

HOSPITALITY

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Providing hospitality to the homeless & to those in prison, through Christ's love
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LETTERS & POEMS

Editor's Note: This is a special issue of Hospitality. Most of the writings are reflections by friends of our community (including some homeless people) in response to the violence that surrounds us all. Many are in reaction to the flood of executions that are now occurring in our state. It is inevitable that living among the oppressed will place us in the midst of much suffering. We encourage more of you to share with us your creative responses to the struggles of life.

In Memory

by Billy Hands Robinson (1984)

Man with the Nubian goat and Russian wolfhound dog,
Let's leap these long lines with cheap corn liquor?
Let's tip-toe these dark streets with bells between our toes?
Nay, God forbid, instead:
Let's drain this debauchery with unadulterated Christian Love!
For these cold streets we keep will drown us all
In pools of our own blood dare we anything less...

And so...
We tread
And bed
And fed
The streets
Our treats,
Poor street elves,
Our very selves,
In return for inhospitalities
And ineffable brutalities.
But, dear Christ,
How high priced
We sacrificed...

Goatman ("Man with the goat"), you're gone,
Your blood long turned to powder on the dingy stone
Of the streets; your cathole, that wreck of an automobile,
Still sits as you left it, forlorn and perfectly still...still...still...
And the fists and pipes that downed you bloody dead
Still roam the streets in search of another head....

Goatman (I'm not a goatman! I'm the man with the goat!), Jessie Griffin, was one of Atlanta's homeless men who, staff in hand, often walked a local animal hospital's Nubian goat and Russian wolfhound down "Sweet" Auburn Avenue, sometimes, both of the animals together. Kids, and grown-ups too, were crazy about him. And it was not just because of the animals or the fact that he dressed quite singularly, always the staff

(Cont. on p. 2 IN MEMORY)

*Billy Robinson is a founder of "The Empty Spoon" a new advocacy group of homeless people in Atlanta



Kathe Kohlitz

and sandals, sashes, headbands, gauchos, bordellos, tikis, copper and silver jewelry, and books, always books, stashed here and there about him everywhere, but rather, it was because he could talk kid's talk and because he was a folk philosopher. I mean he kept kids and grown-ups laughing and thinking. Kids would accost him joyfully wherever he went: "Goatman! Goatman! Goatman!" And grown men and women, doctors, lawyers, teachers, politicians, business people, welfare mothers and street people would come from far and near to seek him out and rap with him.

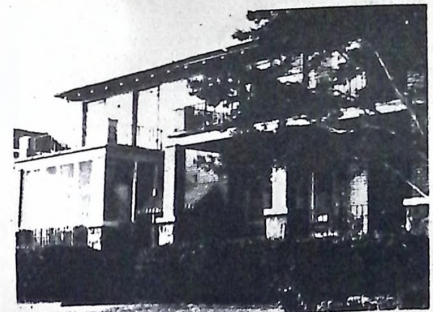
As do we all, Goatman had some grievous faults: he drank too much liquor, especially corn liquor; and he catted in an old automobile which sat on the property of an auto wrecking and painting company named Ivies, which is just a few blocks from Grady Homes, the housing project where most of Atlanta's murdered black children resided -- cold and dangerous spots, both. The owner allowed Goatman to cat there; his rent: "Just keep an eye on the place for me."

One night, 26 May 1984, the story has it, some frustrated young men attempted to break into the auto place and Goatman paid his rent -- he intervened. The young men beat him with pipes and fists and left him near-dead in a pool of his own blood. He died in the local charity hospital a few days later.

Goatman had a mother, an ex-wife, a stepsister, a stepson, yet his body lay unclaimed in the morgue for a long time. And The Open Door Community of Atlanta, an advocacy organization for the hungry and homeless and sickened and imprisoned (especially those under the death penalty) finally organized and held a service for him at the Butler Street CME Church a week or so after he was dead. At his funeral, I understand, only a few members of The Open Door Community attended. And I didn't attend, the service or his funeral. I was much too hurt. I got sloppy drunk and got myself arrested for allegedly being "Disorderly While Intoxicated." Perhaps his kin and lawyer, doctor, friends, etc. did much the same.

And, Goatman and I, early mornings before the liquor stores opened, would often go to the corn patch (one of the bootleg liquor houses where corn liquor is sold) and share a dollar half pint of corn liquor and talk about the world and politics and unemployment and Plato and Aristotle and, most especially, God, and Mayor Young and the little runt of a king with the inferiority complex and his entourage in the comic strips. God, indeed, was his strength and salvation. Mayor Young was his nemesis and idol and he was wont to measure the mayor's action with the rule of God. And the midget king with his outrageous biases was one of his major sources of laughter as well as one of his major sources of philosophical departure. He was a good man.

Goatman struggled through life a pauper and was buried in a pauper's grave. But, in the space between, he touched and was touched by that we call love. *



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Murphy Davis - Southern Prison Ministry Director
Carolyn Johnson - Volunteer Co-ordinator
Rob Johnson - Treasurer, HOSPITALITY Editor
Ed Loring - Correspondence, Building, & Resident Volunteer Co-ordinator



May We Meet Again One Day as Friends

by Leslie Bateson

Pedestrian mariner of streets,
pacing off dreamlike your sentence.
For thou, launched upon the tainted waters of our civilization
hast somehow, somewhere, somewhen slain a beast of opportunity--
the albatross, genus Darwinism, species social.
And I pondered, one night, motifs
in a way preposterous like ads on a bus
and only the conjuries of a stranger,
for you:
Lily of the field--
livid flower of vacant lots, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."
Or sage under the tree--
eccentric yogi in a downtown park, the desires of the flesh being defeated.
And technician of time and space--
peripatetic researcher of the maze of homelessness,
convinced from your measurements that your needs in life
are really no different than mine.

and sandals, sashes, headbands, gauchos, bordellos, rikis, copper and silver jewelry, and books, always books, stashed here and there about him everywhere, but rather, it was because he could talk kid's talk and because he was a folk philosopher. I mean he kept kids and grown-ups laughing and thinking. Kids would accost him joyfully wherever he went: "Goatman! Goatman! Goatman!" And grown men and women, doctors, lawyers, teachers, politicians, business people, welfare mothers and street people would come from far and near to seek him out and rap with him.

