

The Hartford Catholic Worker



St. Martin De Porres House
St. Brigid House

“Fear is useless, you need to trust and believe...” - *Jesus*



Let all that grows from
the earth give praise
Together with mountains
and hills
Give praise you springs,
you seas and rivers,
Dolphins and water creatures
Praise and exalt God
above all forever!

excerpt from Canticle of Daniel

*Untitled by Brian Kavanagh
inspired by the Canticle of Daniel*

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Blue Effect

Mr. Blue, aka Jack Titus

*Our spaces trumpet
the miracle of large open
Presence.
Don't you see how we fill
this world,
the tired canvas
with buoyant promise?
We are the Spirit
ever jumbled,
radiant voice that calls
the dark spin of your life
into question.
Our opening shuts the door
on doubt.
Our lifting heads wag
in blue wind.
gracious gestures echo
the stretches of our need.
We are never far
from ourselves
like you;
yet we lean into
Blue sky
and
that is
miracle enough.Ω*



Where on Earth are we going? And what can we do about it?

The *Awakening the Dreamer, Changing the Dream Symposium* is a profound inquiry into a bold vision: to bring forth an **environmentally sustainable, spiritually fulfilling and socially just** human presence on Earth.

If you are ready to explore what this vision means for you, and the opportunity to create an inspiring future, we invite you to attend.

Saturday, November 10, 2012 10:00 AM – 3:30 PM

Lunch and snacks will be provided. Participants are encouraged to bring their own reusable water bottles and napkins.

Sisters of St. Joseph

27 Park Road, West Hartford, CT 06119

Contact Elaine Betoncourt CSJ - sebcjsj@hotmail.com - 860-586-8637

\$10 - \$20 donation at the door (Scholarships available. No one turned away for lack of funds.)

Register online at: www.Pachamama.org



Dream Variations

*To fling my arms wide
In some place of the sun,
To whirl and to dance
Till the white day is done.
Then rest at cool evening
Beneath a tall tree
While night comes on gently,
Dark like me--
That is my dream!*

*To fling my arms wide
In the face of the sun,
Dance! Whirl! Whirl!
Till the quick day is done.
Rest at pale evening . . .
A tall, slim tree . . .
Night coming tenderly
Black like me.*

Langston Hughes

My People

*The night is beautiful,
So the faces of my people.*

*The stars are beautiful,
So the eyes of my people.*

*Beautiful, also, is the sun.
Beautiful, also, are the souls of my people.*



The Brink of Adulthood: Reflections from atop a lifeguard chair

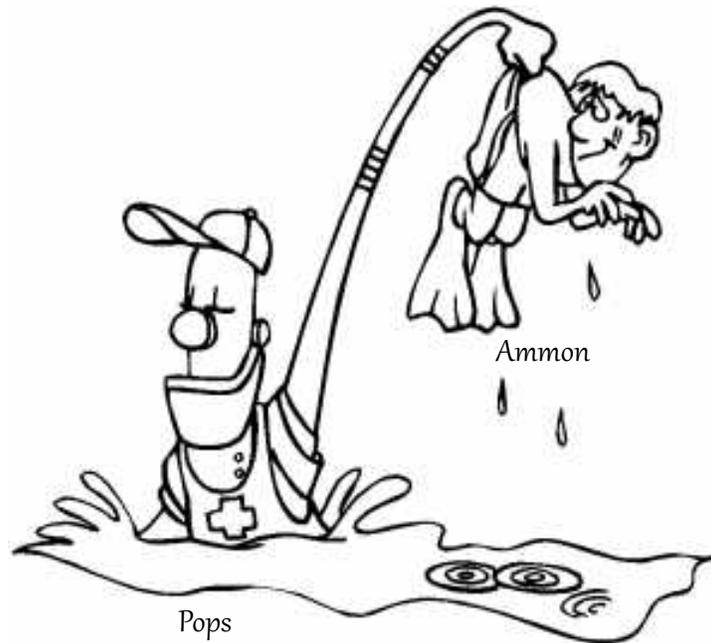
Ammon Allen-Doucot

When Micah went to Darfur in the 6th grade Mom made him a little graphic with a quote on it: "The Journey of 1000 miles begins with a single step" The quote is from Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, and as cheesy as it is, it keeps coming back to me. I graduated from the Connecticut IB Academy in late June, and since then everyone insists on telling me that my senior summer is the start of the rest of my life. So I keep asking myself "Which single step is it that will begin the rest of my 1000 mile journey?" It could have been the first step towards the podium for my graduation speech that ended with me doing a fantastic job singing Rick Astley's classic "Never Gonna Give You Up." (ed. Note: no self esteem problems here). Maybe it was 15 minutes after that when I walked across the stage to take my diploma.

