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September 1997

On Tall Buildings and Forgetting God

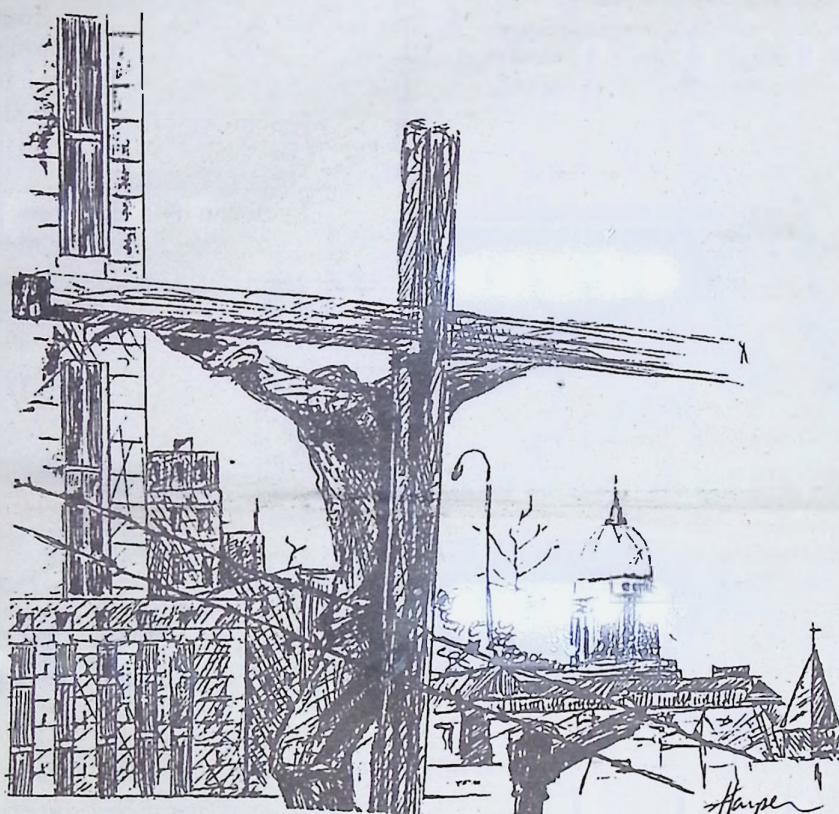
by Stan Saunders

Each year during the annual celebration of the Festival of Shelters, the Open Door Community and its friends worship together in Woodruff Park in downtown Atlanta. When we stand in the park, and take in the scenery around us, we see, as in any modern American city, the tall buildings all around us, the steel, glass, and concrete that make this city a city. If we look more closely amidst all those hard edges, we are likely to begin seeing the symbols of human hope and despair.

In human mythologies, tall buildings are one of the nearly universal symbols of human pride and achievement. They represent not only the technological ability to pack a lot of people and things into an area with a relatively small footprint, but also the pinnacle of human aspiration and accomplishment. This is especially true in modern American culture, where bigness is one of our idols.

Our city buildings are also mechanisms of social control. Construction of one of the behemoths nearly always requires displacing some people from their homes. We also employ, often at slave wages, the least ones of our society to clear the space and construct the buildings. But once the construction is finished, the builders often find that they are excluded from using what they have crafted. And if you get past the security guards in one of the towers and make it onto an elevator, you are likely to find that access to this or that floor is denied. You see, each of the buildings tells a story of who is in and who is out, who has power and who does not, who is welcome and who is not.

The tall buildings we see all around us are also symbols of the modern spiritual quest. Why do humans build spaces like skyscrapers, after all? For one thing they give us a sense of permanence and control over our environment; they suggest to us that within their walls and looking down from their heights, the world is not such a threatening place. They suggest to us that we have the means to shape a world that we can control and manipulate. And isn't this idea that we have the right and



the ability to shape and control our world at the heart of human spiritualities, especially in their modern, American expressions?

This is not really a new insight, however. Remember that one of the first human responses to the fall in Genesis was to start building cities, a burst of human creativity that culminated in the erection of the Tower of Babel, the ultimate symbol of human pride. What the Genesis story tells us, in other words, is that cities are human attempts to respond to the consequences of the fall; they are shrines to the powers of this world. We build cities and tall buildings because we are no longer in fellowship with God. One might even argue that, as a principle, the greater the buildings we see around us, the deeper the sense of underlying despair, fear, and alienation. From a biblical standpoint we can put the issue this way: cities are danger zones for human beings, because they tempt us to celebrate our own accomplishment, to construct our own realities, and to forget who God is and what God wants to do for us.

Forgetfulness is the name of the game in urban politics in Atlanta these days. When the city leaders and local press wage war against the poor and the homeless, they are pressing the battle to make

us forget that all we have comes from God. They are seeking to make the picture of downtown more comfortable and attractive for the right kinds of folks. Polishing the idols, as it were. The risk in all of this is that, when we have sufficiently sanitized the city of unsavory citizens, we will forget the pain and suffering of those we have put away. We will put up bigger walls, install better security systems, and celebrate our ingenuity. We may even be tempted to give thanks to God for not making us like those people on the outside. We may think that our world of idols is the way God meant it to be. But the only way we could think all these things is if we have forgotten who our God is. To embrace the city our leaders have in mind is to forget that life is lived most faithfully in trusting relationship with a merciful and loving God, a God who has promised to give us what we need to live today.

The consequences of such forgetfulness should be well known to those who read the Bible. Deuteronomy 8, among many other texts, spells this out with great clarity:

Take care that you do not forget the Lord your God, by failing to keep God's commandments, ordinances, and statutes, which I am commanding you today. When you have eaten your fill and have built fine houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks have multiplied, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then do not exalt yourself, forgetting the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. . . Do not say to yourself, "My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth. . ." If you do forget the Lord your God and follow other

(continued on page 2)

HOSPITALITY



MICHAEL SCHWARZ

910 Ponce de Leon

Hospitality is published 11 times a year by the Open Door Community (PCUS), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard. For more information about the life and work of the Open Door, please contact any of the following:

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("On Tall Buildings" continued from page 1)

nations that the Lord is destroying before you, so shall you perish, because you would not obey the voice of the Lord your God. (8: 11-20)

It was in order to avoid such forgetfulness that the Festival of Shelters was first introduced to the people of Israel so long ago. During the festival, the people were not to live in their houses, but in the little huts and tents that were a reminder to them of their origins as a wandering, wilderness people, a people who lived in the promises of God rather than in a land of their own devising. The prophet Zechariah closes his visions of judgment against the nations with a warning that they, too, are to attend to the festival of shelters. Year after year the nations of the earth are to go up to Jerusalem to worship God and to join the festival of booths (or shelters). If they do not, Zechariah promises that they will have no rain. If Egypt does not go up to join the festival, they will be visited with the plagues God has reserved for the nations (14:16-19).

That is why we, a tiny, rag-tag community, gather each year in the heart of Atlanta's tall buildings. Our calling as Christians is to remember who God is, what God has done for us, and what God wants to do for us. We have to gather in the middle of the city because, in the midst of all the shrines of human accomplishment and forgetfulness, someone needs to make sure there will be rain. We come amidst all the marvelous buildings because we remember that God is the one who brought us out of the wilderness, who preserves our life, and who gives us all that we need today. We gather in Woodruff Park to remember God and in this way to gain discernment and vision for our

Meals

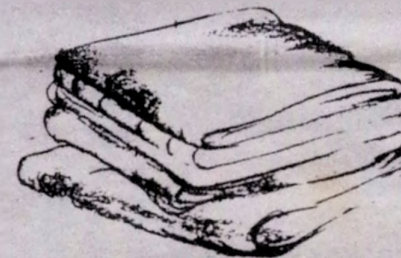
As we move toward the construction and renovation of our kitchen and dining room (anticipated to take at least two months) we are in need of some particular help. If you can help us figure out how to serve 16,000 - 20,000 meals without a kitchen and dining room, we would love to hear from you!

We will need...

- large quantities of fruit and meat and cheese sandwiches on whole wheat bread for our bag lunches.
- muffins to serve with our sack breakfasts.
- help with supper meals for the household (25 - 40). Could you help us by bringing in a meal to share with us or prepare a one-dish meal we could warm up in an apartment-sized oven?

If you can help, call Brenda, our Volunteer Coordinator, at 874-9652.

Blankets!



As we near the end of summer we must look ahead to the cooler days of fall and winter, and here at the Open Door, the needs of the homeless change. Blankets become one of the essential items needed by our city's homeless. Your generous gifts of blankets would be appreciated.

ongoing journey towards God's redemption of this world.

