influence people." What a relief! It was so freeing to really start listening and to discover daily that the love I had been trying to win was already given.

In recent months I have been discovering even more good news in a study of the Gospel of John. Jesus' understanding of friendship goes beyond Aristotle's friendship of character. At his last meal with his disciples, Jesus opens his heart: "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." In other words, if we want to know true friendship, we look at Jesus. This kind of love is characterized by laying down our lives for one another as he has done for us, not just in heroic sacrifice, but also in humble service.

Jesus draws his disciples nearer still. "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father." Friends hold no secrets from each other and will share every good thing they have received from God.

But this friendship has a purpose beyond mere loyalty to one another. "You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last. And so the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name." Just as Jesus has chosen us in love, so we are appointed to choose and to love others. This is the essence of making disciples, because without this bond of love and commitment of life, challenges do not take root and grow into transformed character. We are in a bucket brigade, with love coming from the Father to Jesus, to us, to others, resulting

in networks and communities of discipleship, friendship that will endure—not just in this life, but for eternity.

“I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.” (John 15:12-17) Ⓔ



Rita Corbin

➤ *Friendship Matters* cont from p.5

us to hear about some of each other’s deeper painful experiences. Before long we could say most anything and trust that it wasn’t too foolish to put into words—nor would it be ridiculed. That was important. We didn’t have to guard our words nor wonder what the other person thought. There was a deep, unspoken acceptance. That is God’s gift! I think we have the freedom to mix the unimportant details along with the more profound concerns and be heard and cared for in the process. Listening deeply with the ears of the heart has helped. Those ears are God’s gift!

We both know that living in Christian community is very important to us for support. The body of Jesus that surrounds us is a living reality. And the simplicity which has shaped us and keeps affecting us is also important as we each keep making choices. There are some “hard” areas that need lots of prayer and listening to see how the Lord leads and guides in showing the way ahead. It will be important to keep listening together and with others, too. Praying, listening, supporting, and caring are God’s gifts!

When we’ve misunderstood—like when we each bought a Thanksgiving turkey to prepare for one feast—we learned to forgive and to realize it wasn’t so terrible to have leftover turkey. When we’ve set a time to get together that goes flying by, again the tragedy passes with a sigh and a “sorry.” Realizing that many choices aren’t so grave as they first appear has been good training in the importance of our relationship. But admitting mistakes humbly has been a good gift. Passing lightly over the details that aren’t so significant by saying “whatever” has helped us both to laugh and go on. There’s something very mysterious and fragile about friendship. We’ve experienced the birthing of new life and that’s been God’s good gift to us both! Ⓔ

➤ *Hilda Carper* cont from p.4

Peggy and I can make remarks about the way Julius brings guests on the spur of the moment, and we can laugh together with love and respect for one another.

Our friendship has been fruitful in many ways. Years ago Julius kept inviting homeless people into our kitchen to help themselves to whatever was in the refrigerator, and then would retreat to his office. It was more than he could do to say “No” to a person without a home. Once when Julius was away on a trip, the Evanston Shelter for the Homeless opened up. Peggy and I decided we would volunteer to serve breakfasts there rather than have these folks in our house where there was no space. But the Shelter was going so haphazardly, and I kept making suggestions, so when the guy who started it went back to seminary, they asked me to take over. For seven years I was the director of the Evanston Shelter for the Homeless.

Peggy and Julius are laid back, and can tolerate almost anything—Julius more than anyone. Peggy has learned this way of life as his wife. So I’m the one who is pushing to set limits and organize things. But these personal tendencies would not work together if Julius and Peggy did not respect my gifts, too. They can see that it works better with each of our contributions. Julius and I are at two ends of the see-saw with his desire to help anyone in distress and my need for order and predictability. Peggy serves as the fulcrum to keep both ends well-balanced.

