

# THE SERVANT SONG

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## The Many-Sidedness of Nonviolent Love

by Brayton Shanley

All humans in our own imperfect way are searching to know what is true. Because we want to embrace what is truly real, we seek to know the best way to live our lives and thus make the experience of what is true for us possible. We want desperately at times to reject what seems false, what is deluded. All of the world religions and great philosophies can help us pursue this desire to know a truth to believe in, to practice, and to live by while simultaneously rejecting what is ephemeral for what is eternal. We want to imagine that this journey of discovery will be of ultimate moral and spiritual benefit, an endeavor worthy of our life's time.

As it has come down through history, nonviolence represents this search. Nonviolence is a rare term, undoubtedly coined in English by Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi sometime in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. There has always existed in English the common term for violence and its many variations, but before Gandhi, there was no term for what is *not violent*. The most universal, interfaith and cross-cultural way of getting at the meaning of that which is "not violent" is the term love, a word that compels our attention. It would be a rare being who would reject the miraculous effects of love as not true. What human, what life form doesn't need love?

Yet, love has too many self-centered meanings. A love that is nonviolent however is ordered to something elevated beyond just the things I "love." To Jesus and his Christian followers, a love that rejected all violence is "Agape," the "first love," the love of God as it is God's deepest nature to love. It is creation loved into existence for the purpose of love. For the Hindus it is "Ahimsa," a non-injurious way of being. For the Buddha it is unconditional compassion without harm for all that lives.

This unarmed love inspires one to "feed the enemy" (Romans 12:21) empowers followers to "turn the other cheek" (Matt 5:38) even in violent conflict and compels us to forgive the difficult, to forgive 70x7 times (Matt. 18:22). Agape is radically centered on the wellbeing of the other, the other "person" as well as the "other" as represented by the earth's natural world. Because "Agape" as a Greek term was not widely known in the West outside of very limited Christian circles and because love over time was reduced to self-gratifying love, this ultimate love needed a modifier. The term "nonviolent love" restored love to again mean Agape, the unconditional love of the Divine. At the same time "nonviolence" was no longer limited to a tactic of the peace activist. Combined with love, nonviolence becomes a rich and powerful term. A fact remains. Describing nonviolent love in its totality is a difficult task because it has, as Gandhi termed it, a **many-sidedness**—a force that is infinitely deep and inexhaustibly broad.

**The First Side:** Love that is Agape is a high theology and religious philosophy. The first Christian theologians Origen and Tertullian, wrote of the uncompromising nonviolence of Jesus which anti-war followers later called pacifism. The oldest spiritual tradition in Christianity, the New Testament Jesus preaches, teaches and demonstrates love that is nonviolent. James



Fowler, Christian writer of the stages of faith development, considers a nonviolent faith to be the highest expression of faith, calling it "Universalizing Faith," that knows no religious boundaries. As an ethical philosophy it can be embraced as an almost mathematical truth: In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus teaches that violence can only beget more intensified violence (Matt. 5:38-48). The Quakers say it well: "Nothing good can come of violence." To "violate" is to harm and therefore violence for any reason can never heal or truly reconcile divisions that can lead to war. Conversely there exists an equation that balances perfectly; love begets love that can only multiply love even in the face of violent hostilities. This call of unarmed love can also be found throughout the inspired scripture of Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Judaism and Islam.

**The Second Side:** Love has a profound psychological dimension. John's first epistle states "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4). Great spiritual masters often say the great psychological choice in the human condition is the choice of compassionate love over fear. How much damage has been done to us, to others and to life on earth because of our fear-driven mindsets—fear of the other, the oppressor, the rampaging enemy, fear of scarcity, deprivation, starvation, fear of financial insecurity, and the most dreaded...fear of death? Fear progressively convinces us that it is "me against the hostile and uncertain forces of the world." But if our psyches are quieted in the security of God, the love of

others, the goodness and superabundance of life, then it will be a natural choice of love over fear. The aggression of violence and alienation from the good originates in a mind dominated in its depths by the many anxieties of being alive.

**The Third Side:** Nonviolence has a well documented political history. We discover too easily a human history drenched with the violence of war with the "enemy nation." What originated with the act of throwing a spear to kill and maim the enemy has today progressed to the production and use of nuclear weapons. "Pacifism" is a term that came out of World War I, "the war to end all wars." A "pacifist" is one who rejects the violence of war unequivocally due to faith conviction or conscience. For pacifists, no war is a good or necessary war. Pacifists refuse to fight often preferring to go to jail, vigorously resist war preparations, and steadfastly protest wars in progress and some even refuse to pay war taxes. Why? Because war can only harm and traumatize and is singularly incapable of revealing and healing the underlying differences that cause conflict to become violent.

All wars regardless of "just reasons" leave lethal disagreements unresolved and pave the way for the next and more deadly hostilities that result from increased division, self-righteousness and hatred of the other side. A true nonviolent pacifist will always reject war for the embrace of truth and in the midst of conflict choose the act of reconciliation and the offer of forgiveness. Aeschylus had it very right when he uttered, "In war truth is the first casualty." The disciple of

nonviolence recognizes that the real revolution is the inner revolution. If we are curious about where wars get started, we only have to look within. As nonviolent disciples we seek not to "vanquish the enemy" but to "vanquish the enmity." Unarmed love begins and endures by a miraculous change of heart.