While we're on the streets of the city during the Festival of Shelters, we also listen to the stories of our sisters and brothers who have been cast aside and crushed under the machinery of the city builders. In doing so we continue not only the tradition of remembering what is embodied in the festival of shelters, but also the foundational Christian tradition of hospitality and solidarity with the poor, the homeless, the resident aliens (1 Peter 2:11) and exiles of this world. The streets are where the gospel story can most clearly and powerfully be heard, and where God can most clearly be seen. In our comfortable homes and our towering offices, the gospel may not make much sense, if we can hear it at all. In the middle of the city there is both danger and opportunity. We must be wary lest the grandeur of human accomplishment, the monuments of pride, blur our vision and cloud our memory. In the city we may be greatly tempted to forget our God. But amidst all these symbols of human hope and despair, we have the possibility of witnessing God at work, knitting together a fresh creation. God grant us eyes to see and ears to hear.

Stan Saunders is professor of New Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia.

A Pretty Pass

by Joyce Hollyday

Wesley Woods is a United Methodist retirement high-rise in my Atlanta neighborhood. For a long time, my deepest appreciation of it was related to the grounds that surround it: It's a safe and interesting place to walk my dog. Savannah likes to chase the squirrels, wade in the stream, and arrive around 7 o'clock in the evening. That's when the self-described "bread and peanut lady" comes outside to feed the wild creatures. My typical exuberant and affectionate golden retriever is enamored of her (mostly because she would feed Savannah an entire loaf of bread every evening if I let her).

Some mornings I catch the Emory University shuttle at Wesley Woods and ride it to my classes at the seminary. Some time ago, while I was waiting, I met a woman whose husband had been a pastor in the area where I grew up before he retired several years ago. In the middle of Atlanta, we shared a string of nostalgic reflections about the First United Methodist Church on Chocolate Avenue in Hershey, Pennsylvania.

I've come to appreciate the rich texture of the older lives that exist behind the walls. I find I'm always learning something new. But no one took me more by surprise than Frances Pauley, whose 91st birthday party I recently attended.

Back in 1961, Frances was involved in the campaign to desegregate Albany, Georgia. She was arrested, put in jail, then released and told by the police to get out of town. She confronted her fear by marching right into the office of the chief of police, Laurie Pritchett. "Chief," she said, "they asked me to leave town, but I've got a few things I haven't quite finished yet. So I thought I'd tell you I'm gonna be here a few more days. If there's anything I can do to help you, please let me know." His mouth was still hanging open when she turned around and marched out.

In her years of involvement with the Civil Rights Movement, Frances faced threatening law officers, ranting politicians, and racist mobs—and she stared down the barrel of a gun more than once. She was an inspiring influence on young people. In Rome, Georgia, the public library was the target of desegregation. A young Black man, a cook, volunteered to try to check out a book. Frances sat nearby reading, giving him moral support with her presence. He was fright-

ened, and so surprised when the librarian asked him what kind of book, he hesitated and then said, "A cookbook." Frances proudly points out that he was recently elected president of the National Library Association.

In her nine decades of living, Frances Pauley has been involved in campaigns ranging from clinics and school lunches to heating assistance and AIDS research. In 1991, a Catholic sister concerned about disease among prostitutes

and the door opened a bit. Frances slipped out before the door closed again. Then the elevator got stuck. She recounts, "I got on the other elevator, I went down-stairs, and I didn't tell a soul. I just smiled and went on out."

She says with a laugh and a twinkle in her eye, "I pray every night, 'Please God, take me 'fore morning.' But God says, 'No, you're too mean!'" Mean has nothing to do with it. I suspect Frances is talking to God the way she talked to Laurie Pritchett: "I've got a few things I haven't quite finished yet."

She admits, "It doesn't look like God is going to let me die any time soon, so maybe I will live to love my enemies!" If that learning is her obstacle to moving into the next life, I pray the lesson comes slowly. We need such a blessing of courage among us a bit longer.

Joyce Hollyday is author of *Clothed with the Sun* and the soon to be released *Then Shall Your Light Rise: Spiritual Formation and Social Witness*, from Upper Room Books. She is also a staff writer with "Sojourners" magazine, and a student at the Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia. Joyce is a friend of the Open Door and a regular member of our Sunday

worship community. This article is reprinted with permission from the January-February 1997 issue of "Sojourners Magazine", 2401-15th St. NW, Washington, DC 20009, 1-800-714-7474.



Frances Pauley with Open Door Community Partner, Leo McGuire

called her for help. Frances later reflected, "I guess when you've got a nun who calls up an old lady in a Methodist high-rise to ask her how to get condoms, we've come to a pretty pass."

When she first moved into Wesley Woods in 1988, Frances got into the elevator and discovered that standing next to her was Herbert Jenkins, who had been the head of the Atlanta police department for many years. She remembered tangling with him years before over an incident in a housing project in which police killed a man and critically injured a young boy.

She looked up at him and asked, "You aren't by any chance Chief Jenkins?" He answered, "Indeed, I am!" At that moment, the elevator shuddered

Happy 92nd Birthday Frances

Come join us on September 7 for our Sunday Worship and celebrate the birthday of Frances Pauley. Copies of the book, *Frances Pauley: Stories of Struggle and Triumph* will be available.

BASEMENT TAPES: ONE

By Ed Loring

3

1

In a few hours many of us from The Door will be heading over to the Butler C.M.E. Church for the funeral of Charlie Young, Sr. He is a former resident and we continued a good and strong relationship after he moved out of the community and into public housing. I have been invited by the family to say a few words (hardly my strong suit!!) on behalf of the Open Door. As life would have it in its ambiguities and racism and the assault on the poor, I learned only yesterday, after feeding 150-plus people in the Butler Street C.M.E. Church basement, that a downtown congregation has decided to build a fence and gate around the front steps of the church so that the homeless and hungry cannot congregate there during the day and night. The usual reasons, not without worth, were stated: drinking, cursing, peeing, defecating, leaving trash, and the general unsightliness that brings complaints from the local merchants and business people. I continue to hope for a distinctive witness and welcome from the Church of Jesus Christ, but it is seldom forthcoming in this city. The pressures are too great. I am more grieved than angry, more like Jeremiah than Amos this time 'round. We lose land and social space everyday in this work and ministry. I don't know what to do. I will pray more and I will spend more time with the homeless in their places downtown as I did yesterday after I learned about the fence-building decision. I wish for a Bonhoeffer or someone to step forward who could call the church to obedience. I miss Mitch Snyder and wish he had not killed himself in his despair.

2

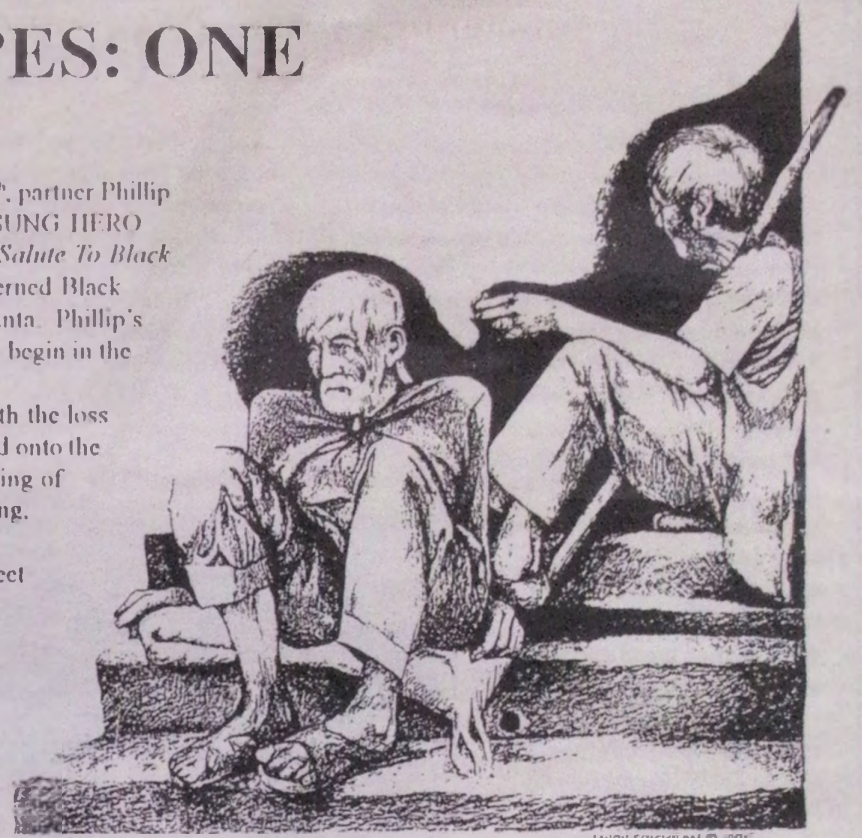
One bit of Good News in an odd sort of way: this morning a man was sound asleep inside the gate and fence protecting the Sunday School room from vagrants, prostitutes, hungry ones, alcoholics, derelicts, and people with socially unacceptable diseases. He had climbed over the fence and with him came a full bed on cardboard, a foam mat, and two blankets. He was snuggled up tight and reminded me of my dad when I came into his and mom's bedroom on a Saturday morning and jumped into their bed and he held me tightly with his strong arms and close to his flavored armpits. In fact, I had a strange childlike inclination to go and lie down on the pallet with this strange man, but the fence was too high and the barbed points at the end of each steel rod, like a medieval spear, would have impaled me. I hope he made it over before the church staff got there. If not, I may be visiting him in jail tomorrow. Just what does Jesus mean when he says, "Come unto me all you that labor (maybe this man was unemployed) and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?" But Jesus probably did not mean the homeless, because, unlike those that the Bible tells us about, these folks are lazy, addicted, pee in public and smell bad. Oh, just give me the good ole demon-possessed and tax collectors that Jesus dealt with, and everything will be all right!