The part of me that sounds like my dad (except it can pronounce the letter 'r') tells me that it was when I got my own checking account with People's United, and learned to balance a checkbook. It is possible that I have not yet taken that step; it could come when I step out the door to leave for college. Granted, Goshen College isn't 1000 miles away but we can be charitable and round up and then it all works out.

I am simultaneously enraptured and horrified by the passage of time. For instance when I'm awakened by one of the many explosions (usually fireworks) that dominate the Hartford nighttime, I think to myself "Thank God this summer is going by so fast." However when I wake up with some of my best friends scat-

tered around the first floor of the Purple House in varying stages of unconsciousness, I think to myself: "I'm not ready to lose this, time needs to slow down." The same goes for my neighbor's barking dogs and the unending well of affection that comes from Reilly. Really all of these things seem minor when compared to the larger things I'll be missing. Brian's worst, and favorite, joke about making sure I put the shower back after I let him know



of my intents to take a shower; the tussles Micah and I have when he forgets that his little brother has about 70 pounds and an inch or two of height over him; Kevin luring me to the green house with promises of junk food and zombie slaying; Mom struggling to keep up multiple conversations and make enough pancakes to feed a small country every Sunday morning; Pops explaining the larger historical and political contexts of any little tidbit he hears... These are the things that have defined the last, and first, 17 years of my life, and part of me

fears that taking that first step will eventually take me 1000 miles away from all that. Will I survive without corny jokes, junk food, and politics? Is 17 too young to be faced with all this?

Just as I begin to get overwhelmed by all this, I think of a particular difficulty at my job. Part of my job is helping our WSI certified instructor coax children into the water for swimming, a tedious and sometimes impossible task. My boss once complained to me: "Honestly I wish I could just throw them into deep water and let them figure it out, like I did with my daughter." That's when I realized that my fears about college were similar. Pop was like a floatie, I could bounce my ideas off of him and he would be a large help. Mom was a life jacket, she wouldn't let me get overwhelmed. My whole family, while keeping me safe, can't come with me if I want to actually grow up. It is scary, but those little kids were scared to, and while it was completely appropriate for them to cling to parents, floaties, each other, and me, I have to let go and try to make it on my own.

It is time for me to take the lessons my family gave me and go out into the world. I was taught the value of bad jokes (Personal favorite: *What did the buffalo say when his kid left for college? Bye son!*), I was taught to keep fighting even when the odds (or in Micah's case simple physics) are against you. Take advantage of breaks and blow off steam- sometimes in the form of good food other times in the form of anti-zombie violence. Mom taught me to listen to everyone, that feelings aren't right

(Please see: Adulthood, p5)

On Holy Halitosis and Hallelujahs

Christopher J. Doucot

Why is an empty beer bottle returned for a nickel while an empty wine bottle is left in the gutter?

When I was a kid we had garbage and trash. Our garbage was all the food scraps and unwanted leftovers that stunk up the fridge. Everything else was trash. The only recycling back in the day were the rare, green tinged, thick glassed six ounce Coke bottles with the painted logo. We put the garbage in a metal pail under the back yard under a heavy metal lid. The lid had a little lever that we would step on to pop it open. Dumping the garbage was a nasty chore during the summer. I'm guessing the job of the Garbage Man who came by once a week before dawn to claim this stew destined for swine was nastier.

At the Catholic Worker we do our best to compost our food scraps but of late I've grown weary of rooting through the trash can to pull out festering banana peels and apple cores; and so these days a bit more of our garbage ends up in the dump. The thing with dumps, (*err landfills- who knew that land was empty and in need of filling to begin with?*) is that our junk is so voluminous in America the landfills are packed so tightly organic materials break down at an exceedingly slow pace. A corn cob that breaks down in our compost heap in a few weeks can endure for decades at the dump; it's been rumored that archaeologists digging for arrowheads in Stockbridge have found a corn cob pipe used by Norman Rockwell.