I am so grateful for the stability of our friendship, knowing that we are there for each other over the long haul. That commitment is there with the whole Fellowship, but with Julius and Peggy it feels more like

my blood family. For a long period, I caught myself now and then calling Peggy “Mom.” This used to really upset Peggy. But it says how close we had become. I have the same feeling, the same level of comfort with Peggy and Julius that I have with my siblings. Since I am an introvert kind of person, my close relationships are quite limited in number—my blood family is included in that. There are a few people with whom I have the sense I could be with them and relax no matter what was going on. For example, I don’t like visitors when I am sick. These people can be with me any time.

Julius, Peggy and I have never explicitly made a commitment to each other. It just was there because of all we have lived through and consulted with each other as we make life’s decisions.

Our commitment does not make us the same. My spiritual life is on a different wavelength than Julius and Peggy’s, so I talk about that with other friends—which may seem a little strange. Julius and Peggy are very uncontrolling. Julius is especially good at encouraging people to do what they feel called to. And Peggy supports me too, making sure I have time to do art and retreats. Julius comes through to make sure I have the tools and space, and a word of encouragement. What I think is impossible, he’ll say is possible, and then work with me to make it possible. He does that for many people.

I thank God for that three-month commitment we made to each other back in January, 1959, which grew and deepened and lengthened into four decades of teamwork for the Kingdom. I am grateful for teammates who are also friends, and who have become family to me in a very special way. Ⓔ



GRAPHIC FROM ST. MARTIN DEPORES CATHOLIC WORKER

› *Good News* cont from p.3

readings, prayers, and reflections linking the sufferings of Jesus with the sufferings of the Salvadoran people, both in 1981 and today. As we walked to the next station, a pickup truck with sound equipment moved before us playing tapes of Archbishop Romero's last talks, interspersed with news from the local radio station and commentary on President Bush's drive toward war with Iraq in just a few hours. We also heard news of massive peace demonstrations around the world. Then we'd hear Romero's words denouncing the rich and ordering the soldiers to recognize they are killing their brothers, to refuse to obey unjust orders. Then the music group would lead us in songs of Jesus' passion as we tramped on in the dust, "Si grandes son disculpas, major es tu bondad." *However great are our sins, greater still is your mercy.* Seldom do we have the opportunity to experience worship and life so closely and holistically connected.

Vitality of the youth

As part of their ninth-grade studies, Valle Nuevo and Santa Marta students decide on a community problem they would like to study and work on, and this year they chose reforestation. One morning we got up early to work with them in their reforestation project. Early each morning of the week a different team of students gathers to water the seedlings, prepare the ground, and write a report on the progress they are making to restore an acre of hillside just outside the village. Our friend Salome, who spent a summer at Plow Creek a few years ago, is the president of this youth group, showing

impressive character and leadership gifts. Another project the youth have undertaken is to fence off the soccer field and get grass growing on it.

Then the music group would lead us in songs of Jesus' passion as we tramped on in the dust, "Si grandes son disculpas, major es tu bondad." *However great are our sins, greater still is your mercy.*

Connecting with friends

We had many good visits with our friends who have spent time at Plow Creek and Reba in recent years—especially with Erlinda, Pedro (who now has a new one-year-old girl, his ninth child), Bacho, Tomasa, Reina, and Juana (mother of Claudia who now has a baby and is living with her compañero in L.A.). We learned that Juana's husband is in a group of forty-five households experimenting with organic farming methods. Their compost heaps, fruit tree nursery and understanding of the principles involved were very promising. Pedro and his brother now own a truck, which they plan to use to make money by hauling. We spend a hot afternoon loading and unloading two hundred adobe bricks with Pedro and

his friends. It felt good to work for him the way he worked for Plow Creek one summer several years ago.

Election-day passion and fraud

Our first full day in El Salvador we spent in Villa Victoria as international observers of the election. The FMLN—the farmer and worker's party—lost the mayor's election by a hundred and twenty votes. The FMLN contested the election since at least two hundred of their members were denied the right to vote because their names were misspelled on the registration lists. A few days later several thousand people participated in a march to contest the election. Nationally, the FMLN seems to be gaining power; they won 31 out of 82 seats in the National Legislature, while the right-wing ARENA party won only 26. Voter turnout was high. The Salvadorans we met were passionate about participatory democracy since they remember how the denial of democracy in their history has repeatedly led to civil war.