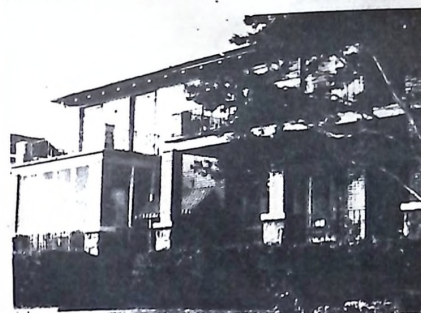
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Lily of the field--
livid flower of vacant lots, "sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."
Or sage under the tree--
eccentric yogi in a downtown park, the desires of the flesh being defeated.
And technician of time and space--
peripatetic researcher of the maze of homelessness,
convinced from your measurements that your needs in life
are really no different than mine.

LOVE

by Alvin B. Alexander *

Love is liken to many flowing waters
It brings many lovely things
 flowers, running brooks and brothers
 and sisters
Animals and the sunset of many springs
Even the wind makes kind whispers

Over all stands love
The season of the beautiful leaves
Like the season of the lovely Dove
And all the good things one believes

Violin music whispers good rhythm
Bringing warmth and memories of unforgotten love
Even the poet knows and brings warmth
Of the love that comes from above

Even the bee is unforgotten
The ocean brings currents that speak of love
One must always think of the first begotten
And everyone will realize that everything is
 a part of love

Cocktail Party

by Jim Carter

The harsh sodium lights illuminate the yard
And I see you sprawled unconscious on cardboards
and rags behind the dumpster.
Sometimes I have approached you as quietly
as I could,
So as not to disturb your sleep and bring you
back to the homeless horror you live with.
I've looked closely just to see your chest
rise and fall;
To make sure by some movement that you are
still breathing.

Occasionally I have paused in fascination,
as I gazed at your face.
The strain is gone, and even in your drunken
slumber, your brow is relaxed,
And I can see something there of the child
you once were,
Before alcohol and the streets and broken
dreams crushed you.
It is then I remember the person in the tombs,
Tormented by demons, who wore no clothes
and abode in no house.

I want to grab you and shake you and slap your
face, and yell at you,
"You fool, you don't have to live like this:
You can lick this thing. Thousands have done it."
But then I remember you live behind the dumpster,
And these thousands who have licked it lived
in houses, with beds and running water and
comfort.

So I walk away in silence, and occasionally
I remember to pray for you;
That the Lord will touch your broken heart and
lead you out of the valley.
You are my brother and sister, but you are
the children of God.
And only there lies salvation.



*Alvin Alexander shared this poem one day when he came to take a shower at the Open Door

NINE-TEN

4

John Pickens: An Unauthorized Biography

by Jim Carter

About thirty of us waited expectantly in the kitchen of the Picken's home on the night of February 7th. We were there to express our affection for John, using that time-tested celebration: a surprise party. All of us stood there mute as we heard him call from the front hall, "Anyone home?" and when his sons, Ryan and Neal called almost in unison, "In the kitchen, Dad," he walked in. Part of the shock of seeing such a gathering hiding in the back of the house may have been because his birthday would not be until a week later on St. Valentine's Day. We had chosen a day that had less schedule conflicts, which makes one wonder if Jesus and the disciples kept a calendar. It turned out to be a great party--one of those real good evenings of talk and fellowship.

It is inevitable that when a person reaches this age, you are going to hear the expression, "Life begins at forty." Probably this was first said (no doubt by Methuselah) to try to avoid a feeling of depression and unfulfillment. From a Christian perspective, though, this may take on a deeper and truer meaning, because quite often around this age a person begins to lose their illusions that the world can give any answers to the problems of life. It seems that as we begin to apprehend the Jesus that has stood patiently waiting for us, that our life does begin; that Christ can "tell us more because now we can bear it." This time in John's life began a number of years ago, and I talked to Donna, his wife, about this subject recently.

"Was there any special incident or time," I asked her, "when you believe that John began to heed the call of Jesus to be with the poor?" She replied that probably the turning point for him was the night that Ron Sider, author of *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger* spoke at Central Presbyterian Church and called into focus that the middle class well-being is a direct result of poverty; that no one can have too much without someone having too little. This was such a disturbing and penetrating thought that John began even more seriously to question his own work and life-style. These thoughts were not new, however. Back in the early seventies when he had been associated with one of the most prestigious law firms in Atlanta he defended American Cynamid against a charge of polluting the Savannah River, and he was uneasy that what he was doing was not right, at least for him. God's nudging had begun.

John and Donna first met in Houston where he was in pre-law at Rice Institute. His ambition was to become a big-name trial lawyer. She was studying speech therapy at the University of Texas in Austin. John was not only a serious student, but had been a top amateur tennis player for a number of years and was nationally ranked 16th in the singles category. In his senior year he went as one of four players on a good-will tour for the United States State Department. They played in Southeast Asia and Africa, and he finished the summer playing in the French and Italian Nationals. The year before he had been good enough to make it to the third round of Wimbledon.

None of this, however, seemed to impress Donna too much. Their first meeting was the classical blind date, arranged by a sorority sister who told Donna about this jock who was so nice. In reply to his question, "Would you like to watch me play?" her answer was, "Not really." She liked him, but didn't take him too seriously. John had decided that he was going to marry her. Donna, however, had other plans. She accepted a scholarship to Stanford University and they did not see each other again for almost a year. He had written her saying the tour might stop in San Francisco, but that didn't pan out, and it was only when Donna went back to Houston in the spring of 1968 that she decided that John



SURPRISE !!! John Pickens starts celebrating his 40th birthday a few days early. Jim Carter waves from left.

was the man she wanted to marry: to use her words, that she found herself "suddenly in love."

Donna's life has always been connected with the church, and one of the things that John told her was that he was an agnostic, but that he might decide to go to church. After they were married and he was in law school at Vanderbilt, they began attending the Second Presbyterian Church of Nashville where John came to love and respect the pastor, John Holder. One of the questions that he asked the minister was, "Do I have to believe in Jesus as a divine being to attend church here?" (Our spiritual journeys always begins before we know we are on one.) Reverend Holder was very astute. He told John that was not necessary.