On Friday June 13th, partner Phillip Williams received the UNSUNG HERO award at the 13th Annual *Salute To Black Fathers* held by the Concerned Black Clergy of Metropolitan Atlanta. Phillip's story with us and his Salute begin in the basement.

After a struggle with the loss of his job, Phillip was hurled onto the streets of Atlanta in the spring of 1990. He was hungry, hurting, and dirty. He came to the basement of the Butler Street Church for breakfast. He liked the grits and eggs and oranges. Phillip needed a shower and was told by the disposable men in the daily line to go to 910 for soup and a shower. He went. He liked Dick's split pea soup. He liked the clothes and hot water. He returned to the basement for breakfast and the Open Door for soup and showers. In June, 1990 he was angry and exhausted. "I knew I had to get off the streets," he told me one day recently. "I was being treated like an animal." CM Sherman was down in the basement serving breakfast and asked Phillip if he would like to come and live at the Open Door. "Yes," he replied with a sense of defeat and hope. On June 8, 1990, Phillip left the streets and came home. He has not left the basement. He has not left the struggle for justice for the disposable and the condemned. He has simply become a homemaker on the peace and justice journey.

A week after Phillip entered our lives, eight of us (soon to be 300 of us) occupied the Imperial Hotel armed with prayer and visions of the homeless housed. Phillip worked day and night to keep the food on the table and the showers flowing at 910 during the 16 days before our arrest on July 3rd. (The Imperial Hotel was on the July 4th parade route and Mayor Maynard Jackson wanted no signs of a revolution on that day.) Phillip learned the ministries well, but was not sure what kind of place he had come to build home during all the stress and strain of those days and nights of occupation.

The next year Phillip was ready to put his love and quiet anger into action on behalf of housing the homeless. People for Urban Justice did an action in the offices of Central Atlanta Progress, a downtown group dedicated to running the poor and non-white Blacks out of the Central Business District. Phillip was arrested. His treatment and experience in the local jail were so terrible that he vowed never to be arrested again. The Holy Spirit intervened, however, and Phillip was twice jailed in 1992 in actions that led to the overturning of the law against sleeping on park benches and statues. (This law was reinstated and broadened in the 1996 Anti-Camping Ordinance.) Two years later Phillip single-handedly took on the Parking Lot Ordinance aimed at young African-American men and the homeless. The ACLU took his case to the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals before the Atlanta City Council changed the law. After his short but cruel time on the streets of Atlanta, Phillip knew what a fight it is to "pee for free with dignity." So in 1996, he hoisted a toilet into



MURY ERICKSON © 1985

his arms and entered Mayor Bill Campbell's office. Not long ago the judge found Phillip along with the remaining six of the "Urine 8," a youthful offender and let him return to leading the Grit Line in the basement of the church.

Phillip has been a leader at the Open Door for several years now. He has been on the Leadership Team since 1993 and he became a partner in 1994. His growth and discovery of his gifts have not come without pain and labor. Phillip is very shy and an introvert. He took his anxiety head on and has emerged as one of the more gifted leaders in public prayer, corporate worship, and our supper circle. Phillip is of African ancestry. This means that his forefathers and foremothers made it across the Atlantic Ocean on the Middle Passage. Not all African Americans trace their roots to slavery days. Phillip does. Therefore his roots must be of the finest stock in America, for only the strongest and most determined human beings could make that voyage, which was a holocaust and death march, likened to President Andrew Jackson's Trail of Tears for the Cherokees, and Hitler's ovens for the Jews and others pursued and murdered under the Third Reich.

Phillip is no stranger to racism, even in our house. Once a well-meaning donor came to the front door to give us a large and expensive gift of clothes. Phillip, who was on House Duty, answered the door and invited the man in. He would not believe that Phillip was in charge and kept asking to see the person with the authority to receive the gift. After a few minutes Phillip gave up. He went and found a white partner who came and told the man, "Yes," Phillip is responsible for the house. Amazed and befuddled, the man left his clothes and drove away. The police have been hard on Phillip, as well. They have called him a "dumb S.O.B.," refused to shake his hand, and have wanted to deal with a white when called to our home. Phillip is quiet and persistent, and he gives his life to the uprooting of racism. He is a leader in our lives and we thank the Holy Spirit for bringing Phillip to the basement of the church and into our home.

(continued on page 5)

ACLU Challenges Urban Camping Ordinance

The ACLU of Georgia and the Task Force for the Homeless, on July 18, 1997—the anniversary of the opening of the Olympic Games—urged Atlanta Mayor Bill Campbell and the City Council to seek the repeal of Atlanta's "urban-camping" ordinance. If the City refuses to address this unconstitutional ordinance, the ACLU and Task Force will file suit on behalf of several individuals arrested or threatened with arrest for urban camping.

Between 15,000 and 22,000 people are homeless in Atlanta on any given day. With less than 3,000 beds for the homeless, including emergency and transitional shelters, over 80 percent of the homeless population has no alternative but to sleep outdoors.

Homelessness is caused by underemployment, unemployment, lack of affordable housing, and substance abuse, as well as the lack of services for the mentally ill, victims of domestic violence or those in family crisis. The underlying problem is extreme poverty.

On any given night, homeless people who are unable to stay in a shelter must find a place to

sleep and often find a spot on public property—parks, vacant lots, buildings and under freeways. The City of Atlanta has chosen to respond to such conduct by criminalizing the life-sustaining behavior of those forced to live on the streets.

Atlanta has passed a number of ordinances targeting the poor and homeless. It is illegal to enter a vacant building, to be in a parking lot without having a car parked there, to "aggressively" panhandle, to make music on a city street, to earn money without a city permit, to remove any item from a county-provided trash container, to wash automobile windows at city intersections, to loiter at Hartsfield Airport, to act in a manner "not usual" for a law-abiding individual, and to beg in nine different public locations. To make certain the homeless get the message that they should get out of town, Atlanta extended the jail time to six months for violating anti-homeless ordinances.

Because of its ordinances criminalizing poverty and its clear intention to make the city inhospitable to the homeless, Atlanta has the reputation of having the "meanest streets" in the nation [National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty study, December 1996].

There have been over 100 arrests for urban camping since the law's enactment in November 1996. In March of this year, a dramatic increase in the frequency of arrests occurred after Atlanta Police Chief Beverly Harvard publicly stated that her department would aggressively enforce the so-called "quality of life" laws which include the urban camping ordinance.

As Richard Brown, staff counsel for the Task Force for the Homeless and one of the attorneys representing the plaintiffs in this potential litigation, noted, "The cost to arrest, prosecute, and incarcerate those arrested for urban-camping far exceeds the cost to provide affordable housing and treatment for the needy."

The ACLU alleges the ordinance is unconstitutional because it is overly broad and vague and constitutes punishment for individuals based upon their status as homeless persons.

"Atlanta's urban-camping ordinance makes it a crime to be homeless," said Gerald Weber, ACLU Legal Director. "The City once known as being too busy to hate is now housing its homeless citizens in jail."

The suit will seek to enjoin the City from enforcement of the ordinance and damages for the individual plaintiffs.

Decatur City Commission
P.O. Box 220
Decatur, Georgia 30031

July 3, 1997

Dear Commissioners:

I was thoroughly disappointed to read in the *Decatur Community Review* that the Commission had recently enacted an "urban camping" ordinance. Like Atlanta, we have now moved away from trying to end homelessness or show compassion to the homeless. Instead, we have decided to turn homelessness into a crime by making a basic necessity of homeless people (a place to lie down and sleep) illegal. This criminalization of homelessness is popular today in cities across the country, but I had hoped for something better from Decatur.