Across the river into Honduras

For the first time we visited Los Hernandez, Honduras, a community of five hundred who took in more than five thousand Salvadoran refugees, including Valle Nuevo folks, in 1981. Yvonne Dilling, our group leader, had arranged this trip that included eight women from Valle Nuevo who relived their refugee experience. We heard the stories of how the refugees escaped a "search and destroy" mission of the Salvadoran military, arriving hungry and often naked from the Lempa River crossing. We were quite moved to hear of the ways this poor Honduran village organized and shared their limited resources to meet the refugees' needs, despite the real threats of the Honduran military. The Hondurans also prayed and passionately shared their concern for the victims of war in Iraq.

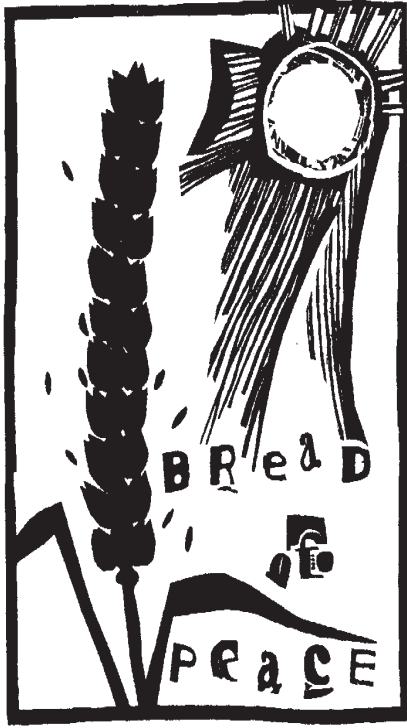
Youth challenged by martyrs to follow Jesus

Our last day in El Salvador we traveled by bus with forty-six ninth graders to San Salvador, visiting the University where the six priests were killed, and the chapel where Oscar Romero was assassinated. A theologian at the Jesuit University named Jon Sobrino and the nun who was our tour guide at Romero's cottage challenged the youth to commit themselves to follow Jesus the way these martyrs did in working for peace and justice.

We want to say thanks to those of you who contributed financially to enable us to go on this trip. The cost was less than expected, so we were able to give \$182



The main reason why we keep coming back to Valle Nuevo—the love of the children and our hopes for their future.



Meinrad Craighead

to the youth group toward pipe for the irrigation system for their soccer field, and make a donation to complete the construction of the home of a widow, Lupe Sanchez, to which the directiva of Valle Nuevo had been volunteering their labor. The youth of Reba have brought home enthusiastic plans for a fund-raising musical evening to benefit the teachers of Valle Nuevo and Santa Marta who cannot afford to buy the college diplomas and teaching certificates that they have already earned!

A story to honor Margarita

We would like to close with a story from the good-bye gathering that was held for us. One of the young schoolteachers, Victor, who is an excellent guitarist and songwriter, announced he was going to sing a song. Just then Margarita, a lady in her seventies, said she would like to sing a song that she just composed about their sufferings and struggle during the time of civil war. Victor immediately deferred to her, and figured how he could accompany her with his guitar. Margarita sang her dozen or so verses in her singsong manner and Victor did an excellent accompaniment. Then everyone applauded stronger than any other time of the evening. Seeing the honor they gave to Margarita was a wonderful impression with which to come home. ⁽²⁾

› The Spiritual Gift *cont from p.1*

In our church, the image of “family” has been the main image of Christian relationship, but for me, I can’t say that I understand the difference between what it means to be “brothers and sisters” or “friends” because to me they seem the same. Being “family” and being “friends” seems hard to separate. Maybe Jesus had the same problem—he seemed to consider his disciples as both friends and family.