**The Fourth Side:** A love that is nonviolent is a day-to-day practice. As the day begins, our inner souls are cleansed and made more patient and God-molded by a daily practice of silence and meditation. In the nonviolent way "love is always patient and kind" (1 Cor. 13). This love requires the continual asceticism of inner work and self scrutiny. As we leave the prayer mat and enter each day's demands, we begin to use language to communicate. The words we speak to each other in both tone and content are weapons that have the potential to harm or can be the healing touch of Christ.

As the day's inevitable conflicts arise, a need will be apparent—the necessity to study and practice the art of nonviolent communication. Language that is nonviolent is an inspired virtue mixed with training. We choose to utter words that de-escalate violence and reject words that intensify it. In our culture, the trained mediator of conflict is beginning to assume the stature of peacemaker, skillfully keeping angry conflict out of the law courts where both sides in the "fight" can often remain suffering and un-reconciled long after the legal decision has come down through the courts.

**The Fifth Side:** Most of us have been raised on the threat of punishment. True nonviolence seeks a slow-to-anger sacrifice that avoids the knee jerk retaliation of "lex talionis," the revenge of punishment. Rejecting use of the punishing hand toward our children, we practice the highest form of self control. Punishment, the threat to inflict pain so as to influence or control behavior, is just another form of *adult to child* violence. Controlling bad behavior is the work of patience taken from the Latin "patio"—to suffer. Love here is a suffering love. We bear this inner pain of self control by listening and therefore healing the child's pain and bitterness. Our legal systems are based in this same punishment ethic often exacting revenge on the criminal wrongdoer. A nonviolent legal system would mediate differences without blame and punishment, choosing instead to see how most "criminals" are also victims of abuse and neglect. In a nonviolent "legal system" we would remand them to "penitentiaries," as the Quakers had centuries ago, places where "criminals" can be counseled, healed, enlightened with spiritual practice and trained in socially useful work.

Punishing young children only succeeds in making them angry. Punishing a grown child reared in punishment turns them antisocial. Sending a young adult from a tough childhood to prison to do punitive time for a crime keeps that person in bondage to a wounded, angry

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# Living Truth and the Unspeakable

## An Interview with Jim Douglass

*Jim Douglass, noted author of **JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters**, theologian, and nonviolent peace activist, visited Agape during his recent book tour and after giving a keynote address at the Peace Pagoda.*

**Agape:** Jim, you have been inspired to live a life of nonviolence inspired by Jesus. What were the major influences?

**Douglass:** When I wanted to be a nuclear physicist I realized that I was not only totally incompetent, but that all kinds of questions were around me and I couldn't answer them. And I just realized I was in darkness and I left the campus, told my parents I was giving up my scholarships, and I joined the United States Army at a time when I would otherwise have been drafted. In other words, I just went in a direction that seems paradoxical because I joined the Army. That opened me to a totally new life than the one already determined in relation to the influences of my parents, my schooling and my background and from that point on I decided I would just open myself to God's will and to whatever I could learn without any decision as to what I was going to do—be a nuclear physicist, be a lawyer. And I especially wanted, after twelve years of schooling, grade school, and Catholic high school, to finally learn what it meant to be a Catholic Christian and a follower of Jesus.

**Agape:** And then there was the turning point when you were teaching in Hawaii?

**Douglass:** Yes, I was teaching a course on the Theology of Peace. Dr. King was assassinated April 4, 1968. Some of my students, without my knowledge, burned their draft cards, submitting themselves to years in prison, some of which they served, and began the Hawaii resistance. They asked if I'd like to join them, as though they were very non-violent about it saying "put up or shut up Mr. Professor-of-non-violence." And I did join their group and went to jail with them and that was the beginning of the end of my academic career but a baptism into non-violence as a way of life. Through my students I had to go a new way and a longer experiment in truth meant understanding Dr. King's martyrdom as my way to life.

**Agape:** And you continued to connect this idea of non-violence and faith and Jesus.

**Douglass:** Well, Jesus' teaching was primary for me, and the faith has been liberating me, helping me realize after some study and reflection that as I see it the greatest follower of Jesus was not a Christian. He was a Hindu, Mohandas Gandhi. So to understand non-violence I haven't gone so much to doctrinal formulations which are okay, but to the way of Jesus, and in our own context, the way of Dr. King, the way of Dorothy Day, and Gandhi in particular because I think he, more than any other person I've encountered, just as Jesus did, put flesh into the non-violence of God. I think Gandhi in his experiments in truth taught us a method, a way of living the Gospel, and he's for me not only the greatest exemplar, but also the greatest theologian of nonviolence. Truth is God, just as Gandhi said and, if we go deep enough into the truth, we're going into the presence and transforming power of God.

**Agape:** So you have a history with nonviolence, beginning in the sixties with Vietnam and then to the resistance of nuclear weapons and civil disobedience. You write

books on non-violent theology. What did you learn from this journey into peace?