The treatment of "Miss Elizabeth" Barbee, as described in the *Review*, simply demonstrates the moral bankruptcy of "urban camping" ordinances. She was apparently given an ultimatum to leave town or go to jail, and when she decided not to go to jail, we shipped (or MARTAed) her off to be someone else's problem. "Economic vitality" has apparently become more important than compassion in Decatur. I am reminded of Jesus' words, "as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). I wonder if, along with "Miss Elizabeth," we have also run Jesus out of Decatur by means of the urban camping ordinance.

Decatur does not need to follow the cruel, greed-driven path that Atlanta has taken. I hope the Commission will reconsider the urban camping ordinance and lead the city in working for more constructive approaches to the problem of homelessness.

Sincerely,

Charles L. Campbell
Assistant Professor of Homiletics
Columbia Theological Seminary
Decatur, Georgia

("Basement Tapes," continued from page 4)

The formal dinner to honor Black leaders in the many areas of our lives was held at the Atlanta Hilton Towers. Before the crowd of more than 500, Dr. Gerald Durley, former Panther, present pastor of Providence Baptist Church, read wonderful words about Phillip and his contributions to our city in the struggles for Peace and Justice. Rev. Timothy McDonald, pastor of First Inconium Baptist Church and President of Concerned Black Clergy, handed Phillip a beautiful plaque which now rests on our living room wall. Among those giving Phillip a big hand were his brothers and fellow servants from 910 who spend lots of time in the basement: Chuks, Jim Hinshaw, Ed Potts, Adolphus, Ira, Lawrence, Paul, and Joe Dan. We are all most thankful to Concerned Black Clergy.

"How does it feel?" I asked Phillip a few days later as I, recovering from Hannah's high school graduation, sat on one of our new living room chairs. "Oh, I'm ready for the next battle," he said. "I think we need to take on the Anti-Camping Ordinance. You know, Ed, I want to put my body where needed." This morning he was in the church basement serving grits.

Ed Loring is a Partner at the Open Door.

Join Us for the Festival of Shelters

(We will keep a presence in Woodruff Park for the week of September 21 - 26)

The **Festival of Shelters** is a celebration from ancient Israel, which commemorates God's instruction to Moses and the Israelites. It is a joyful harvest festival and a time of remembrance. After the Exodus from Egypt, God commanded the people: "You shall live in booths seven days; all citizens of the land shall live in booths..." (Leviticus 23:42). The Festival is meant to remind all of God's people, especially those who celebrate a prosperous harvest, that we were once homeless wanderers. God provided for us in our thirst and hunger, and as we remember, we are led to share of our bounty with the poor and homeless of our day.

So the people got branches and built shelters on the flat roofs of their houses, in their yards, in the Temple courtyard, and in the public squares. . . All the people who had come back from captivity built shelters and lived in them. . . And everybody was excited and happy (Nehemiah 8).



Casualties of the War on Crime: Fairness, Reliability, and the Credibility of Criminal Justice Systems

by Stephen B. Bright

(Editor's note: Attorney Stephen Bright is the Director of the Southern Center for Human Rights located in Atlanta, Georgia, a nonprofit, public interest human rights organization which focuses on the human rights of prisoners and those facing the death penalty in the South. This piece is reprinted from the "University of Miami Law Review," January 1997, with permission from the author. This piece is the first of a 2-part series.)

Due process of law has become a casualty of the war on crime. As representatives of both political parties compete to show which is the toughest on crime, the criminal justice systems in the United States have become so result-oriented that little attention is paid to the fairness and reliability of the process which leads to those results. In the quest to obtain more convictions and death sentences, little concern is being shown for the likelihood of error and the need to provide equal justice for persons of color and the poor.

Yet the criminal justice systems are making some of the most important governmental decisions in society—who will lose their liberty and for how long, and who will be put to death. The operation of the criminal justice system is particularly important to the African-American community. One third of African-American men between the ages of 18 and 30 are under some type of court supervision and by the turn of the century one half of all black men will be in prison or jail, or on probation or parole.

There is good reason for everyone to be concerned about how well criminal courts are discharging their responsibilities. Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens has pointed out that "the recent development of reliable scientific evidentiary methods has made it possible to establish conclusively that a disturbing number of persons who had been sentenced to death were actually innocent." This "most dramatically illustrates" the consequences of failing to provide legal counsel to the poor. In the 20 years since the Supreme Court upheld the resumption of capital punishment, 59 persons sentenced to death have been freed after establishing their innocence. The Department of Justice has recently published a report on a number of other persons convicted of crimes, but later exonerated by scientific evidence.

Courts make many other important decisions in criminal cases besides guilt or innocence. Courts set bail and determine the lawfulness of law enforcement practices such as searches, seizures

and interrogations, all of which have enormous consequences with regard to the type of society we have. A finding of guilt only raises a second question of how that offender is to be punished. Punishments range from community service, to fines, to days in jail, to years in prison, to life in prison without the possibility of parole, and to death.

Those decisions are frequently influenced by legally irrelevant considerations such as race, poverty, and politics. Racial disparities are found throughout the criminal justice system. Virtually every report that has examined the operation of the death penalty has found racial discrimination in its infliction. One of the most recent reports reaching this conclusion was issued in July, 1996, by the International Commission of Jurists, a highly re-

This lack of fairness seriously undermines the reliability of the results reached in many cases, and the trust which citizens are willing to place in the court system. Unfortunately, many criminal justice systems lack the most basic components of fairness: fair and impartial judges, prosecutors free from political influence, and effective representation for those accused of crimes.

Competition between the political parties to show that they are tough on crime has included efforts to intimidate judges and the removal of the state court judges from office by voters after campaigns in which capital punishment was the central issue. When federal Judge Harold Baer suppressed cocaine and heroin seized by New

York City police officers, Republican presidential candidate Robert Dole called for his impeachment. Additionally, the Clinton White House suggested it would ask for his resignation if Judge Baer did not reverse this ruling. Judge Baer reversed his ruling.

Since Rose Bird and three of her colleagues were voted off the California Supreme Court in 1986 because of their votes in capital cases, trial and appellate judges in other states have also been removed from the bench for being "soft" on the death penalty. The most recent was Justice Penny White, who was voted off the Tennessee Supreme Court last August in a retention

election. In opposing Justice White, the Republican Party mailed a brochure to voters titled, "Just Say NO!" with the slogan, "Vote for Capital Punishment by Voting No on August 1, for Supreme Court Justice Penny White." Inside, the brochure described three cases to demonstrate that Justice White "puts the rights of criminals before the rights of victims." The first case was described as follows: "Richard Odom was convicted of repeatedly raping and stabbing to death a 78-year-old Memphis woman. However, Penny White felt the crime wasn't heinous enough for the death penalty—so she struck it down."

The mailing did not disclose that Odom's case was reversed because all five members of the Tennessee Supreme Court agreed that there had been at least one legal error which required a new sentencing hearing. Nor did it mention that the Tennessee Court of Criminal Appeal also concluded that Odom was entitled to a new sentencing hearing. The Tennessee Supreme Court affirmed Odom's conviction and remanded

(continued on page 7, column 1)



garded organization made up of jurists from around the world, after a visit to the United States.

Yet courts tolerate racial discrimination and often refuse even to examine issues of racial prejudice. The Supreme Court allowed Georgia to carry out death sentences despite significant disparities in the infliction of the death penalty. Two African American men sentenced to death by an all-white jury in Utah were executed even though jurors received a note which contained the words "Hang the N g g r's" [sic] and a drawing of a figure hanging on the gallows. No court, state or federal, even held a hearing on such questions as who wrote the note, what influence it had on the jurors, and how widely it was discussed by the jurors. Similarly, William Henry Hance was executed in Georgia without any court holding a hearing on the use of racial slurs by jurors who decided his fate. Other courts have refused to look behind gross racial disparities for discrimination. The tolerance of racial discrimination and the refusal of courts even to examine these issues reveal a lack of commitment to fairness.

his case for a new sentencing hearing. No member of the Court expressed the view that the crime was not heinous enough to warrant the death penalty. Indeed, the remand for a new sentencing hearing made it quite clear that the Court did not find the death penalty inappropriate for Odom. Justice White did not write the majority opinion, a concurring opinion or a dissenting opinion in the case. Yet Tennessee voters were led to believe that she had personally struck down Odom's death penalty because she did not think the crime was "heinous enough."

Justice White's opponents also blamed her for the fact that Tennessee has not carried out any executions in the last 36 years. But the Odom case was the only capital case that came before the Court during White's 19 months on the Court. Justice White was opposed by Tennessee's governor and both its United States Senators, all Republicans.

Immediately after the retention election, the Governor of Tennessee, Don Sundquist, said: "Should a judge look over his shoulder [in making decisions] about whether they're going to be thrown out of office? I hope so." This contrasts sharply with a statement made by Supreme Court Justice John Paul Stevens at the American Bar Association meeting in Orlando the same month: "It was never contemplated that the individual who has to protect our individual rights would have to consider what decisions would produce the most votes."