After he had finished law school in 1971, they moved to Atlanta. John had accepted a position with King and Spalding and they settled (where else) in Buckhead, and the "good life" had begun. Also, by chance (or was it?) they started attending Central Presbyterian Church in downtown Atlanta and John's first experience working with people below the poverty line was with the Tenant's Association in Capitol Homes. Joanna Adams, one of the ministers, was also involved, and she was one of the people who began to have an influence on John in working with the poor.

John spent five years with King and Spalding and then decided on opening his own practice. He had decided to move away from "big corporation" law. Then approximately a year later he went into practice with an attorney named Charles Kidd and was able to start doing more work with the impoverished. Kidd and others began sending him clients. The first case he took on where the party was unable to pay for the services was unique in one respect. The person's name when translated into his native language meant "the face of God."

It was about the time of Ron Sider's influential talk that John and Donna answered an appeal from Clifton Presbyterian Church for volunteers for their night shelter. Here he met Ed Loring and Murphy Davis, and John's contact with the poor had reached the lowest economic level--that of the destitute and homeless, those people that we shunt aside and too often try to ignore. John's journey had taken another giant step.

Not long after this the A.C.L.U. asked John to take on the case of an electrically lighted cross that had been erected in the state park at Black Rock Mountain in north Georgia. John needed a minister to testify that the cross should be removed and called upon Ed Loring. Despite resistance in that area from many people, including threatening letters, the court ordered the cross to be taken from the state property.

As happens with the majority of us, all these decisive changes were taking place slowly. Gradually John's work in law was moving toward exclusivity with poor people; gradually the friendship with Ed and Murphy along with Carolyn and Rob Johnson was having a

(Cont. on p. 9 JOHN PICKENS)

* Jim Carter is a Novice (exploring long-term membership) at the Open Door. This article is the last (known!) surprise for John Pickens on his birthday. Happy Birthday, John. We sure love you!!

Death Watch/ Life Support



Donna Pickens. "Violent Society" 24"x36", ink, wash, 1981.

Since the last issue of Hospitality three more brothers in Georgia have been killed by the state. Alpha Stephens died on December 12, Roosevelt Green on January 9 (see other articles in this issue) and Van Solomon on February 20.

In response to any planned executions in Georgia, Southern Prison Ministry and the Georgia Committee Against the Death Penalty consistently provide an opportunity for public witness in Atlanta. Executions are carried out at 12:15 midnight. At 8:00 on that same evening we gather at Central Presbyterian Church for a service of worship and affirmation of life. The congregation then moves across the street to the steps of the State Capitol for a silent vigil.

When executions are scheduled in Georgia you can count on these events being scheduled. Please join us in a public witness for life, mercy, and justice. And call us with questions and suggestions.

A VIGIL

by Becky White

11:40 PM, January 8, 1985

In less than an hour it will all be over. I wasn't sure the execution was still on until I heard it on the 11 o'clock news. I was in class all afternoon and evening, and I clung to the hope that the Board of Pardons and Parole had mercy and granted a stay. But no. Roosevelt Green will be electrocuted at approximately 12:15 AM. And his mother will watch. And I remember that Jesus' mother watched her son's execution too. Blessed Mary, mother of God, have mercy on us all.

And all I can think of is my friend on death row. And I wonder what goes through his mind and heart as the state, as we, prepare to execute his fellow prisoner. And I think of the joy and beauty my friend has shared with me through his letters. I wonder who has shared those things with Roosevelt Green. And my heart reaches out to the friends who will weep for him, and to his mother who will be with him. Oh Jesus, the son of mothers everywhere, have mercy on us all.

12:04 AM, January 9, 1985

The man next door just got home. And from the apartment downstairs I can hear the shower running. Out in the night I can hear trucks passing on the highway. And at the Georgia Diagnostic and Classification Center near Jackson they must be strapping Roosevelt Green into the chair now. And maybe they are reading a statement or he is giving his last words. It will be over soon now. A man, who maybe didn't even kill anyone, is about to be killed. Holy Jesus, lamb of God, have mercy on us all.

And I am comforted to know that there are candles lit in the darkness outside the prison. There are candles shining there for Roosevelt Green, and for the One who is the Light. And all around in the power and devastation of death and of the law, there will be little flickers of hope. There is hope because Jesus came to smash death and the law which binds us. Jesus will free Roosevelt Green, and he will free us. Oh Jesus, Light of lights, have mercy on us all and set us free.

12:27 AM, January 9, 1985

It must be finished now.
Lord have mercy on us all.



Cemetery Prayer

by Tom Duley

God,
isn't there enough death?
Death and dying, fear of death, death of God.
The crucified God was executed at our hands.
Even you have not escaped our vengeance.

Death hides in language,
words protect us.
Killer, criminal, prisoner, inmate, executed.
Chilled words that numb reality.
Blind words that blur vision.
Dull words that paralyze hearts.
God,
isn't there enough death?

Arise, God.
Arise and melt the chill,
return feeling, heal blindness,
resurrect hearts.

Expose this death for what it is.
Protect us no longer.
He was,
Roosevelt, son, friend, child of God, murdered.

1

by Dan Berrigan (1983)

I count the heartbeats to the end
I count the breathing to the last.
And here, with clash and ceremony comes
a headhunters' banquet
borne like a hero's death, head high.
A still life in my guts, I'll carry it
to ante room, to ante time.
There, then
behold the concatenate powers
periwig, shroud, noose, the wizened
blank faces, frozen in obduracy -
O appetite! O consummation!
And high above
perched on the hanging tree, the scavenger daw
mutters like a mad metronome; law law law.

Where is God?

Alpha Otis Stephens came a long way down the road toward healing. His beginnings in life were nothing short of violent and abusive. Put out of his home by the age of six to avoid the violent physical attacks of his alcoholic father, young Alpha learned to survive on the streets by the law of the jungle. In and out of prison from the age of 14, he went to death row in 1974. In 10 years on death row, Alpha taught himself to read and write. Through the friendship of another prisoner and other friends who visited and wrote to him, his hard exterior began to come down. He took great interest in life and wrote prolifically of God's love and forgiveness--of human rights and the sanctity of all life. Alpha Stephens became a changed man.