These dense, anaerobic mounds have altered the topography and atmosphere of our nation as landfills are closed and capped, leaving behind Methane belching, human-made urban mountains. At 188 feet Hartford's mountain is higher than the highest peak in Rhode Island (*not really*) and it produces enough gas to

generate electricity for 1500 homes (*really*). I would love to see the gas used to power tow lines for an extreme sledding course in the winter and to heat a multi story aviary like the one at the Stone Zoo outside of Boston. Sitting alongside the river, the mountain would be a great place for bird watching, indoors and out, year round.

Of course not all trash is rubbish; one man's flimsy plastic Coke bottle is Dave the Can Man's treasure. In America our streets may not be paved with gold but our gutters are lined with nickel. Dave earns about a dollar a mile, that is, on a good day Dave will walk perhaps ten miles to gather ten dollars of cans and bottles. I wish every chip bag, cigarette butt, lottery ticket stub, car tire and abandoned couch had a deposit, imagine how clean our neighborhoods would be!

Why do we have deposits on cans and bottles but not other trash? There are three billion abandoned car tires in America, half are dumped by the train tracks down the street, and the other half lay beneath the Connecticut River. I'm sure there are brilliant folks out there that could extract the resources, the rubber and steel, from those tires in a manner that is no more harmful to the environment than is the mining and vulcanizing necessary to forge new steel and rubber.



Maybe this mess of tires could be stacked ten feet high and rammed full of earth to create exterior walls for houses with an R value superior to pink polystyrene.

It seems we need to add value to cans and bottles in order for us to not disregard their intrinsic value, and even then it seems that it is mostly the poor among us who appreciate that value.

I got to thinking about garbage back in June when over the cacophony of a Hartford garbage truck I heard someone yelling "Ma! Dad!" It was PJ, who nineteen summers ago was the first kid we met when we moved here. Today, and I say this with great pride and sincerity, he is one of our garbage men. It is honest and hard work with a future- I mean really will there ever be a shortage of trash in America?

PJ is no saint, he's been to jail a couple of times for selling weed, but that is in the past. He is a good guy. He's endured a great deal of tragedy in his life: he was homeless several times as a child, his mom and dad died before he was a teenager, several of his friends have been murdered and most recently his two year old step daughter fell to her death from a fourth floor apartment window. Despite all this he remains a joyful person in his core. When he hugs us on garbage day he wears a pierced ear to pierced ear grin that reflects his joie de vivre.

He's not blithe about the suffering he's been company to, but neither is he consumed by it. Instead, his joy seems to me to be a confirmation that PJ cherishes life. Despite what could justly be understood as a Dickensian childhood, PJ was always surrounded by affectionate people who loved him the best they/we could so that he grew up with no doubt that he is wanted and treasured.

In the shadow of Hartford's Mount Trashmore is its successor, a transfer station; a sort of Grand Central where trash gathers ahead of being barged to an incinerator down river, an emerging trash tower rising above some other metropolis, or some hapless country south of the Equator. On flood plain beyond Mount Trashmore lies another transfer station, the Weston Street jail. As I write these words our friend Sedrick paces in an 8'x10' cell contained therein.

We've known Sedrick nearly as long as we've known PJ. This is not his first time awaiting transfer to one of Connecticut's human dumps.

Once upon a time our prisons were dubbed penitentiaries by Quaker reformers who earnestly believed that the transgressors among us could eventually be welcomed back into society after a period of penance. We later called our jails Reformatories and even today they are officially Correctional Facilities-

Orwellian misnomers both. In fact little reforming or correcting actually happen behind bars. If we were honest with ourselves we would admit that we want our prisons to be dumps where we can punish addicts, deviants, the mentally ill and the criminal.

Obviously public safety is a core justification for incarceration, but unless we are willing to imprison people for life, (increasingly it seems we might be) the safety of society is more likely diminished by releasing folks after years of isolation and deprivation instead of years of education, vocational training, addiction counseling, and mental health care- you know- a little bit of correcting and rehabilitating.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics there are currently 1.3 million persons with mental illness hidden in American prisons. *"In 1959, nearly 559,000 mentally ill patients were housed in state mental hospitals. A shift to "deinstitutionalize" mentally ill persons had, by the late 1990s, dropped the number of persons housed in public psychiatric hospitals to approximately 70,000"*. Sheriff Drew Alexander of Summit County Ohio is blunt in his remarks to CBS News: *"The cop on the street will tell you -- we dump [the mentally ill] at the jail."* This is what we've done with Sedrick.