Having Kingdom friendships for over twenty years, learning the difference between loving as Jesus loves and as the world loves, has been an ongoing area of discovery for me. Meeting someone new and learning about what makes that person tick, who their family is, where they came from, what Jesus is doing in their life day to day are all very exciting for me. Knowing each other’s past is really important to me because we all have a story to tell and in that story God uses each one of us to unfold the future of the other. And even more powerful than knowing about someone’s past is having lived through it with them—to have that shared history and know firsthand how God has worked in each other’s lives is part of what makes life in Christian community so rich.

You have to open yourself up pretty wide to have deep friendships, and in this you are inviting both pain and joy. The world is afraid of experiencing the pain, but if you don’t open up wider you won’t get the joy that comes with it. God made us relational. He made Adam and Eve to have a relationship with him, he made us relational with each other.

My dad always said it is better to have a million friends than a million dollars because they could all come up with a buck. Friends are my old-age insurance! I don’t make any

IRA investments but I invest in those who will be there for me (like I will be there for them). My dad doesn’t think twice about where he will go in his old age because he knows I will always be there to care for him. Through the years we have taken into our home people in great need of one kind or another, and I hope this gives confidence to those around us—including our extended family—that our home is always open to anyone in need, that it’s not just a philosophy, it’s a fact. We’ve also had that kind of Christian friendship extended to us when we were in great need. Through this example—both directions—our daughters find joy in offering themselves in deep friendship and hospitality to others, bringing this gift to the next generation. My husband and I have had the privilege of living in community or being in small groups most of our married lives. In this we have a very large support system and have been surrounded by others who share in our commitment to extend Jesus’ love in hospitality and friendship. This is a huge blessing to us both.

Let me end with a testimony to my friends. These past two years have been some of the most difficult in my marriage and in the area of sin and temptation, but in these years I have clung on to my friends and have needed them and they have come through for me in so many ways. They have called me to Jesus in prayer and daily confession and accountability. For this I am truly thankful. God’s grace is so obvious to me, the way he uses friendship over and over again to lead me through the hard places.

As I grow older and remember all the interwoven stories of how God has used each of us in the lives of one another, I look forward to gray hair, long walks, long talks, rocking on porches, and sharing stories of God’s goodness with the next generation. ⁽²⁾



Rita Corbin

Shalom Connections Gathering 2003

“Friendship in Christ”

Keynote Speaker, Chris Rice

July 31–August 3, 2003

Reba Place Fellowship, Evanston, Illinois



The Shalom Connections Gathering 2003 is scheduled to encourage participation in the Ekklesia Project's Conference—another band of Jesus' disciples with whom we have enjoyed a growing relationship. We invite you to join us for any or all of the events listed below: **August 1 to 3: The Shalom Connections Reunion** begins on Friday night with a time of worship, dramatic introductions and fellowship. On Saturday afternoon, Chris Rice, author of *Grace Matters*, speaks about God's call to transforming Christian friendship from his experience of the interracial Antioch Community of Jackson, Mississippi. The Shalom Reunion will also include a Lack of Talent Show, Sunday worship with Reba Church, and times to enjoy and reflect on our friendship in Christ. The Shalom Reunion ends on Sunday evening, August 3.

July 31 to August 2: Ekklesia Project Conference. The theme of this conference is “Discipleship in a Divided Church.” It begins Thursday noon, July 31, at DePaul University (a 20-minute El ride from Reba) where Shalom Mission Communities will lead two workshops, reflecting on our experiences of economic sharing. The Ekklesia Conference ends Saturday noon, August 2. For information and registration look up www.EkklesiaProject.org.

July 31 to August 2: The Shalom Family Camp will take place during the same time as the Ekklesia Conference for folks who would rather go to the zoo or the beach with Shalom friends than attend a theological conference. The Shalom Family Camp begins Thursday morning, July 31.

We invite you to stay with us at Reba and attend your choice of the above events. For more information or to register, please contact David Janzen at dhjanzen2@juno.com or call (847) 328-6066.

Sponsored by Shalom Mission Communities: Plow Creek Fellowship (Tiskilwa IL), Hope Fellowship (Waco TX), Church of the Sojourners (San Francisco CA) and Reba Place Fellowship (Evanston and Chicago IL)

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