Those like Gov. Sundquist who suggest that removing judges from office for unpopular decisions is nothing more than democracy in action misunderstand the role of courts in our society and the importance of an independent judiciary. As Judge William Cranch wrote, courts have a duty to decide the legal issues before them "undisturbed by the clamor of the multitude." Often that includes protecting the rights of various minorities—political, racial, and ethnic. Unlike legislatures or executives, courts are not expected to gauge public opinion by resorting to focus groups or public opinion polls before making their decisions. Judges are expected to enforce the law, whether it be the First Amendment right of citizens to publish unpopular opinions or the right of a suspected child molester to a fair and impartial trial. As Justice Jackson said:

The very purpose of a Bill of Rights was to withdraw certain subjects from the vicissitudes of political controversy, to place them beyond the reach of majorities and officials and to establish them as legal principles to be applied by the courts. One's right to life, liberty, and property, to free speech, a free press, freedom of worship and assembly, and other fundamental rights may not be submitted to vote; they depend on the outcome of no elections.

The threat that a judge can be removed from office because of an unpopular decision undermines the independence, integrity, and impartiality of the judiciary. The greatest threat to the rule of law comes from those judges who remain on courts but refuse to enforce the law in instances where an unpopular outcome could jeopardize their careers. Once a judge compromises his or her oath by refusing to enforce the law in order to stay in office or advance to a higher court, both the judge and the court are irreparably diminished. When judges must depend upon majority approval, courts are unable to perform one of their most important constitutional roles, de-

BLESSED ARE THEY WHO SHOUT... FOR THEY ARE KINGDOM BELIEVERS

by Jodi Weisz

When I heard about Ed Loring's audacious eschatological shout, "It won't be long! It won't be long!", I knew I had to borrow it. Ed, a founding member of the Open Door Community in Atlanta, shouts his shout right smack-in-the-middle of this delicious community's Matthean-whirl. While feeding, clothing, and sheltering hungry, shoeless, homeless friends, Ed will fabulously bellow his trumpet: "It won't be long! It won't be long!" So glorious is Ed's shout that it has become mine, as well as eighteen first, second, and third graders whom I teach at an afterschool program in Washington, D.C.

Many days Ed's shout is the only thing my kids and I learn together. When I shout it—the kids shout it back at me. Of course, to outsiders all our shouting probably seems like the least classroom-like-thing-in-the-world. To the kids, it's the funniest. I often hear them explaining to their parents, "But Mom, our teacher likes it when we shout!" Yes, our shouting-way sounds hilarious because the kids do not hear it for what it is: my raw, fast confession to them: my pure-apocalyptic apology for all of the innumerable times I will have to ignore them.

It won't be long! Soon, you will get the attention you deserve! It won't be long! Soon you'll be surrounded by so many role-models you won't need to act desperate! It won't be long! Soon your community and your government will put you first! Soon we will no longer ignore you—no longer punish you because we have ignored you! Soon your caregivers will no longer hit you! Soon you will no longer hit each other! Soon, nobody will hit another—with hands, with words, with threats, with bombs! No! It won't be long! It won't be long! Soon we will not be so terribly, terribly tempted.

But ah! How we are tempted! Kids are to be kept in line! Spare the rod, spoil the child! Exit the troublemakers, ignore their tears. Send the ones who "act-out" home. Be Secure! Evaluate, don't contemplate, or at least evaluate more than you contemplate. Be a professional, not a fool.

Professional teachers create classrooms filled with quiet, mild, obedient kids. Professional teachers don't encourage kids to shout. Professional teachers keep things under control.

scribed by Justice Black, of serving as "havens of refuge for those who might otherwise suffer because they are helpless, weak, outnumbered, or because they are...victims of prejudice and public excitement."

Prosecutors in most states also are elected and their decisions in criminal cases are often not detached professional judgments, but are based upon political considerations. The unlimited discretion that prosecutors are given in directing investigations, in charging, in deciding whether to seek enhanced penalties or death, and in plea bargaining is a major cause of the racial disparities throughout the criminal justice systems.

In part 2 of this series, we will continue with the discussion on how criminal justice systems lack the most basic components of fairness by presenting how there is ineffective representation for those accused of crime. ♦

I dream about my children in the middle of the night. As Kingdom Representatives on Earth, they work over-time in the midnight of my psyche. Like second-grader Jose's story about "MeltMan," a superhero who eats up stray flying bullets for a living. This supertall, supersoft guy has started making cameos in my dreams! "Oh, it won't be long!" In another, my third-grader Laveda and I are swinging on a surly playground. Suddenly, her swing snaps. Laveda falls into a mound of broken glass and scary trash below. For a moment I pause—if I pick up that trash, I'll need a pair of gloves. Gloveless, I ignore the trash and help Laveda up. She's a big girl with asthma. And she's mad, "Why do I have to fall into a mess when I am trying to swing?" I hear myself shout just as I have shouted a hundred times in waking life, "Oh, it won't be long, dear! It won't be long!" Ed's golden horn wakes me up, and I think of Jamal. Just yesterday during snack, he added another detail to the Divine Blue Print: "SOON THAT SCHOOL UP THE STREET WILL HAVE PENCILS AND A PLAYGROUND TO GO WITH THOSE KIDS!" No, not long at all.

Not a day goes by in my "urban-city classroom" that I am not deeply touched by the tremendous acts of love of my "at-risk kids." Some of their especially wonderful displays are their beautiful, simple handmade thank you cards—"Kingdom Invitations" I call them. One of my favorites, written on a piece of flaming fluorescent orange paper is from: "SOMEONE WHO IS SPECIAL" and she is Jamila

SPECIAL,
EVERYONE is SPECIAL
SPECIAL is EVERYONE
EVERYONE IS SPECIAL!

On its inside:

"Dear Ms. Jodi you are VERY VERY Special.
Everyone is SPECIAL,
SPECIAL is everyone."

I trust in you. You believe in God and so DO I!
p.s.

from someone who is SPECIAL.

Tell me again, who is special!? Again, who is teaching whom to believe in God?

Of course, children teach us. They are our royal emperors of hope. They are the purest yogis of faith our culture's got going. They are the first to forgive, the last to be made cynical. If we are, as Ruben Alves insists, "called to live by a Love that we will never see," it will be children who will show us how. For in their everyday smiles and simple handmade thank you cards, they are inviting us to the banquet of God's ever-ready, gratuitous love. Children, in their countless daily acts of surrender, reveal Love's Way as forgiving, believing, and irrepressible.

At an afterschool program up the street from my house, 40-plus children are being supervised by one brave woman (OH! It won't
(continued on page 8)

be long!). Recently, it struck me that these children receive less attention from their teacher, Laura, than passengers on airplanes do from two, three, or four available airline attendants! Laura's kids play musical chairs in a dark, musty church basement complete with leaky roof. Pushed down by many low ceilings, these kids not only seek chairs among a shrinking circle, they must leap over precarious rainbuckets placed between their rapidly disappearing opportunities! This wonderful, dedicated teacher (who volunteers her time) serves alone. She, too, has had to take up the holy vocation of shouting. On the day of my visit, the kids learned the following shout: "Don't knock over the buckets, don't knock over the buckets!"

When I first started visiting kids in my neighborhood, I would get overwhelmed. Their day-to-day environments (for learning, for growing, for socializing) taste crazy. I'll never forget the time I visited a local elementary school where many of my kids spend the first part of their day. It was lunchtime, and the overstuffed mess hall was enflamed by five or more sizzling brawls. A tiny, fairy-like girl fended her way through a roar of flaying arms and fists to seize my leg—the only adult pair standing in the room! Gripping as the mighty-little can, she had come to seek not only my protection but to get an answer to her burning question, "Who ARE you? WHY WOULD YOU COME HERE?"

When you go to visit children in your neighborhood (Yes, it won't be long until you do!), you may also get overwhelmed. All the messiness of neglect can seem unbearable. But, soon these words will come to you, "Blessed are the poor. . . Blessed are the pure at heart. . . Blessed are they who mourn. . ." As these words begin to comfort you, know that you are experiencing their miracle of stillness, their miracle of opening, their miracle of presence. As Mary with child Jesus went to visit Elizabeth with the child John, this is our required work: that we leave our house (our individual pregnancies), and go and be with our cousin's children. This is where and when the mystery of visitation will get revealed. That promise of a shared pregnancy—of a mutuality in the moment—with its potential for, not one, but two, prophetic births! When you go to visit a beloved child (named John, named Jamila, named Jose, named Laveda), you will know Who is with you, and Why you came.