When I was in high school I memorized my Social Security number. Looking beyond the downside of assigning a number to every legal resident of the country, a Social Security number is a symbol of hope. They symbolize an optimistic outlook that we will have years of gainful employment and that the feds are (or are supposed to be) saving, our Social Security payments for when we get old or if we get ill. By the time Sedrick dropped out of high school he had memorized his inmate number, the number permanently assigned to him by the CT Department of Corrections in anticipation of his repeated detentions. I have a

file thick with jailhouse letters from Sedrick taped shut along the edge by the prison censor. The return address may vary but the sender is always #318512.

Sedrick was born to a woman addicted to crack. When we met him he looked like the kids Sally Field and Bob Geldoff raised money for at *Live Aid*. His mother says she loves him but then again she's been known to beat him with a cast iron frying pan. She also refers to us as *"the hillbilly, Nazi, crackers on Clark St."* Sedrick was born sickly, with cerebral palsy and diminished intel-



Brian Kavanagh

lectual capacity. With an I.Q. measured in the 60s he would have been eligible for state services, including housing and vocational training, had his mother made the arrangements before he turned 18.

Instead, Sedrick has been in and out of jail for the last ten years. A few years back his pockets bulged with a wad of counterfeit twenties. I'm guesstin' he was never arrested for that because the notes were so pathetic they wouldn't have been accepted in a game of Monopoly. He has been imprisoned for trying to

(Please see: *Halitosis*, p8)

Halitosis, cont.

cash bad checks for an acquaintance, for stealing candy, possessing weed, and for littering among other non-violent offenses. He's in now looking at three years for a probation violation since being arrested after a woman I know caught him taking ten bucks from her purse.

I like Sedrick a lot; like PJ he is an incredibly happy person despite a life of hardship that I know I could not have withstood. Still, he drives all of us absolutely crazy with his incessant calling at all hours, his arriving here four hours after he said he would be here in five minutes, and his kleptomania. Nevertheless he has never hurt anyone, he's a great conversationalist and letter writer, he's eager to please, and he's diligent. But given the limited public transportation of Hartford and a paucity of job opportunities for someone with intellectual challenges (never mind someone with a criminal record) it is unlikely that Sedrick will ever be gainfully employed or living in his own apartment. The state implicitly says as much having assigned him a conservator and granting him Supplemental Security Income benefits.

A number of years ago he lived with us for few weeks until he went off his meds and scared Ammon. Now that our kids are grown we

sometimes contemplate inviting him back, but honestly it would be a full time job to have him live with us. I'm no soothsayer but it seems likely to me that Sedrick will spend the better portion of his remaining life in some sort of jail. When he's not imprisoned he will bounce from couch to couch between his sister, mother and friends. No doubt he's a scoundrel and a thief unwelcome and unwanted beyond the 'hood, but he's also a friend and brother whose company I usually enjoy.

Most of us might dismiss someone like Sedrick the way the can men dismiss an empty wine bottle because who can see the Ruach, the breath of God that has filled the lungs of miscreants and ne'er do wells since the beginning of time? What more value can we add to Sedrick so that we don't disregard his intrinsic pricelessness?



Nancy Ruth Jackson

When we founded our community back in the day there was a ten foot high flashing sign on Main St. just around the corner from us that read: "Redemption Here". Though the sign was a beacon for bottle collectors from across the city to cash in their quarry, I suspect it meant more.

You know, sometimes God's breath stinks, but it's still God's breath. Ω



Listen: there was once a king sitting on his throne. Around Him stood great and wonderfully beautiful columns ornamented with ivory, bearing the banners of the king with great honour. Then it pleased the king to raise a small feather from the ground, and he commanded it to fly. The feather flew, not because of anything in itself but because the air bore it along. Thus am I, a feather on the breath of God."