**Douglass:** If you're trying to understand the signs of Providence, the invitations of people, the presence of God and of grace they're going to keep leading you into deeper dimensions of truth. I keep getting surprised where I end up. But then, I look back and see, well, that's where it was leading all the time. For example, I would never have imagined writing a book about President John F. Kennedy. I'm not



a historian, I've never studied history as a major, nor have the ability to write a history or investigate a crime. I don't have any of the skills for that. But then, I think back and realize that the things I wrote before then I wrote in an effort to see the historical Jesus. As you're going along God gives you what you need and the questions you need to follow.

**Agape:** So you spent the last fifteen years on this book **JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters**. What is the thesis of the book?

**Douglass:** It is a revelation of the story, which is not my story, and it's not even John F. Kennedy's story, and it's certainly not a story that got invented by anybody. It is that a miracle happened. The most critical moment, perhaps in history, when two enemies were on the verge of total nuclear war, annihilating what we're looking at now outside this window at the worst point in that crisis, turned to each other and recognized they needed to join together and acknowledge the truth of his enemy.

The truth stretched across the gulf in that instance, in the Cold War, between two polarized ideologies and two huge power blocks, and the greatest and most destructive military forces in history. And because John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev as enemies overcame their alienation from each other and because they turned to each other they had more in common with each other from that point on than either had with their own national security state. So, I can find hope in Dallas, Texas where the President of the United States was assassinated. It happened because

he was willing to die for the truth. It happened because the national security state felt it was necessary to kill him because he was a traitor. I can take hope in that event because Kennedy's courage made it possible for us to sit here and hope and work and struggle for a world that continues to be here and so that all of us on this planet still have a say in it. He turned in the traditional, biblical, gospel sense of "turning."

**Agape:** So what happened November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas?

**Douglass:** Kennedy's security was withdrawn. He was driven into a trap. He had been set up. The entire context was being controlled. Intelligence people were everywhere. All the major agencies of his government were being manipulated. Secret

behind it. They do not want us to see the connections in a way that would allow us to understand that 1963 is right now. But of equal of importance is the "unspeakable" in us, our reluctance to go there. For example, a simple question: Who paid for the assassination of John F. Kennedy? Once we understand the profound and overwhelming involvement of our government the answer is very simple. We did. We paid for the assassination of John F. Kennedy, we, the citizens of the United States with our tax dollars. That raises a lot of questions about complicity, about responsibility, about what I do on tax day, April 15. What do I do every day of my life in terms of giving over my power to other people to make the decisions about life or death whether it be in Afghanistan or Iraq or on the streets of Dallas or across from the Lorraine Motel where shots were fired to kill Dr. Martin Luther King (which was also paid for by us, citizens of this country)? We're

basically giving over those decisions to forces of the unspeakable because we don't want to recognize that it all comes back to us.

**Agape:** If we were to speak the "unspeakable," would there be a fear of moral and political collapse of a nation? Is this fear so deep that it has paralyzed us as a people in falsehood or denial for 47 years?

**Douglass:** It is. It is so deep that the best people in the peace and justice movement do not want to go there. It is so strong that it includes the people we most trust. We might turn on the radio and say: "This is one program that will really explore the truth." But you won't find that program

going there when it comes to the hardest questions like the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. You won't find some of my best friends, who I respect profoundly, going there.

**Agape:** Is there hope that these facts about the Kennedy assassination might change our ability to confront the "unspeakable," even that we might confess our fear of the "unspeakable"?

**Douglass:** My hope is for the ability to see, for new eyes. A phrase that came when Robert Ellsberg and I were working on the introduction to the book was "contemplative history." It's not as if you study what happened to Kennedy in order to do something, like have a new investigation of the assassination. That's not going to work because the resources that would go into that are the actual sources of the assassination. Now that I understand what happened to Kennedy and what he did so that nuclear war wouldn't happen to us, I see things very differently and very hopefully. So if you go deeply enough into the darkness there's light. Or if you reach the point where you're going to, as Gandhi said, commit yourself to an experiment in truth without reservation as to the consequences, your eyes are not only opened, but there's a new possibility. If you're going to try, as

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# Witness

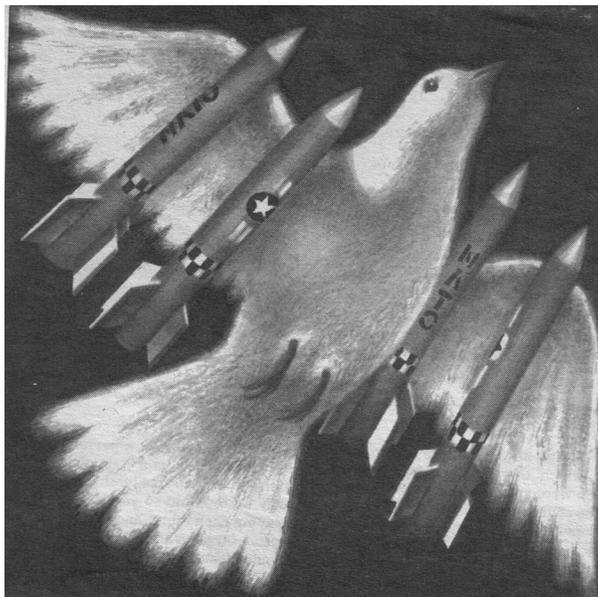
## Barnes Air Force Base Air Show Witness

by Daniel Sicken

It was a Sunday in late August. The intense rain was blowing nearly horizontal across the runway and into the crowd at the final day of the Westfield International Air Show at Barnes Air Force Base just west of Springfield, MA. The rain didn't seem to faze the sightseers who were mesmerized by biplanes flying upside down and fighter jets twisting while in formation. We were all soaked from the waist down despite the partial protection of umbrellas. However, the rain made it easier for the three of us to enter the parking area with ease, and then walk to what seemed like a mile-long display of military aircraft. Some were old, some new, and many were very, very dangerous to any perceived enemy.