Children are miracles sent to us, not us to them. As their "at risk" adults, we have forgotten the way to the Kingdom. Children, the very poor among us, remind us that love is among the small and tearful, not the big and fearful. Schools, streets, and basements swell with beatific teachers of love, always welcoming to visitors! Yes, the little children are ready to teach: God's love is magnanimous, fresh, free, and often very, very funny. Oh! and "EVERYONE is special, VERY, VERY SPECIAL!"

OH! It won't be Long! It won't be long! Soon adult-children-of-God will stop believing that affection must be earned, control must be sought, the way of nonpower isn't powerful. It won't be long! The secret of the secret discipline is out: the least-listened-to are shouting in the streets and being heard, running rampant everywhere, loving

and forgiving us for our shameful, neglectful ways.

My kids see the Kingdom clearly. They tell me, It won't be long! SOON there will be NO gunshots and more flowerpots. They paint pictures of playgrounds surrounded by luscious green grass (where did they see this grass?!), and they assure me such playgrounds will be "EVERYWHERE!" Yes, SOON there will be more schools than shopping malls! Such schools will be smaller, neighborhood centered and, as for malls, it will be illegal for them to be MEGA. Yes! Soon everyone will know where the nearest one-room school house is. It will be the place teeming with parents and community! Yes! It won't be long until adults spend less time in cars and more time tutoring kids! It won't be long until we act on our belief that it is more valuable to love kids than all the buying and



Jamal Contes

selling of things we could ever do! Yes, it won't be long! Eighteen kids in Washington, D.C. have told me so! "SOON! ALL THE CHILDREN IN THE WORLD WILL EAT AS MUCH FREE macaroni and cheese AS THEY WANT!"

Eighteen kids are teaching one adult the size of belief necessary to usher in the Kingdom—it's ENORMOUS and LOUD—like a shout! In the middle of our classroom, on a bright-blue rug decorated with bold, golden butterflies, I have whispered to them about the secret of soul-force. We take turns practicing the art of vigil—together, letting our little lights shine. I hold up the lives of Aung San Suu Kyi, Ven. Maha Ghosananda, and Sri Eknath Easwaran—whom my kids call "big flashlights of love." Of course they know about King and Gandhi too, but they tend to fixate on the part of the story when "those guys got shot." My kids know too well that murder is not a tragic fate reserved for only rare hero-prophets. On the playground and before leaving for the day, we practice growing our hearts so big that even jail cells can't imprison them! Snacktime stories are

filled with the adventures of nonviolent heroes and heroines like Quaker Ruth Hartsough who, by standing (in the middle of train tracks, at the entrance of weapons labs), revealed to us the might of witness, of speaking truth to power. Ah, but just like the butterflies beneath their feet, these kids do not stand in one place for long! (I once thought we would participate in vigils around the city, but now I see that shouting is the real vocation we've been called to.) Around the room we swarm—one more community longing to be transformed.

Yes, my kids and I, we yell. (We've been warned that this might be off-putting to potential volunteers and possible donors.) Shouting helps break us out of our fearful cocoons of insecurity, frustration, and frequent desires for revenge. "It won't be long! It won't be long! It won't be long!" Shouting helps their teacher ward off the temptation to want "ship-shape neatness" and "clear-cut control." Shouting keeps us clear about our most important program—the nurturance of Faithful Eyes, Hopeful Hearts, and Active Nonviolent Muscles of Love. Come, come, my little extremists. Stand up! Yes! Shouting is exactly the right thing to do when everyone is starving for affection.

Well, I don't believe you want to hit her. IT WON'T BE LONG! Stop choking her, let's practice hugging. You're not the biggest deficit disorder to ever live to seven. You're not a deficit, you're not a disorder, And, you're not suspendable!

I believe your tears are STRONGER than your threats. I believe your smile says more about you than "I don't care." I believe you do care. IT WON'T BE LONG! I believe in you.

I'm glad you cried instead of hitting back. Wars are all the tears that men never cried. YOU ARE STRONG WHEN YOU CRY. Well no, your Daddy probably doesn't know this either! IT WON'T BE LONG!

I trust you. I love you. I believe you are closer to God than me, and Hallelujah for that!

I believe the Kingdom is OVERflowing with children. I believe children are the Kingdom! I believe if we seek and listen and play with our children we will skip into the Kingdom. I believe children have come to teach us to SHOUT. I believe we MUST shout, like all lost children do, at the top of our lungs, until we find our way back.

Oh! It won't be long! Soon, it will all start making sense—this spirituality of shouting, this spirituality of finding, this spirituality of shouting to be found! Yes, we will come to love shouting as the Promise-Noise of God's Coming-Mending—offered to us through that supreme command—to go, find, and love one another. Come, come adults. We have put our children last and so are at-risk. Let us go and visit the children.

Jodi Weisz served as Director of The Good Shepherd Ministries Primary Plus Afterschool Program in Washington, D.C. Recently, Jodi began working as an immigration advocate in the Bronx where she lives with the Ursuline Sisters Community of St. Angela.

Inch by Inch

a column by Murphy Davis

Lucy Rose died in July. She had fought breast cancer for several years, and in the last year and a half struggled against its recurrence in her bones. It was a long, hard fight, and Lucy stayed on her feet longer than anybody thought possible.

Since 1983, Lucy was a professor of homiletics at Columbia Seminary in Decatur. She loved to teach as much as anybody you ever knew. And as recently as a month before her death, she was still making plans for the courses she wanted to teach next fall.

Chuck Campbell, Lucy's colleague in teaching, tells about how in the last months Lucy would come in to class, she looked so frail and so pale and thin and kind of hunched over. He would look at her and think, "I don't see how she's going to be able to get through this class." But Lucy would walk into the room and sit in a chair in front of the class. And as the class would get underway, she would begin to talk. Before long, she would be moving her arms, getting up, walking back and forth, and writing on the blackboard. Chuck described this incredible transformation as she changed from being a very sick, weakened person, to a teacher filled with the vibrance and vitality of the love of her craft.

She did very well as a teacher, and left a legacy of students and colleagues, who will long remember her contributions to their lives and to the art of preaching. Her book, *Sharing the Word: Preaching in the Roundtable Church* just came out this spring. She and her husband, Gerry Cook, have an eight-year-old daughter, Lucy Mac.

My main memories of Lucy will always be from our childhood. We got to be friends when we were about twelve. Our families, like many Presbyterian preachers' families, spent summers in Montreat, North Carolina, a Presbyterian conference ground and retreat center near Asheville, North Carolina.

Lucy and I loved to hike and spend time in the woods. So many of our memories are from lazy Sunday afternoons when everything was quiet, and we would take off together into the woods.

On one such Sunday afternoon we had gone up Lookout Mountain, and decided to take the side trail off onto an old railroad trestle that went around the front ridge of the mountains surrounding Montreat. As we got over toward the spring on the trestle, we were playing some game together and chasing each other. At one point we were running along the path at a furious pace with me in pursuit of Lucy. She was some yards in front of me, when all of a sudden, she utterly vanished. I realized that she was running close to the edge of the trestle, and that she had gone clear over the edge of what looked like a pretty steep precipice. I stopped dead in my tracks, and my heart froze. I thought, "Oh, my Lord! Lucy's fallen off the cliff, and she's probably dead." A million

things started racing through my mind, and I thought, "Here I am. I'm going to have to go home and tell Lucy's parents that she's fallen off the mountain and broken her neck." With utter terror in my throat, I walked over to the edge of the trail. I crept up and peered over the ledge. And there several feet below was Lucy with her long arms and legs draped over a few rhododendron bushes. She looked up backwards, saw me peering over the edge, and started to laugh until both of us were howling. Finally, I grabbed one of her gangly arms and helped fish her over the ledge again, and we went on with our afternoon's fun.