-Hildegard of Bingen



Gina Mikal
www.scientificillustrator.com

Notes, cont.

soon as they are only an hour from Goshen. We hear from Ammon regularly, Skype at least once a week and are hoping we can afford to get him home for Thanksgiving. Micah is looking for a job, so if you know of anyone hiring, please throw him a line. He gets great recommendations from our friends Mark and Judie who hired him this summer for some construction work on their foundation. He is a very hard worker!

We would like to remind folks to check out our website that is updated frequently with great photos and the latest HCW news. Speaking of news, we are getting ready to plan a big shin-dig for our 20th anniversary. More details to come.

We are thrilled to introduce Christina Napolitano to the community. Christina recently graduated from Simsbury High school and will be heading to Ghana in January. In the meantime she will be living at The Green House and helping out after school.

We have also welcomed Floyd Grier into the community. Floyd has been coming to the Green House since he was around 8 years old. He is 21 now, and is working with the HuskySport folks doing their "Read and Raise" program at Fred E. Wish school. He will be helping to run our after school program as well. Meanwhile Kobe has graduated from CCSU and is currently touring Europe hoping to make it onto a professional basketball team.

Pete the Bike Guy has been very busy all summer keeping an ever-expanding fleet of bikes up and running; spending up to ten hours at a time fixing flats, tightening spokes,

repairing gears and adjusting brakes. Pete has also taken Dwight under his wing. It's a good ole mentor/apprentice relationship. Dwight has been working alongside Pete for several weeks learning how to build and repair bikes. Dwight is just an amazing person. He's been a part of our community since nearly day one. He is kind, gentle and an amazing artist. Recently his art teacher, [Mary Lang Killilea](#), arranged for him to get an eye exam and eye-glasses; you should see his art work now!

We are also grateful that our relationship with CCSU seems to be diversifying and expanding. Over the summer one of Chris' former students volunteered with the kids and last weekend several of our stalwarts (Jim Conway, Jim Cronin, Justin Evanovich, and Matt Friedrichs- I hope I didn't miss someone) took a busload of kids to Central for a football game and field day. Jim Conway teaches in the Psychology Department at CCSU and has brought his students here for a few years now. He has also arranged for a colleague, and long time supporter of our work, Carol Austad, to visit in October. And John Campbell, the Catholic campus minister at CCSU, continues to bring students here every week. We are very excited to see this connection blossom. Hopefully some of our young people will soon be students at CCSU.

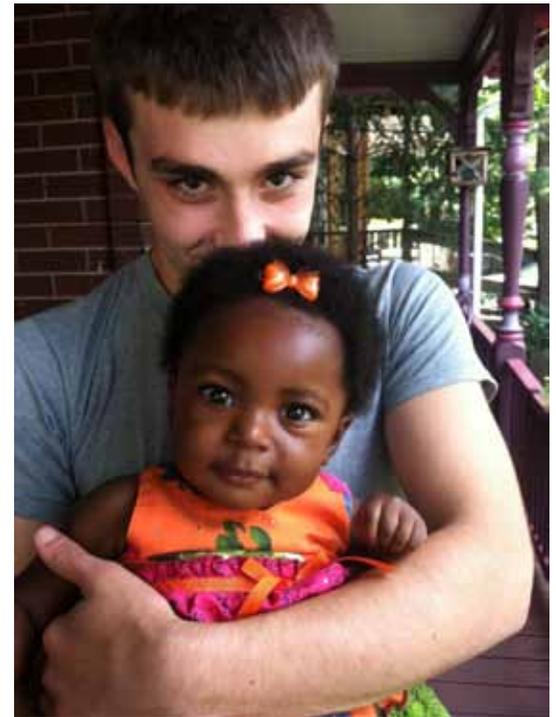
Brian Michael Kavanagh just celebrated his 69th birthday up in Maine with his family. We hope to have a little bash for him at The Half Door in the next week or 2 as well.

Chris is back at CCSU teaching 2 courses and will be adding a 3rd class

at U of H in January. The only think that can9 save the pain of the Redsox this season is some ribs that he barter for fresh fish with a few of our neighbors.

Kevin is still the mainstay of the 3rd floor. He spends a few evenings every week doing work with addicts in a few of our many prisons. He has been taking classes to become a full time drug counselor as well. This year he got Chris and I watching /reading *The Game of Thrones* series.