And yet, and yet...they went ahead and executed him, the very one who had come so far! Does such a system make any sense? They even plan to do the same with the other hundred or so on Death Row. Is such behavior rational? I don't even ask whether it is Christian. People who support the death penalty draw their arguments from the Law of Moses, which St. Paul fiercely and clearly taught was abrogated by the Law of Jesus Christ. But even in the Old Testament we have God's true and original purpose stated lucidly by Ezekiel: "I desire NOT the death of the sinner, but that he/she be converted and LIVE."

(Cont. on p. 9 WHERE)

Either/or

by Jim Carter

His burning body leaps against the straps,
And Christian justice has been served once more.
Behind the modern church a street man naps,
And dies from cold and drink outside the door.

I look in reverent awe at God's green fields,
And think about the joys that are all free.
I know the zest a crystal day can yield;
Your smile and laugh--the gifts you give to me.

The tension is so great between these things,
My soul is stretched until it lies unfurled.
How can I dare to let my full heart sing,
When all around me death controls the world.

Tell me the answer, Lord. Is it all right
To shout your praises in the darkest night?

MELVIN ★

8

by L. C. Dorsey

On December 5, 1984, Melvin died on an operating table in a Dallas (TX) hospital from a shotgun blast to the stomach. He had argued with Anderson Price, a 67-year-old man, who grabbed his shotgun. Reports from the Crimes Against Persons Division of the Dallas Police Department say Melvin struggled with Price for the gun, and was shot during the struggle. Because of the on-going investigation, no additional information was available. Oh, yes, the body was at the city morgue and could be claimed by the next of kin.

Melvin Louis Braison was born June 20, 1948 to Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Braison. He was the youngest of three brothers born to the union. He was Black, male, poorly educated, and was unemployed at the time of his death. He had travelled to Dallas almost three years earlier, looking for work and a new beginning. He'd left behind a wife and two daughters.

Born in the Mississippi Delta on a government agricultural experiment farm, he came into a world of poverty and difficulty. When his father came to fetch his maternal grandmother to care for the mother, new baby and the two toddlers, he told her that both mother and child had nearly died. He'd taken a long time to be born. The mid-wife finally laid him in his mother's arms in the three-room shack, provided for good tractor drivers.

Melvin, even as a baby had spirit. He would never become one of the bowed, cowed, broken spirited Black men that shuffled along the dirt roads of the Delta. He stood up for himself.

Melvin had a terrific sense of humor and any family gathering that Melvin attended was sure to be spiked with laughter. He enjoyed making people laugh. And he enjoyed family gatherings. The big, noisy clan that he was part of got together often, and he managed to get his share of attention, laughs, and sometimes, other family members' goats. He was a favorite of the younger kids who never took him seriously as a grown-up. "Melvin, come and play with us," they'd call out to him. And he'd make a serious face and scowl, "Don't you know I'm grown?" Often the scowl would collapse into smiles or laughter.

Melvin was generous. If he had only one dime and someone needed the dime, he'd give it to you and never think about it. If he could help you do something, he would.

Melvin had a temper; a quick temper that would appear in an instant, accompanied by loud cusses and threats. But he was unable to maintain the anger very long or to hold a grudge. He had been known to collapse in a fit of giggles in the middle of threatening to "beat your a--," or to go sit down quietly if one of his elder relatives told him to.

Melvin drank, and liquor was the stimulant that brought out the anger. At home in Indianola, Mississippi and later in Memphis, Tennessee, when he had too much to drink and began to hassle people, someone would simply take him home or find a relative to come and get him.

His family thinks that if he'd been at home, he'd still be alive.

Melvin's body was flown back to Mississippi and buried at a little church in the country, not too far from where he was born, went to school, played, dreamed, and suffered the agonies of racism and poverty. The family of poor people put him away nicely. They say he wore a smile on his still youthful face.

Melvin was my older sister's youngest son. We grew up together, although I'm older. I nursed, bathed and took care of him when he was a baby and later, when my oldest child was born, he returned the favor.

★ This article appeared in the December 1984 issue of "Not in Our Names," a newsletter of the District of Columbia Coalition Against the Death Penalty.

Melvin understood why I worked with prisoners and was opposed to the death penalty, and supported my work. He had felt the harsh hand of the law as a teenager for truancy and fighting. He later served some months in a prison for assault. He knew about the fear and horror of the inside world.

I'm often asked by reporters and proponents of the death penalty how I would feel about the death penalty if someone I loved was killed. And I've always answered honestly, that I didn't know how I'd feel. Well now I know.

The telephone rings in the middle of the night in a dingy, old, walk-up rent-controlled apartment building where I live. Melvin's brother, Leroy, is on the other end of the line. He told me Melvin was dead. He gave me the details, the detective's number and number at the morgue. We called the rest of the family with our awful message.

I felt dead inside. I waited for the anger to come, but it didn't come. I waited for the tears to flow, but it was as if I was suddenly dead -- dried up inside. Hours later, I went to bed and waited for sleep, which also didn't come.

In the next hectic 72 hours, I felt anger, but not at the faceless old man who had ended Melvin's laughter, but at the poverty that made some of us choose between going to the funeral or sending money to help with the funeral arrangements. Why do people have to choose in these crucial family times?

I felt pain when a friend, whom I'd called to ask about agency help to get the body home asked me, in all sincerity, why we were trying to bring him home? She really didn't know that we couldn't leave Melvin in a strange place where his spirit would be restless and lonely. Loneliness is terrible.



I felt powerless as my younger sister turned to me to find out how he'd died. Who would kill Melvin? And why? It is terribly important to her to know. I keep trying to explain that to the Division of Crimes Against Persons, but they don't understand Emma (my sister) and the shock of this violence to her gentle spirit. They can't give any more information.

I think about Mr. Anderson Price and wonder what he is like. Is this his first killing? Is he traumatized? Is he alone in a jail cell, or is he back at home, smoking a pipe, or rocking in his favorite chair or whatever he was doing before he pulled the trigger on December 5? My mind won't let me feel anger towards him. Perhaps it's the social work training, or maybe I know how frightened senior citizens are of younger males.