Which one would we choose? That was the only unanswered question that remained for me and my two co-conspirator friends, Brayton Shanley and Walter Schwarz. Walter, 84, avowed atheist and retired airline pilot, was identifying the older aircraft that he recalled from his flying days. Then we saw it—a fully equipped fighter-bomber on display in an open bay hanger. We scurried to the side of the hanger, sheltered from the wind, where we each pinned a large single-lettered banner to our bodies. Then we stood in front of the fighter-bomber.

Something isn't right with the



Ray Barkus

visuals which consisted of square pieces of cloth with bold dark letter, which, in this case, erroneously spelled out DMW, (Dept. of Public Works) instead of WMD (Weapon of Mass Destruction). We quickly changed

positions. Success at last! A great wave of satisfaction swept over me as we tried to hold up another banner that we all agreed on, "Jesus Weeps," but the wind was too intense to keep the banner in place.

Our goal was to publicly name these mass death machines for what they truly are, and we did that. A bonus ensued. We must have stood there for at least 20 minutes as people passed by with surprised looks. There was only one negative comment, though. Then the Barnes Air Base police arrived. We expected that arrest was possible, but not likely, since we did not plan on refusing to leave. The Air Force captain told us that we would be escorted off the base.

So, off we walked, with a heavily-armed airman, the captain, and a Westfield police officer on a bicycle at the rear. I marveled at how engaged in conversation we were with the captain—a dialogue, not a monologue. The nonviolent Jesus was in the conversation and how we all are called to be nonviolent, often at great personal risk to ourselves.

As we drove off the base, I thought to myself, "How wonderful it is that the three of us engaged the military powers in this simple action, this witness; when we are so diverse in faith and belief, yet united in our common humanity". Isn't that what Jesus was all about?

*Daniel Sicken, a friend of over 20 years, a Plowshares participant who has spent several years in jail, is also a Air Force veteran.*

### Jim Douglass Interview Continued from page 2

Gandhi would put it, to really get to the heart of a realization of the power of truth which is the power of God, Truth is God, then you have to go wherever the darkness leads you.

**Agape:** So Jim, you are saying unequivocally that JFK was a unique President, morally courageous and influenced by his Christianity as he stood up to his own national security state and his generals, which is somewhat without historical precedent. He wanted to end the war in Vietnam, looked to abolish nuclear weapons and finally end war as we know it. He was planning to pursue rapprochement with Castro through Khrushchev, who were our political enemies. What is the moral, political and historical significance of this almost five decades later?

**Douglass:** When he was President, I didn't look to John Kennedy as a source of light. Take Barack Obama today, who many people championed when he was running for office. They now feel totally disillusioned because he has chosen to escalate the war in Afghanistan and in numerous other ways has moved in directions that contradict the tradition they think he espoused when he was running for office. If we look into Kennedy's history as it was given to us, we didn't expect him to do what he did. We didn't expect grace to work in that way. We didn't think, depending on what our political allegiances were, whether we were conservative or liberal or radical, whether we were on the Soviet

side or the American side. Human beings were not expected to have the kind of grace that they did in that crisis. What I'm trying to say is that we cannot give up on Barack Obama, and we cannot give up on ourselves. We cannot give up on the total transformation of grace that is present in the moment. And grace has happened in the case of Kennedy and Khrushchev to an inconceivable degree. We can understand that the same possibility exists right now for each of us for the vision of Dr. King for a nonviolent revolution and for Barack Obama being willing to go the distance, which of course would mean Dallas for him in one form or another. Then we should recognize that we need to go to Memphis with Dr. King.

**Agape:** Would you agree that Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King, Gandhi, are not encased in a power that is the United States government, a world dominating economic power backed up by a invincible military that protects that economic domination. All these men you mention, John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and Khrushchev are leaders of these empires. To change these governments in the direction of nonviolence would take a miracle. What do we do then with a Barack Obama? Do we dialogue with him, do we pray for him? Do we vote for him?

**Douglass:** What about Mr. Bush that preceded him? Or let's back up further and say how about Nixon or...? It's a question that goes deeper than what might be considered the most hopeful representative of the presidency. Do we dialogue with someone in a position we think is not going to be helpful to us and

that is pervaded by the intrinsic evil of the system? Sure, why not. Gandhi would talk with him. He did—he wrote Churchill a letter. It is not who you talk with but what you say to that person and whether it's possible to do it both truthfully and lovingly at the same time. The question that is paramount to me in that respect is: Can we believe that grace can happen anywhere with anyone? I think Dorothy's answer to that was "yes," and for St. Francis of Assisi, it was "yes." In the Catholic Worker movement we have a tendency to be so rightly suspicious of the power, but we may not allow grace to be there in ways that would help us.