Lily is now 10 months old (though really only 8 months because she was a preemie), and is really the love and delight of the whole community. Mo is starting nursing school, so we are hoping to have Lil' 2 nights a week. She has a wonderful way of cheering us up, slowing us down and really making us stay present to the moment. God bless her! And God bless you!Ω



Micah and Lily

Quilting for Causes

Denise Weeks, stalwart member of the Green House community and a new member of the Hartford Catholic Worker board of directors, has been teaching quilting to some of the Green House kids.

Pictured to the right are Ashanti and Tylejia with a quilt they created this summer. Denise has also been selling some of her quilts with the proceeds benefitting the Hartford Catholic Worker. If you are interested in quilting with the kids or purchasing a quilt to benefit our work please contact Denise at Denise@Weeks1.net



Notes From De Porres House

Jacqueline Allen-Doucot

God has a great sense of humor. I know this because I found myself getting very frustrated trying to get the "House Article" done in time for the last deadline. When I say last... by that I mean weeks after the deadline set at our last house meeting. I decided after the 10th time the doorbell had rung that I would spend a quiet moment before I RESTARTED. I played Good News roulette thumbing through the New Testament and reading whatever my finger landed on. The scripture quote? "I know thy works; behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." Rev 2:8. Apparently no woman can shut it either...and I just laughed!

It is a beautiful Fall day and we give thanks for another safe and joyful Summer passing at the Green House. It seems like just yesterday we were in June celebrating the latest round of graduates from 8th grade and high school. The Worker house hosted a fantastic party for the grads that included great food, a moon bounce (many thanks to [Onetentco](#) of Farmington), and the best slideshow ever! Every grad was given a brand new backpack filled with school supplies. Our college grads received laundry baskets with going away supplies and a gift card as well. We are very grateful to Danielle D. and Husky Sport for all the good organizing and hard work. We thank the extended community for all the support for the young ones. Please keep Ammon, Nate, Keyanna, Latiqua and G-Baby in your prayers. They are our "away" students and as such are far from this beloved community.

A month after saying goodbye to Kirstie Dodd (we really miss you), our Notre Dame interns arrived to save the day. Hope and Gerri pitched in with our own G-Baby and Amanda to take over the Summer program at the Green House while Jackie and Chris ran Camp



Sasean, Catherine, Josh, and Saniah at Amanda's wedding

Ahimsa. It was very satisfying to see Isaiah (G-Baby) running the show after Amanda's wedding in late July. He is starting his junior year at UConn and we could not be more proud of him. Josh R., Sasean, Jose, Najea, and Maria K. were the Camp counselors, Josh C and Ellie were junior counselors.

Denise W. made quilts with some of the younger gals and there were Friday field trips to swimming holes, volunteer pools, and berry patches. [Captain Don](#) took a crew of fisherman out to sea and helped out with new poles for Camp Ahimsa. The LaChapelle family helped out by hosting the Ahimsa Campers for a 4th of July picnic and running some of us to Misquamicut on Thursdays. St

James Episcopal once again shared the bounty of their churchyard garden with us. Our neighbors loved the fresh vegetables. We all managed to keep our cool! Thanks to St Tim's, Corpus Christi, St. Bridget's of Manchester, St. Peter Claver, The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, Susan Salesses and Denise Weeks for supporting Camp Ahimsa.

We arrived back in Hartford just in time to stuff about 60 backpacks with notebooks, pens and school supplies. St. Ann's of Avon, Corpus Christi and St. Elizabeth Seton saved the day!! This past week was the first full week of after school program. We are happy to welcome kids from Clark, Weaver, East Catholic, Northwest Catholic and college kids from UConn, CCSU, Trinity and U of H. It is a fine blend of young old, not so young and now even some toddlers thrown in the mix!!

It seems almost quiet here these days...because when Ammon left for college we also lost his best friends Nate and Shaq who practically lived here!! Chris and I were able to take a few days to drive Ammon and Nate out to Goshen....and we fell in love with the place. We were also able to visit Jerry Berrigan and Molly Mechtenberg, former community members who started a Worker House in Kalamazoo that looks a lot like this one. They are doing an amazing job building community and growing great kids. They reminded us so much of our earlier days. Ammon hopes to visit them

(Please see: Notes, p9)