We don't know whether Mr. Price is Black or White, and, although one witness has contacted the family to tell us that Melvin was murdered in cold blood, we know that we will never know what happened.

And what would Melvin say should happen to Mr. Price if I could ask him? I don't know. I never thought to ask him. I would imagine, knowing Melvin's philosophical nature, that he would say, "Now L. C. what good would killing him do? That'd just be two people dead then." And, thinking about his wisdom, he'd laugh out loud.

I now know what the answer is the next time someone who believes in executions asks: "How would you feel if it was someone you loved?" I will answer: "Dead and dry inside." And I know with a certainty, from which fate has removed the last crucible of doubt, that the death penalty is wrong, and that executing Mr. Price won't bring back Melvin's laughter. ★

Where? (Cont. from p. 7)

What then happened at the cruel, legal, execution of Alpha Otis Stephens? Perhaps I can best answer that agonizing question by repeating the story Elie Wiesel graphically tells of the time that he witnessed, as a boy of 15, the cruel, legal, execution of three fellow prisoners at Auschwitz.

One day when we came back from work, we saw three gallows rearing up in the assembly place, three black crows. Roll call. Three victims in chains--and one of them, the little servant, the sad-eyed angel.

The SS seemed more preoccupied, more disturbed than usual. To hang a young boy in front of thousands of spectators was no light matter. The head of the camp read the verdict. All eyes were on the child. He was lively pale, almost calm, biting his lips. The gallows threw its shadow over him...

The three victims mounted together onto the chairs. Their necks were placed in the nooses.

"Long live liberty!" cried the two adults. But the child was silent.

"Where is God? Where is God?" someone behind me asked.

At a signal from the head of the camp, the three chairs were tipped over....

The two adults died rather quickly, but the boy, for more than half an hour, struggled

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between life and death, dying in slow agony under our eyes. And we had to look him full in the face. He was still alive when I passed in front of him. His tongue was still red, his eyes were not yet glazed.

Behind me I heard the same man asking: "Where is God now?"

And I heard a voice within me answer him: "Where is God? Here God is--hanging here on this gallows!"

In Christian terms, the cruel, but legal, execution of every criminal repeats not only the horrible scene of Auschwitz, but even more so, of the EXECUTED CRIMINAL ON CALVARY, JESUS. He accepted His execution in the place of all of us. He freely chose to die, that we might be freed from the death penalty. Why then do we continue to execute those for whom Jesus Himself died? I can admit that up to this twentieth century, we Christians did not fully appreciate what the death of Jesus truly entailed, but now that our consciousness has been sufficiently raised to its full implications, then we must stop executing those who commit crimes. Let us rather, turn our energies and considerable resources toward the restoration of life (even rehabilitation), that they and we may live in the Kingdom of God truly come among us.

Thomas Fidelis
Monk of the Holy Spirit Abbey
Conyers, Georgia 20208

John Pickens (Cont. from p. 4)

deeper impact on his values, and gradually the contrast between living in one of the wealthiest sections of the city and working with people who sometimes didn't have enough money for breakfast was becoming untenable. Then, too, John's income was not what it had been. One obvious aspect of downward mobility is downward money. In the summer of '83 while looking for a house in a less affluent neighborhood, the Pickens met John David and Barbara Borgmann, then owners of the house in which John and Donna now live. Let me quote Donna on that meeting: "I knew immediately that this was the house for us and Barbara also realized that we were the ones to have it. There was such a rightness about the whole thing, even to our home in North Atlanta selling within two weeks and for more than we expected. God's hand guided the whole transaction from start to finish."

For almost a year now John has been exploring with the four partners at the Open Door the depth of his

commitment to a life-time of work with the poor. He is one of the primary members of the Atlanta Advocates for the Homeless, a group that is becoming a force in Atlanta. His law work has expanded to deal with our brothers on death row. He also serves breakfast once a week to our street friends at the Butler Street CME Church, helps cook supper on most Wednesdays at the Open Door, and between all this manages to eke out a living. Another blessing that our community is receiving is that Donna is exploring a long-term commitment to the work of the community too. These two are a beneficial influence on all of us.

In 1975, not long before his death, John's father said something to his son that became very important to him. He told John "that he had wanted to be something and say something and do something with his life" and had not succeeded, and he wished for John that he would be able to do this. We who know John at the level of brother can testify that he has taken that advice. *

Hope Prevails Over Despair

—Bishop Desmond Tutu

A time of prayer for Africa



For use at:

- Easter sunrise services
- Easter vigils
- Sunday morning services
- Anytime

Join with churches across the nation to bring prayer for Africa into Easter services. Distribute these unique bulletins pre-cut in the shape of Africa at Easter sunrise and church worship services.

- Contact worship planners as early as possible to get permission to distribute the bulletins.
- Agree on a place to pass them out or have them inserted in the worship bulletin.
- Ask the leaders to pray specifically for the hungry in Africa during the worship service.
- To receive your bulletins in time, order as soon as possible.

This piece pre-cut in the shape of Africa will fit into your church's 8½ x 5½ bulletin or can be distributed by itself.

Easter is a celebration of hope.

Encourage Christians to join in hope for Africans by spreading the word.

"Jesus rose from the dead. The incredible, the unexpected happened. Life triumphed over death, light over darkness, love over hatred, good over evil. That is what Easter means—hope prevails over despair."

—Bishop Desmond Tutu, South African Council of Churches, Nobel Prize Winner

- Pray for our brothers and sisters in Africa who are hungry.
- Pray for those of us who can help alleviate their suffering.
- Pray that world leaders will act with compassion and mercy.

At least 150 million people in the 24 most seriously affected nations are faced with starvation. Hundreds of thousands have already died and many more will suffer long-term effects of malnutrition. The current crisis is a result of highly unusual prolonged drought that amplifies complex problems of underdeveloped agriculture, poor public health care and economic barriers.

Christians concerned about Africa can:

1. Pray as individuals and in churches.
2. Use generously to hunger organizations and denominational hunger programs via Post Office (you don't know if a group please contact 131 125 222 East Lake Drive Decatur GA 30033 for a list of groups to consider).
3. Let the President and senators and your representatives know of what you are doing. After the laws of Africa, for suggestions, contact Bread for the World, 812 Rhode Island Ave. N.E., Washington D.C. 20018.