The second memorable event is one that's emblazoned forever, not only in my memory, but in my consciousness as well. It was another Sunday afternoon, and I went running up the hill to Lucy's house. The Roses stayed in those years in a little cottage on a steep hillside, on West Virginia Terrace, which overlooked Montreat. It was just a little climb up the hill from where my family lived. I got to Lucy's house, and her father, Dr. Ben Lacey Rose, was on the front porch reading the newspaper, or something. He called for Lucy, who emerged, and we took off to see what kind of mischief we could get into for the afternoon to liven things up. Eventually we ended up at Lake Susan, the lake in the center of Montreat. There was a very strict Sunday code at Montreat. You couldn't swim; you couldn't play tennis; you weren't supposed to play cards even at home. You were supposed to do quiet, meditative things on Sunday afternoon. So the lake was a quiet place. Nobody was swimming in it. Nobody was boating on it. But as we hung around the shore, we noticed that the lock wasn't fastened on the life guard's row boat. It was lying there unused, and the oars were nearby. Hungry for a little excitement, we slipped the chain loose, turned the boat over, got the oars, and jumped in. We pushed it off from the shore and started to row. And there we were on a glorious, sunny Sunday afternoon, rowing out into the middle of Lake Susan. We thought we were hot stuff, and we were having a ball. We rowed around a little bit, and everything was quiet and nice. All of the sudden, out of the quiet stillness, there was a sound that I will never, ever, ever forget: LOOOOO—SEEE! Her name was ringing off every mountain top and range in the whole Swannanoa Valley: LOOOO—WOO—OOO—SEEE! It echoed and reverberated until it rattled my bones and filled every square inch of my consciousness. I was SURE that it was God Almighty calling from Heaven. Our hair stood on end, and before our skinny bottoms could settle back on the splintery wooden seats of that lifeboat, we had it skimming over that water like it had a motor. As we flew toward the shore it dawned on us: Dr. Rose was sitting on the front porch of the cottage on West Virginia Terrace. He must have looked over the top of his newspaper and down the hill to the center of the lake, where he saw us in the lifeboat. We were caught! No two girls ever moved any faster than we did, with or without a boat. That thing was pulled up on the shore, turned over, re-chained, the oars stored away, and we were gone.

I'm afraid that I probably left Lucy to go home by herself. I think I heard my mother calling, or something, and I believe that I left her to face her father alone. This was a serious infraction of the Montreat code: *Never* was any child to presume to take the lifeboat out on the lake. But on a Sunday afternoon it was a *real* No-No.

I don't remember what happened. I don't remember what the consequences were for Lucy, and I can't remember if Dr. Rose ever told my parents about the event, or if my fear that he would was punishment enough. But I do know that I'll never forget the sound of Lucy's name ringing out in the hills and valleys of Montreat. I've told her over the years that I know I was there when she was called. But I never knew it was supposed to be that scary.

Throughout our adulthood, Lucy and I would sometimes go long periods of time without seeing each other. But every time we did get back together, we picked up right where we had left off. When I was struggling with cancer two years ago, Lucy's cancer had been in remission for nearly two years. She came to see me several times, and her strength and vitality were a great encouragement to me.

Like Lucy's many friends, family, and colleagues, I will miss her in many ways and with gratitude. And sometimes, (when I'm in Montreat), I can almost hear her name ringing off the mountains.

Murphy Davis is a Partner at the Open Door Community.



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Book Review Corner

There Are No Children Here: the Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America

By Alex Kotlowitz

review by Carla Roncoli

"What would the world be to us if the children were no more?" asks H.W. Longfellow in a quote at the opening of *There Are No Children Here*. Indeed this book is about a place where no child should be, where the two boys whose story is told are said by their mother to "have seen too much to be children." The book follows the life of brothers Lafayette and Pharoah (spelled as such) and some of their friends, neighbors, and relatives, who reside in the Henry Homer Homes in Chicago. The boys are respectively twelve and nine at the beginning of the story which spans over a period of two years (plus an epilogue written in late summer 1990), unfolding according to the rhythms of children's life, between school years and summers off. They are among the twelve million children who are living in poverty in the most affluent and technologically advanced nation. They live within our borders, not separate like the Black homelands in apartheid South Africa, but intertwined among the strands and pockets of comfort and prosperity the rest of us enjoy. In Chicago, that means that one in every three children belongs to the "other America."

The title could as well have been "There is no peace here" or "There is no justice here". Like so many other housing projects of large metropolitan areas (including those managed by the Atlanta Housing Authority) low-income minority families are warehoused, in environments of squalor and violence, dominated by drugs and gangs, stranded by the inability of minimum wage jobs or welfare benefits to provide for safer lodging in private rentals. If a "home" is a place where one finds security, nurturance, and rest (as the middle class expects to), these children and their families are homeless, no less than those living on the streets. Most of these families aspire to, and struggle toward, leaving the streets and shelters as well as the projects, as the boys and their mother fantasize over a "white house in a quiet street."

But the book could have also been entitled "There are no dreams here": reality brutally imposes itself, inescapably, through the gun shots and screams, the blood and the sewage, the odors and fumes, the rats and the roaches, the dangers and diseases that emanate from the accumulation of generational poverty and societal abandonment. Those born and raised there see their dreams not only "deferred" (as in the famous Langston Hughes'

lines cited together with Longfellow's verses), but deteriorating and dying; they "fester like a sore" or "stink like rotten meat," like the putrefied animal carcasses discovered in the basement of the Homer Homes after years of neglect by the housing authority. "maybe it just sags, like a heavy load," like the dead body left behind by the police raid. The only sensible ambition seems that of staying alive for just a little bit longer, dodging the police gunfire and the gang beatings, the slow death brought about by drinking or drug abuse, or the summary sentences imposed on those caught in the wrong place at the wrong time as happens to so many Black youths, including the boys' older brother.

"If I grow up..." replies nine-year old Pharoah when the author asked him what he wanted to become. "I worry about dying, dying at a young age..." he told a friend three years later. Yet the boy is also the one most stubbornly protective of his childhood (by claiming to be "too little" to understand the family troubles and neighborhood threats) and, with it, his capacity to chase his dreams. He retains an innocence and an ingenuity that endears him to people and enables him to trust them, as well as the curiosity and creativity to learn and imagine and pursue a better future for himself. His earnest application of all his mental and emotional resources to win his school spelling bee, despite his stuttering problem and chaotic domestic life, is an instance of the heroism only children are capable of. That is why the kingdom of heaven is rightfully their own, and will be forever, and no housing authority will take it away from them.

Without that flicker of hope, one would even be tempted to entitle this book "There is no God here." Indeed religion plays no major role in the story, other than funerals for children's friends who are killed and hand-outs by nearby churches the family relies on when the mother temporarily loses her welfare benefits. Like many women made vulnerable by need, their mother had been sexually harassed by a minister, which turned her off from religion. But the boys, especially the young one, retain a sense of God and prayer as a resource for coping with fear and defending their loved ones. Grace flows ineffably around them, in their affection for each other and their family members, in their relatives' and neighbors' support in times of need, in their mother's determination to ensure not only survival but a better life for her children, in the dedication of a teacher or a public

defender who help keep hope alive and seek a fair chance. Even the author engenders a positive influence and agent of change in the children's lives: over the years he becomes their friend, spending time with them not just interviewing, but also playing, fishing, and hanging out. He has used the proceeds from the book sales to send them to private school and to build a trust fund for them and the other children who are portrayed in the story.

Oddly, this is revealed in a somewhat apologetic "Note on Reporting Methods" at the end of the book, where the author acknowledges that some people may see his involvement in the children's lives as a betrayal of journalistic detachment. I would rather say it constitutes an example of responsible authorship: in too many cases writers (including anthropologists) have gained fame and fortune from appropriating the voices and the stories of those whom they encounter and engage with in their work, which is all the more easy to do when the "subjects" do not have the power or means to uphold their rights to shape and share in the outcome. I would also commend the author's honesty in revealing that in at least one instance his own writing unintentionally hurt the family by alerting the welfare officials to the fact that the boys' father stayed with them at times, which led to the mother's temporary loss of benefits. But I wished that, rather than relegating his own role to a footnote (as well as to the preface and epilogue), the author would have been bolder, and broadened the framework to include his relationship with the family, with all the dilemmas and ambiguities it must have entailed: somehow the core of the book reads as if "there is no author here." Yet staying out of the way might have been a narrative strategy aimed at enhancing his characters, at preventing adults' overshadowing adolescents, who are elusive and enigmatic material to work with and write about anyway. In so doing, the book admirably succeeds in fulfilling the boys' mother's hope, that it would make us all hear, stop, and listen to the voice of the children asking for peace, justice, and the gift of childhood.

(Carla Roncoli teaches anthropology at the University of Georgia, and is a frequent contributor of book reviews for *Hospitality*.)

IF YOU PUT AN END
TO OPPRESSION,
TO EVERY GESTURE
OF CONTEMPT, AND
TO EVERY EVIL WORD;
IF YOU GIVE FOOD
TO THE HUNGRY
AND SATISFY THOSE
WHO ARE IN NEED,
THEN THE DARKNESS
AROUND YOU WILL
TURN TO THE
BRIGHTNESS OF
NOON.
ISAIAH 58:1-10

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- Bible study and theological reflections from the Base.
- Street actions and peaceful demonstrations.
- Regular retreats and meditation time at Dayspring Farm.

Contact: Elizabeth Dado, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA 30306-4212
404/874-9652; 874-7964 (fax)

Dear Friends,

The paper (*Hospitality*) comes as a big dose of emetic and vitamins, both. Thank you for the great work—sight of Murphy's smile was like multitudinous prayers heard.