**Agape:** Gandhi did say at the end of his life: "We must all stay together aloof from power or politics. Anyone who goes into it is contaminated." How do we not become contaminated and how do we not go for false hope politically?

**Douglass:** Gandhi didn't have any great hope that by Nehru becoming prime minister of India things were going to go toward a non-violent future but that didn't mean he didn't have his friend Nehru over to dinner the next night. These are different things. You can dialogue with anyone without aspiring to a position of power or thinking that the system that person is a part of is going to make a difference. The reason you dialogue with a person is because you see that the person has the hope of being way beyond the system that is all around, him or her. And Gandhi never ceased being a politician. At the same time, he never ceased saying that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

**Agape:** So the one in power would come toward a Gandhian figure, one who might not seek out such a person with allegiance to the power structure. Talk, yes, but the hope is more of a moral or spiritual movement toward peacemaking.

**Douglass:** That is right but that doesn't mean Gandhi doesn't write to Churchill. He didn't care what people thought. He wanted to follow the will of God and his calling. Even George Bush, while he was in office, did good things while he did totally horrific things like everybody else. He has different sides. He is a human being. If you have a purpose that can somehow support or encourage or allow grace to work through you to redeem that part of that human being where he/she might not ordinarily go politically and spiritually, because you believe in him/her, then do it, whether it's George Bush or Hitler or Barack Obama or anyone in-between.

**Agape:** Therefore we want to encourage Obama to become courageous in the Kennedy mode.

**Douglass:** But recognize that if he were to do that, that's the end of Barack Obama as the President of the United States. He might be less than a four year president. It's the beginning of Barack Obama as a transforming vision.

# An Exercise in Vulnerability: Francis Day at Agape—Women and War

by Suzanne Belote Shanley

Issues of war related grief, the failure to grieve, and the toll of war on women raise disturbing questions about American women's acceptance, rejection or dismissal of the devastation of our successive and



Robynn Murray, Iraq Veterans Against the War

current wars. My own personal history includes sitting in reverential silence as my father turned the pages of his WWII photo album, commenting on the "Japs" in a vague and not totally hostile way. During many a drunken reverie, he pulled out his souvenir bullets and shells from New Guinea and Australia, while we four children looked on in wide-eyed admiration.

Yet, never once did my father speak of the effects of his separation from my mother and their son, Harry, my older brother, born while my father was "away" for three years. Eventually, my mother shared how she had cried her heart out during that time, believing that the stress of it all caused her kidney cancer. She responded nonetheless as most women



Ban Al Mahfodh, Iraq citizen during two wars

did during WWII, with a heroic and stoic embrace of the "Good War" while she was left alone on an Army base, pregnant with her first child.

The subject of "Women and War" became central on Francis Day 2010, as we decided to hear from women who had experienced war first hand, and those who are resisting it through action and non-cooperation. We anticipated the difficulty for women

from Iraq and Afghanistan when meeting a American woman Iraq war veteran. Our intentions were to listen to the suffering, but we also recognized that we are perpetrators of their pain.

Seeking to create a community of witness and support, we hoped ultimately to rescue from the rubble of shattered lives, something transcendent, transforming, through an "exercise in vulnerability" which Parker Palmer identifies as the fruit of creative teaching. We hoped that Agape could be, once again, "a space in which obedience to the truth is practiced."

Carolyn West, of the UMass Medical School's Center for Stress Reduction and frequent wisdom guide at Agape, acknowledged the dramatic intensity of what we were all about to hear and the subsequent collective upheaval we might all undergo. She opened the event with a meditation to

assist us in discarding the habits of mind that block clarity of vision.

Prior to Carolyn's opening, Paula Green, skilled practitioner of nonviolent conflict resolution, founder of the Karuna Center and professor at the School for International Training in Brattleboro, VT and the women who would be present to each other's pain throughout the day. As I looked

into the faces of these fragile and wounded sisters, I thought that only the language of poetry would suffice, "poetry as pity, the pity of war" in the words of poet Wilfred Owen slain in WWI.

Robynn Murray, an Iraq vet, in her mid-twenties, attractive, tattooed and restless, was riveting to watch as she confided her nervousness about meeting Ban Al-Mahfodh, a victim of American's carnage in Iraq (1991-2003). Ban sat across from Robynn, sad, mournful and restrained, as Robynn sobbed intermittently, remembering details of her 100 combat missions in Iraq. Both Robynn and Ban had anticipated this moment, but now that it was here, the reality was charged with anguish and inexpressible, palpable grief.

Paul Hood, a WWII veteran, and an old friend and resister, acted as Robynn's anchor as she, pulsating with emotion, disclosed her recent stint in drug rehab. Both Ban and Robynn were suffering from PTSD (post traumatic stress disorder), each finding her way to The Joiner Center in Boston, where solutions to war are explored with an emphasis on healing. Journeying through the landscape of recovery, Robynn, raw and revelatory, barely able to contain her heartbreak, and Ban, in stark contrast reserved, nearly expressionless, protecting herself from disclosure, looked at each other with eyes of compassion.