Order Form

Send me _____ bulletins at \$8 per 100 plus 20% handling.

Name _____
Organization _____
Address _____
City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Send to: SEEDS
222 East Lake Dr., Decatur, GA 30033

Dear Editor

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Dear Editor:

Thank you for listing the various shelter facilities available to Atlanta's homeless and hungry. However, we would like to make your readers aware that some shelters practice covert and overt discrimination according to sexual orientation.

Evangelical Outreach Ministries, Inc. (EOM) and the Atlanta Gay Center must sadly acknowledge several reports of subtle harassment and even denial of services to some guests who were found to be gay.

The most frequently cited shelters practicing anti-gay discrimination were the Salvation Army Shelter and the Gospel Light Mission.

The members and friends of EOM, Inc. call on the leadership of community shelters to immediately adopt policies which ensure that gay men and lesbian women enjoy equal and complete access to all services offered the general public.

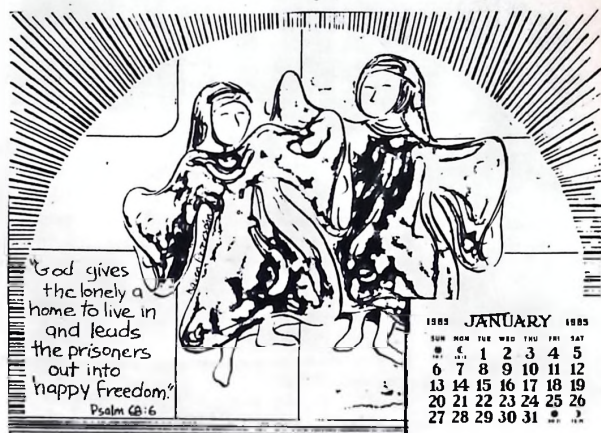
It is a sad commentary on the people of faith that some shelters would say, "Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest...except if you are gay."

J. David Chewning
Atlanta, Georgia

I cannot understand the plea for education aid for Nicaragua in the December issue of "Hospitality," for it would seem to me it means the government of that nation can spend more money on weapons instead of school materials. How is it you ignore the fact that the present government of Nicaragua has committed genocide against its Indian population, who are also doing battle against the government due to its acts of horror against the Nicaraguan Indian people? Also the Black Anglicans who reside in that nation are also being discriminated against and even the Jews of that nation. I am really disappointed in your letting this appear in a good publication that you put out.

Dear Mr. Berkowitz, Mr. B. Berkowitz
Brooklyn, New York

Enclosed are two articles about Nicaragua from the May 1983 issue of *Sojourners*. We encourage you to write them for the complete copy. One of those addresses the Miskito Indian conflict. We certainly agree that Nicaragua has made mistakes since their 1979 revolution replaced the U.S.-backed Somoza regime. They (and most governments) spend too much money on weapons. But it's clear from the evidence that we've heard and seen (Ed Loring from our community spent a week in Nicaragua this past summer) that the main reason for their proportionately large military is in defense against our government's aggression. Also, given our bloated military budget, it is a bit hypocritical to judge our neighbors. One of the reasons so many people are homeless in Atlanta is because of the wars our country is fighting in Central America! Finally, even if Nicaragua was a clear enemy, Christ would ask us to love them. We are disappointed that you find private contributions to help innocent children so offensive.



Folks,

I was impressed and/or excited by the letter from Tony Spence in your (Sept. 84) issue of *Hospitality*. I didn't receive the previous issue to which he referred, (Eds. note: an article by Ed Loring entitled "Repression of the Gospel in the United States") and yet I was very aware of what he was referring to...an attitude (of yours), and at the same time, aware of a maturing of that attitude which led you to print his letter.

In my mind I go two ways with the issue of "Christian attitude." On the one hand I always feel, "Why don't those people at _____ (fill in the blank) realize that they are only 'part' of the body of Christ? Why do they need to feel that their own persuasions are the only valid ones? In the case of The Open Door, I often have felt, 'Why can't those people realize that there needs to be justice before there can be mercy? Why do they only see that justice in this world is not always just?' So what else is new? Justice is no fun for those being judged even when it is just. And if justice is unfairly meted out, so is everything else. But to say it shouldn't exist because the world system is flawed...well, it's like saying people shouldn't have money because money corrupts. Or people in America shouldn't eat because of all the wasted food in America.

On the other hand, I've seen that only by having what seemed to me an "unbalanced" view of their surroundings have groups been able to muster enough emotion and "bear enough witness" to make needed changes. I believe the Open Door could have only been founded by a group of people who were selectively sensitive to the area of concern where God was calling you.

But, as I said, the letter you printed gave evidence to me that you all are beginning to see the other side of the other side of the other side...realizing perhaps, that there are an infinite number of sides which we all see only dimly. I could say, "See too many sides and you end up in the Army like me," but that's only one side of it isn't it?

Jesus loves, Jim Jouppe

Dear Jim,

In some ways I think you give us too much credit for being tolerant! While happy to print his letter, I sense most of us still agree with Ed's original thesis--

(Cont. on p. 12 EDITOR)

Open Door Schedule

WE ARE OPEN....

Monday through Saturday, telephones are answered from 7:30a.m. until 6:30 p.m. and from 7:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. The building is open from 9:00 a.m. until 8:30 p.m. those days. Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. On Sunday we are closed until 5:15 p.m. Then our phones and door are answered from 5:15 until 8:30 p.m.