We're still sweating out the sentencing date of our dear prisoners in Portland. Prayers please!

Love to all, keep the door open.

Daniel (Berrigan, SJ)
New York, NY

(Editor's note: The prisoners are the Prince of Peace Plowshares, one of whom is Fr. Berrigan's brother Philip. Since 1980, more than 136 people, including Dan, have taken part in 56 Plowshares and disarmament actions.)

To the Open Door Community,

My wife came across an article in the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* (1/29/97) about two small children who were thrown through a third-floor apartment window in Tacoma, Washington, as police responded to a domestic dispute. At the very end of the article is this sentence: "Two homeless people stripped from the waist up, used their clothing to keep the children warm until help arrived."

It concerns us that with all the negativism, brutality, shock news, and "schlock" so freely covered in excruciating detail on a daily basis by this newspaper, an article like this one which details such a kind and selfless act by two good Samaritans is buried amidst the daily tripe, and paid almost no attention at all.

Without fanfare, two homeless and nameless commit such a selfless act then quietly disappear. One sentence at the end of an obscure article; how casual. There is no fitting reward for good works, only that they be passed on.

Sincerely,

Joe Weiss
Atlanta, GA

Dear Friends,

I am six years old. I made a lemonade stand to make money for the homeless people. I give all this money to you.

Love,

Taylor Lalli
Roswell, GA

Dear Community,

The June article by Richard Schaul (*Hospitality*, June 1997) about "moving" into the religious world of the poor has stayed with me from the moment I read it while flying from L.A. to New Orleans to collect research on the life of Muddy Waters.

It made sense to me in the same way that "in this world but not of this world" speaks to me; in the way that definitions of power will never be the same any longer.

Entering into the spiritual life of God's chosen people: the poor.

Because of fellowships like your own and the hard earned knowledge that all which is not given away is lost, I expect something to happen every day (praying I'll be present and paying attention when it does).

Please keep bringing such news to the world. I can hardly find it anywhere else.

Sincerely,

Rafael Alvarez
Baltimore, MD

Dear Open Door Folks:

I have long been a reader of *Hospitality*, and it always continues to affect my life in ways that I don't understand. It is a beautiful publication.

I have been for 30 years a teacher of law. I don't think I have ever read anything more powerful on the quest for justice and the need for resistance than Ed Loring's "God Rules in Favor of the Oppressed" (*Hospitality*, May 1997). May I have permission to make several copies of this piece, as I want to give it to my first year students?

Like Bill Stringfellow, in the face of Babel, Ed Loring speaks the truth.

Peace,

Andrew W. McThenia, Jr.
James P. Morefield Professor of Law
(Washington and Lee University, School of Law)
Washington, DC

The following is a memo "FROM: A.G. THOMAS, DIRECTOR FACILITIES DIVISION," on Commissioner J. Wayne Garner's stationery to "ALL INMATES," "RE: \$10.00 INMATE CONTINGENCY FUND," "DATE: MAY 29, 1997."

As of June 15, 1997, the business office at each GDC state prison facility has been instructed to establish a contingency fund for each inmate's account in the amount of \$10.00. If you currently have \$10.00 or more on your account, on June 15, 1997, \$10.00 will be moved from your active account to establish your contingency fund. If you have less than \$10.00 on your account, the money currently on your account and money you receive in the future will be placed in this account until a \$10.00 contingency fund is built. This fund is being established to ensure that funds exist should you become obligated to the Department for any debts incurred.

The money in the contingency fund remains your money; however, you will not be allowed to spend these funds during your incarceration. At the time of your release from incarceration, if you have no outstanding debts, this \$10.00 will be released to you along with your release check. If you owe any debts for medical co-payments, damage to property, etc., the money will be applied to cover these debts in accordance with Georgia and Federal law. The Department will, of course, withdraw the money in your contingency fund at any time to pay filing fees or court costs for any lawsuits you may file if ordered to do so by a court.

Grace and Peaces of Mail

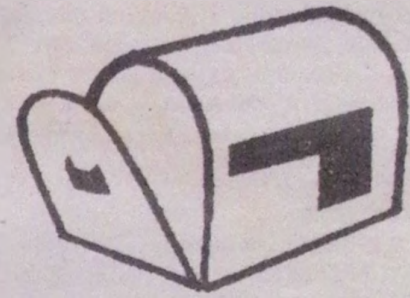


PHOTO BY JEAN SHIFRIN. ATLANTA CONSTITUTION
USED WITH PERMISSION

Our friend, Sandy Mershon, died on Sunday, July 13, 1997. Her life had been an active one and full of varied experiences. Sandy was a Catholic sister, who taught high school. After she left the order, she married John Ball and became a Quaker. Sandy served as president of the Atlanta-Fulton County League of Women Voters and director of Atlanta Clergy and Laity Concerned. She was always a presence and a voice in the struggle for justice and peace.

In the winter of 1996, Sandy received the difficult news that her cancer had recurred and was in her bones. Not long after, when the Open Door Community had a picnic and action in Woodruff Park, she came to join us, making it clear that she would put her remaining strength and energy into the justice struggle.

This treasured photo of Sandy and Ed Loring dancing was taken at that action and appeared on the front page of the local section of the *Atlanta Constitution* on March 19, 1996.

When Sandy got too weak to dance, she sat in her rocking chair, knitting caps for our homeless friends.

Sandy died in peace, with grace, and we will miss her.

WE ARE OPEN. . .

Monday through Saturday: telephones are answered from 9:00am until noon, from 2:00 until 6:00pm, and from 7:00 until 8:30pm. The building is open from 9:00am until 8:30pm those days (Both phone and door are not answered during our noon prayers and lunch break from 12:30 until 2:00). Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. **On Sunday we are open from 7:00am until noon.** Sunday afternoon our door is answered until 5:00pm.

OUR MINISTRY. . .

SOUP KITCHEN: Wednesday-Saturday, 11am-12 noon
SUNDAY BREAKFAST: Sunday morning at 9:10, 7:15am
BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST: Monday-Friday, 7:15am
SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES: Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 2-4pm (Be sure to call; schedule varies)
USE OF PHONE: Monday-Saturday, 9am-noon, 2:00pm-5pm
CLARIFICATION MEETINGS: Alternate Tuesdays, 7:30-9pm.
WEEKEND RETREATS: Four times each year (for our household and volunteers/supporters), next retreat is our Advent retreat, December 5 - 7.

Our Hospitality Ministries include: visitation and letter-writing to prisoners, anti-death penalty advocacy, advocacy for the homeless, medical services including clinic visits by Dr. Jann, daily worship and weekly Eucharist.

Open Door Community Needs

JEANS
T-Shirts
Men's Work Shirts
Quick Grits
Carpeting
Cheese
Coffee
Multi-Vitamins
MARTA Tokens
Postage Stamps
Underwear for Men
Men's Shoes (all sizes)

Disposable Razors
Women's Underwear
Toothbrushes
Deodorant
Vaseline
Towels
Socks
Shampoo
Men's Belts
Washcloths

Sandwiches
Chests of Drawers
Box Springs and
Mattresses for Single Beds
Table and Floor Lamps
Lightweight, Folding Ping Pong Table
Soup Kitchen Volunteers*
Butler St. Breakfast Volunteers*

* contact our Volunteer Coordinator, Brenda Smith at 404-874-9652

From 11am til 1:30pm, Monday through Saturday, our attention is focused on serving the soup kitchen and household lunch. As much as we appreciate your coming, this is a difficult time for us to receive donations. When you can come before 11 or after 1:30, it would be helpful. THANK YOU!

Moving?

Bulk rate mail is not forwarded by the U.S. Postal Service. Send **Hospitality**, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE, Atlanta, GA, 30306-4212, your new mailing address as soon as you know it. Please enclose the mailing label from your most recent issue. Thank you!

Open Door Community Worship

We gather for worship and Eucharist on Sunday evenings followed by supper together.

Please join us!

- September 7 5 p.m. - Short Worship with Eucharist, at 910;
5:45 - Frances Pauley,
Stories of Struggle and Triumph
Celebrating Frances' 92nd Birthday
- September 14 5 p.m. Worship at 910
- September 21 Festival of Shelters
5 p.m. - Worship at 910
(call us for details)
- September 28 5 p.m. - Short Worship with Eucharist, at 910
5:45 - Music night



If you have found **Hospitality** helpful and would like to know more about the Open Door Community, please fill out, clip and send this coupon to The Open Door Community * 910 Ponce de Leon Ave., NE * Atlanta, GA 30306-4212.

Please ADD to the **Hospitality** mailing list.

Please accept my tax deductible donation to the Open Door Community.

I'm interested in volunteering. Please give me more information.

I would like to explore a six to twelve-month commitment as a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door. Please send more information.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ + _____

Phone _____