As people began to gather under the Agape tent with a few minutes until starting time, I brought Habinomana Matirde from Burundi/Rwanda, who speaks no English, into our circle. Matirde's elegant native dress, her colorful headscarf, interior calm and dignity, gave us a taste of a beauty so visceral that it stabilized for a moment our splintered hearts.

Once we joined those under the tent, Paula addressed "the tragic tale of humankind's propensity to make war and the statistics of women as victims of those wars." With authority and compassion she noted that women are "primary victims of war" but then also "secondary" victims as the men who fight in war often "become alcoholic, drug-addicted, and domestically violent."

I could personally identify with these words, as did Miyako Taguchi, our first soul-sharer ("speaker" as a word to describe these sisters seems woefully inadequate) who is a second-generation daughter of Hibakusha, or survivors of the A bomb. Miyako had never spoken publicly about her difficult childhood, her parents suffering both physically and psychologically from the after-effects of the bomb. Miyako's mother pleaded with: "Tell my story," which Miyako related in graphic detail, stretching our impoverished imaginations as she recalled the agony of tens of thousands of people under the bomb. Miyako, had become our teacher, "obedient to the truth" in hesitant little breaths, wiping her eyes, giving voice to the voiceless with many first generation Hibakusha dead or dying.



Matirde left with son Emmanuel middle - Survivors of Burundi - Rwanda Refugee Camps, Dancing.

We held Miyako in our hearts in a moment of silence, a practice we continued throughout the day after each speaker. This silence prepared us for Matirde's story of 19 years in refugee camps, living in the woods. With unassuming directness, her son Emmanuel translating at her side, Matirde related the unutterable—rape, murder and pillage during the



Maryam Shanshab, Afghan-American

Rwandan genocide. An attractive woman in her 60's, her physical beauty and haunted expression accentuated by the robust colors of her native dress, awed and inspired us.



Miyako Taguchi, daughter of Japanese Hibakusha

machine gunner, not fully trained, and sexually assaulted, no response from the officers to this, little follow-up care, into drugs, suicide, just out of

rehab. "I became a monster. I had lost my humanity," Robynn cried out.

Skip concludes: "And then what saved her was discovering her writing gift. 'This turned my life around.' She looked wobbly. Later she sat in full view with her boyfriend, leaning against him, on his shoulder, smoking, looking dejected. She is not clear yet of her horrors."

After Robynn's electrifying testimony, the measured cadence and hushed tones of Ban Al-Mahfodh's restraint became a teaching on the silencing that results from war and its psychic devastation. Ban is actively engaged in peace missions of reconciliation, a part of her journey into the transformation of her suffering.

## From Vulnerability, Through Suffering, to Action and Resistance

The afternoon brought us the clear, emphatic voice of Maryam Shansab, a young research scientist at Tufts, who came to the US from Afghanistan in 1985. Maryam conveyed her frustration as an Afghan-American observer of the political scene of unremitting obfuscation and lies, castigating the elitism and isolation of many in academia, removed from the severing of people's lives in war. Her youthful beauty energized her remarks, specifically addressed to young people (about 50 students from area colleges) as she urged them to become "educated on the issues of war and peace."

Martha Hennessy, the seventh grandchild of Dorothy Day, quoted her grandmother's biting critique of President Truman who was "jubilant" after news of the success of the Hiroshima bomb: "Truman was a true man of his time in that he was jubilant. ... We have killed 318,000 Japanese. ... It is to be hoped they are vaporized, scattered, men, women and babies, to the four winds, over the seven seas." Martha bore a remarkable physical resemblance to her grandmother, as she gave voice to Dorothy's resistance which she now claims, including civil disobedience and her opposition to war throughout her life.

One of the favorite soul-sharers among the youth that day was Amanda Daloisio, thirty-five year old mother of two young children who had lived in Catholic Worker houses of hospitality for eight years. In 2005 with 24 other people, she upheld the lineage of pilgrimage witness by walking "for four days camping in the yards of people...celebrating daily mass until we reached the Cuban military fence" and the men held behind it in Guantanamo Bay. Engaging in a "24 hour vigil for four days," for the detainees, the group had "fasted, gone to jail, and made sure the detainee's stories were recorded in some way."

"Having children" has changed her perspective on war Amanda commented, as she moved from hearing "heartbreaking stories of women living in war zones" to being "pushed" to unite with a mother of one of the Guantanamo "disappeared" by

"visualizing" her, following "her footsteps as she has waited."

Shortly after Francis Day, Marilyn Penny, a member of a peace group in Little Compton, Rhode Island, offered these reflections on the soul sharing: "The speakers, profound and



Smith and Stonehill College Women-Dancing African

courageous, took us down very dark and difficult places. I usually resist this; I find it frightening, but I knew we had to go there with them, to accompany them, walking with them and holding them, privileged to do so."