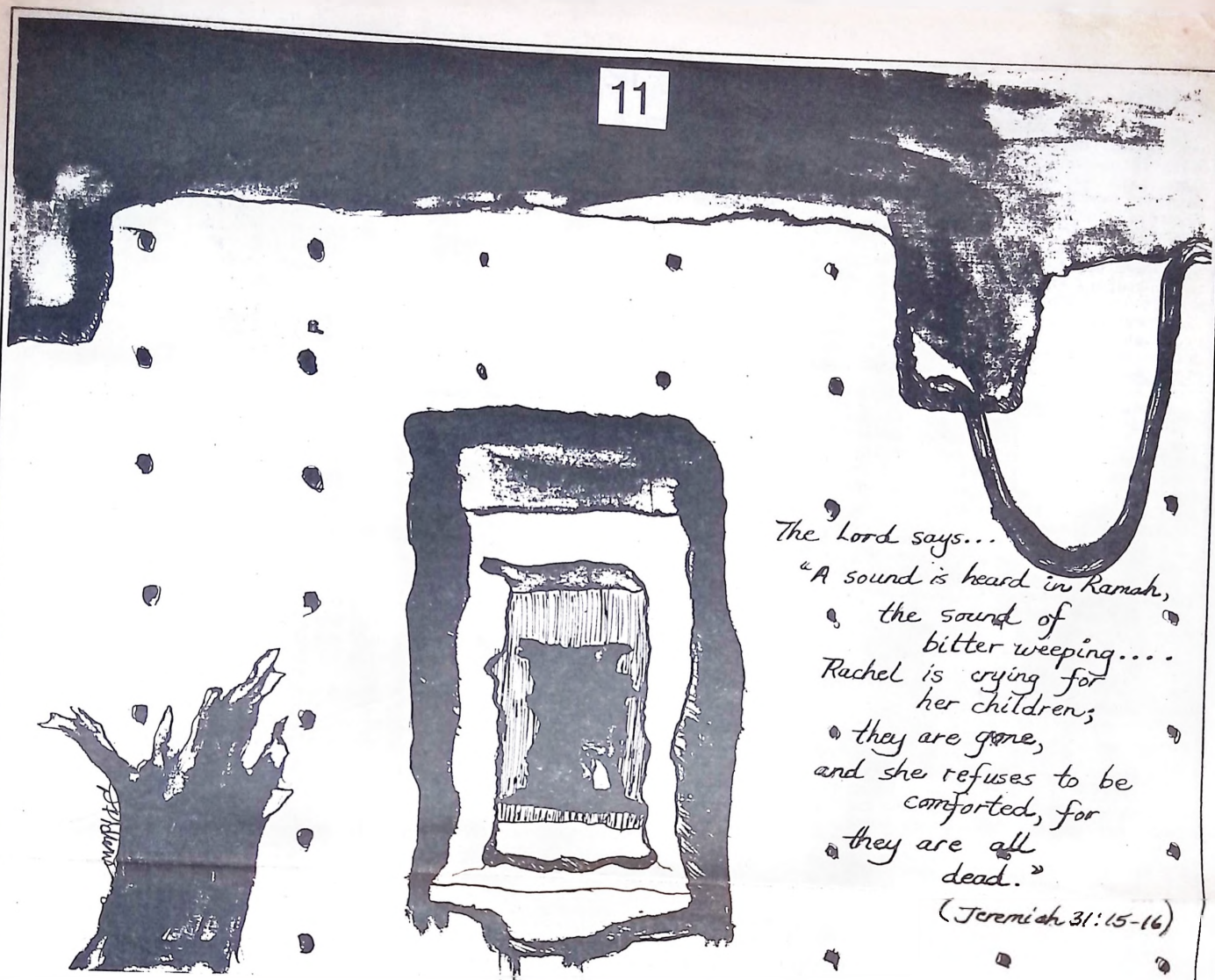
OUR MINISTRY....

SOUP KITCHEN - Mon.-Sat. 11-12 noon; Sunday 5:15-5:30pm. BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST Mon-Fri. 8-8:30am

SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHING - Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday 9 a.m. -11:00am.

USE OF PHONE - Mon.-Sat. 9:00a.m.-4p.m. SHELTER REQUESTS - Mon.-Sat. 9:00a.m. - Noon

SUNDAY WORSHIP - 7:30p.m. BIBLE STUDY - Alternate Wednesdays 7:30-9:30 pm
call for schedule and current topic



The Lord says...

"A sound is heard in Ramah,
the sound of
bitter weeping....
Rachel is crying for
her children;
they are gone,
and she refuses to be
comforted, for
they are all
dead."

(Jeremiah 31:15-16)

Discovering Rachel

by Donna Pickens

Several years ago, while studying art at Georgia State University, I began a sculpture project. The inspiration for the project came from a photograph that an artist friend had shown me, taken of an old, abandoned tabby mill near St. Mary's, Georgia. I was intrigued with the series of door-like openings in the photo that seemed to pull the viewer deeper and deeper into space. To me, the ruins evoked feelings of utter devastation and despair. In one photo there appeared to be a ghostly image of a woman mourning, although my friend believed that the image must have been created by a dead tree trunk.

I began the project by building a door and several sections of walls with window-like openings. I also painted a canvas of a woman mourning and mounted it behind one of the window openings. The project was never completed, since I felt that I needed to experience for myself the atmosphere of the place in order to articulate clearly what the image meant to me. I stored the sculpture in a corner until a later date when I might visit St. Mary's.

The "later date" came after Christmas this year, when John and I and our 2 boys went to participate in a protest against the Trident nuclear submarines to be based at Kings' Bay, Georgia. The protest was set to mark the anniversary of the "Killing of the Innocents," when King Herod learned of Jesus' birth and killed hundreds of innocent children to preserve his rule. Certainly the Atlantic fleet of Trident submarines planned for Kings' Bay Naval Base poses a terrible threat to millions of helpless innocents. These Trident-2 missiles are first-strike weapons, useless for deterrence, and will each carry 8 warheads of 300 kilotons or 14 warheads of 150 kilotons. Hiroshima's bomb was 12.5 kilotons.

During the two-day vigil at the submarine base, I suddenly discovered that the tabby ruins of my aborted sculpture project were directly across the street from our vigil location! In the late afternoon, after everyone else had left, I walked alone through the ruins--drawing, meditating, and thinking back about the powerful events of the day. There were no tree trunks within the walls to resemble a woman mourning. But suddenly and startlingly, the words from Jeremiah 31: 15-16 came to me:

The Lord says..."A sound is heard in Ramah, the sound of bitter weeping.... Rachel is crying for her children; they are gone, and she refuses to be comforted, for they are all dead."

Like a vision, I knew why I had felt so compelled to draw and paint and sculpt these ruins. The warning is clear: unless the nuclear madness is stopped across the street at Kings' Bay (and other bases), we will all be like Rachel mourning for her children....for they will be no more. *

* Donna Pickens is an artist and long-time volunteer with the Open Door Community. Several of her recent drawings are shared in this issue.

that many Christians use the Gospels to repress others and indeed the truth of Christ's radical message is being intentionally (even if unknowingly) repressed. Along with Jim Wallis of Sojourners, we believe that mainline American Christians have been worshipping some powerful idols. As always, we all need to be called to repentance. In the aggregate, for sure, the Church desperately needs a revival!

However, I readily admit (though perhaps not enough in our paper) that we too have idols. We welcome admonition and want to be open to the truth when our own blindness obscures it. Perhaps we can become better at creating an atmosphere for dialog. The challenge is to debate but not succumb to the valueless position that everything has multiple sides...and therefore take no position.

Regarding justice and mercy: I wasn't clear what you meant in saying that justice needed to proceed mercy. I have an idea. Obviously your serving in the Army indicates that you believe international justice may necessitate enforcement by force when someone (President, Congress, world opinion, international judges) decides that injustice is occurring and can't be stopped by any other means.

Well, I agree that justice must be upheld in the long run. I also agree that mercy--particularly God's mercy appears to be conditional. But I don't believe that our being merciful is supposed to be offered only when justice is firmly in place, as you imply. Here's why: First, God offers mercy to those who repent. And God's promise of mercy and forgiveness comes to us "while we are yet sinners." In that sense, mercy is at least promised before justice--before we acknowledge that we have been unjust.

In practice, our ability to forgive those who repent is very limited. Most typically, especially in our criminal justice system, we remain extremely skeptical of offenders' apologies. This is one area I believe Christians must be bold in their forgiveness. How can we demand or tolerate vengeance upon broken, repentant folks, when God is so accepting of us. Jesus' parable about the unforgiving servant (Matt 18:21-35) suggests how necessary mercy is.

The more difficult angle, of course, is how we treat the non-repentant ones--those who are unjust and seem undaunted even by being caught, and labeled "wrong." I agree that these folks (countries, etc.) must be confronted and held accountable for their injustice,

and that mercy--our half of reconciliation--cannot come fully until the injustice ends and is followed by something comparable to repentance. But, I don't believe that violent, humiliating, dehumanizing, or hate-accompanied force are the ways we should respond even to our worst enemies. Here again, God, through Christ, has revealed alternative, nonviolent, love empowered forces to resist evil.

I've seen the evidence that even in the short run, nonviolence can convert the enemy and bring about true reconciliation. But the reality is that turning the other cheek will often fail in the immediate short run to stop injustice. Russia might just occupy our country if we didn't have a military defense. Jesus did get crucified.

Still, my choice is to bet on the long run. I'm willing to risk my life, my daughter's life, and even your life by resisting injustice nonviolently. I'd rather live in an occupied country and work to change my enemy than live in a world on the verge of extinction because of the "security" nuclear weapons offer. Admittedly this is easier said than done. The struggle of Christians in Latin America makes me realize how difficult it is to resist oppression without guns. In every era there are struggles against evil which impel people to allow the ending vision to justify the means. I don't presume that my philosophy of nonviolence today will assure my merciful behavior in all situations in the future.

Obviously the nonviolent response to interpersonal or international injustice is relatively unpopular. Georgians will probably execute another person or two by the time you read this. Alpha Stephens, Roosevelt Green, and Van Solomon admitted guilt and expressed remorse for their participation in murders (while maintaining that they didn't "pull the triggers"). Yet prosecutor, juries, judges, legislators, and most citizens believe in your thesis. Mercy to murderers is very conditional. If you are poor and black and kill a comparably wealthy white person you are unlikely to be given any mercy.

The tremendous paradox is this: as unjust as our system of justice is, we better hope that God is a lot more merciful toward us than we are toward one another. I'm confident She will be...if only as a nation we repent.

These are a few responses to your letter, Jim. Know that we appreciate your support and concern. Continue to search for the truth. More people than yourself depend on it.

Rob Johnson

Help!

Current needs for supplies at the Open Door include:

UNDERWEAR LARGE JARS OF VASELINE RAZORS
DEODORANT

Druid Hills Shelter

Each night since October 28, the Night Shelter at Druid Hills Presbyterian Church has opened its doors to 30 homeless men. In addition to a warm place to sleep, this year we have been able to provide nutritious suppers, breakfasts, showers, and blankets. We have an excellent core group of volunteers from a number of local Presbyterian churches, including Emory, Pilgrimage, North Decatur, Covenant, Ingelside, Shallowford, Druid Hills, St. Andrews, Oglethorpe, Conyers, and Trinity. Charity Friends and the Quaker House are also active. The Open Door Community continues to help by giving out tickets and providing some general advice and oversight. Other congregations and individuals have donated food, money and supplies. We are very grateful for all the support the shelter has received this year. We continue to need the following items:

paper towels
styrofoam cups
paper plates

If you can donate these items, please bring them to the Open Door (910 Ponce de Leon) marked for the Shelter at Druid Hills.

Sheryl Marshall
Shelter Director
624-1068

Legal Clinic

The Legal Clinic for the Homeless is a volunteer corps of legal workers (attorneys and non-attorneys) which provides legal representation to the homeless and others not within the network of social service and Legal Aid agencies within Atlanta.

The Legal Clinic will have volunteer attorneys to provide:

- (1) Free legal advice and counsel
- (2) Referrals to volunteer attorney agencies in appropriate cases.
- (3) Referrals to Social Service agencies
- (4) Free legal representation in certain cases

The Legal Clinic will operate on the first Saturday of each month from 9:30 am to 12:00 noon at the Open Door Community, 910 Ponce de Leon Avenue, Atlanta.

For more information on the Legal Clinic, contact Eric G. Kocher, Suite 500, 1422 W. Peachtree Street, N.W., Atlanta, Georgia, 30309; phone 404/876-4884.

Newspaper Requests If you or a friend would like to receive **HOSPITALITY**, please fill in this form and return to Ed Loring at the Open Door 910 Ponce de Leon Ave. Atlanta, Georgia 30306

Name _____

Street Address _____

City, State, Zip _____