Marilyn reflected too on "women who through the years have gone to the 'front' of this peace building movement," who "opened our eyes, stripped us of arrogance and yet challenged us to show up, no doubt in our smaller probably far less dramatic way." Some aspects of the pain expressed caused Marilyn to ask: "Who is holding them? Did they suffer, too, the intense loneliness of those who see a little bit more than the rest, are prompted by more clarity,



Ali Sabah and Omar - Planting Tree

more courage to respond to a deeper call from within?"

Mitigating some of the pain, the dancers and musicians of The Association for Burundian Solidarity in Massachusetts (ABUSMA), ranging in age from pre-school to older women, had all of us dancing, clapping and raising our voices in animated joy, bodies and souls lifting in movement and praise, all after years of suffering

in refugee camps and struggles with relocation in Springfield, MA.

The interfaith prayer service included a violin solo performed by Anna Culver, a junior from Smith College who had joined Rachel Ravina (a summer intern at Agape) and an

intercollegiate cappella choir for the day's music, while a circle of grief enclosed Ali and Omar with their father Sabah Kader, as together, they planted a tree in memory of their wife and mother, Suad Salaman. (Details of an American attack on the family are shared in this issue of Servant Song, by Eleanor Maclellan RSCJ, part of an Agape support team for them.)

At Omar's suggestion, we passed around a photograph of Suad's in her traditional scarf, allowing us to grieve openly the cost of war as we watched the boys and their father, shovel dirt into the hole dug for the tree. Drained, uplifted and chilled in the late October afternoon, as we departed from our space circle, having heard the voices

of the victims of war, we pledged to act on their behalf, those whose voices we had heard, and those who remain voiceless.

# Canticles of Silence

## A Late Start

by Ellen Finnigan

It is a Tuesday and some community members have already driven off to give talks; Nathan and Jake are cutting wood by the garden. In the strange, unseasonably warm weather, I turn and walk away from them into the forest, past the piled cords of wood, which I don't suppose will be needed today, past the frog pond where in late summer Omar and Ali, wielding their bright nets, trenchantly dragged me by the hand through the mud. Dead leaves now float there like aging lily pads, liver-spotted and dulling. I walk under the maple tree that a few days ago rose like a siren outside my window, a shock of red, now, after a hailstorm, depleted, its adequate brown bones exposed behind a thinning cover of color. The trail is papered over by leaves, wet from dew and rotting, making it slick, while the highest ones, still bonded to their trees, are lit up far overhead, a vaulted, incandescent ceiling. Surely I am not the first to compare a forest on a fall morning to a cathedral, with all its shapes and lights.

Tree roots curve over the dirt path, creating a staircase and secure footing on the slippery trail. I rely on them. Though one can see farther now than one could in summer, when the forest was lush and thick with green, this recent thinning out, this wearing of the forest, has littered the trail with autumn's debris, making the trail harder to see, so I keep veering off course, into the brush. Luckily though, now, in this later season, I can see my destinations through sparser branches; I have learned at least how to keep certain things in my sights. I hike up.

I am getting a late start—it is already mid-morning—for my hermitage day. You see, when it came time to leave, to go be alone and pray, when there was all this waiting for me out here, the gem-blue sky and the autumn scenes and freedom from daily routines, there was a sudden urge to take care of all of the mundane tasks I'd been avoiding. Had to empty the



David Kleit

wastebasket, organize the Tupperware cabinet, return that email from two months ago from a person I haven't seen in seven years. (You might understand: The Tupperware really had become a situation.) But, though late, I am now on my way.

The leaves, too damp, don't crunch. One small creature darts, making the forest briefly twitch. Then, again, it is still. Very

little wind. Footsteps resound on the wooden stairs. The door is never locked.

I have been to the hermitage twice before and twice have been transformed. To tell you the truth, I come here for repair. I am damaged. I get lost.

I set down my books, sit in a chair in the corner, look around. Inside it smells of incense and stove fire. The bed is neatly

made. The kettle is set to go. Nothing here directing you. Cobwebs glisten between the screen and the window pane, and at first, there is the vague feeling of boredom. Too dark. Too still. Thoughts of "Here we go again" or "Do I have to?" But that passes.

When it is time, I rise from the chair and approach the ladder. The ladder is maybe my favorite part about the hermitage. I could write an entire essay about that ladder. For now, though, it will suffice to say that I climb, and it is a bit precarious, a bit of a physical struggle, slightly awkward and troublesome, because I'm carrying my rosary and the ladder is creaking and I'm afraid of slipping and falling off. At the top, I'm on my knees, crawling, (more creaking), and the connection with the place where I entered, the room down below, feels tenuous, because the only thing connecting me to it is that ladder, an ancient tree.

I crouch in the dark, high cave, on the soft, red carpet, and approach the tiny altar, behind which a small window looks out over the trees. The view is mostly obscured by a stained-glass cross and a picture of Jesus. One does not climb into this loft for the scenery. I light a candle, a stick of incense. The smoke curls softly up.

And then, there it is, again, the feeling of having gotten too late a start, maybe too late a start in all of this, having spent too much time getting and spending, laying waste my powers. The feeling of shyness: I can only kneel; I can only look. And then, the silence teaches me that it's okay: My powers, without this, were never much to begin with. And so I begin again, anew, and am on my way.

*With an advanced degree in writing, Ellen, a "nine-monther" as we say here at Agape, has just completed the writing of a book.*

## Circle of Being

### Discovering Tolstoy at Agape

by Nathan Kleban

During college, reading Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* aroused in me feelings that I wasn't able to coherently put into thoughts or words. Through much contemplation, I was able to make some sense of the emotions. Tolstoy's ideas on love, especially in his treatise *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, intrigued me. I attempted to understand his stance on religion, specifically in his *A Confession*, as I did not have any stance. He sought meaning in life, without which meaning suicide became his only option out of the despair. To this end he began to believe in "God," which created the necessary meaning. With my conception of God being the "man in the

sky," Tolstoy's reasoning was too great a leap for me to make myself.

Once college ended, I decided to join the Peace Corps. Given an interest in pursuing an agricultural placement, I desired to work on a farm before departing overseas. Through WWOOF (Willing Workers On Organic Farms), I explored the options. There were many organic farms, but one stuck out because of its focus on nonviolence, the Agape Community. Given my great interest in Tolstoy and the enthusiasm for him shared by those at Agape, the community seemed like a perfect fit for me.

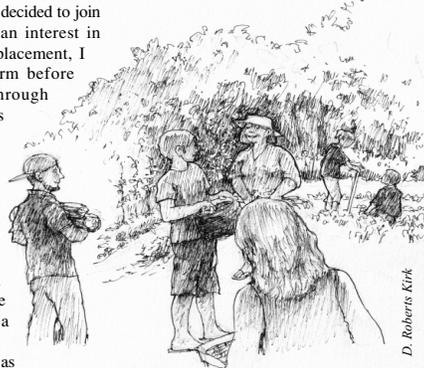
At first I was hesitant as Agape's website is liberally sprinkled with religion. Back home in Kentucky, my perception was that when it came to religion, the "crazy" and much more religious ones were the Protestants with their mega churches

and creationism; Catholics I knew weren't as religious, but rather attended church as tradition and didn't pay much mind to religious matters otherwise. I saw Catholicism as a toned down religion, so the Catholicism of Agape was not as worrying

observance among other things, so I may feel very out of place. But with the Tolstoy connection, I would not give up on Agape for anything.

There was also a fear that Agape may be a cult, a group which zealously follows strange and dangerous customs. Still, I took the plunge and drove up that dark, intimidating driveway one cold September evening. Since arriving, Brayton assured us, "We're Catholic. We don't have cults." We still joke about it though. A fellow intern responded to a relative's query for photos, "I slept through prayer the other morning and they locked me in the basement for a week of 'reflection.' I'm out now though, so I'll get those pics up real soon!"

I have since found there are many interesting aspects to religion, which I had once both laughed and frowned upon. I had regarded prayer as silly, laughing at those who prayed for the sick in hopes that prayer would heal them. While there are still those, in my mind, ineffectual aspects of prayer, the daily prayer does give direction to the day as it contains much food for thought. Furthermore, prayer to me is not so much asking for another to solve the problems of



D. Roberts Kirk

as it might have been.

I was repeatedly warned by the cofounders that Agape was religious, with prayer three times a day and strict Sabbath

*Continued on page 7*

The Many-Sidedness of Nonviolent Love

Continued from page 1

and violent past. It is our punitive society that must condemn, incarcerate and execute that is "imprisoned." In its quick instinct for the violent solution, the law courts backed up by a fearful citizenry believe that only inflicting pain can prevent wrongdoing and protect society from the dangers of violence. The reality of a high rate of criminal recidivism proves opposite; only love, compassion and mercy will heal them (and us) and set them free from their anger and the anti-social behavior it breeds.

The Sixth Side: In the sacred endeavor to live non-injurious lives of compassion we awaken to one unalterable truth—All life is one. In the last decades of the 20th century into the 21st, to be nonviolent only referred to humans learning to live without injuring or killing, other humans. To love unconditionally, however, one now must embrace that life which exists in the absence of any political power, namely the natural world and its fragile ecosystems.

Nonviolent peace activism that stands in opposition to our society's plague of violence cannot simply remain in the

historically limited framework of anthropocentrism, that is, human beings mediating their life on earth only with other human beings. When humans consider themselves and their intelligence to be the highest and most significant life form their domination and sense of superiority over other life forms, can be another death dealing oppression. There are environmental facts that show that humans haven't just done violence to each other, they have plundered the earth.

In the 21st century, we humans represent six billion strong. In our centralized urban populations, with our over reliance on fossil fuels, our fear of scarcity has encouraged us to use the earth as a "thing," to plunder her for our own survival or advantage. We overproduce, hoard and protect all the things we have convinced ourselves we need. To truly love is to experience life as one, a sacred and fragile web. To seek the truth of nonviolence, we can't dominate any living thing. We might, as a spiritual practice, emulate St. Francis of Assisi, Patron Saint of Ecology and seek not the highest, but the lowest place on this earth. In seeking the lowest place, we can begin to discover our rightful place with all earth's creatures and

her ecosystems. When we humans find our true place with all of created existence, then we will celebrate the Divine and the Divine Plan for all of creation. This humble love will restore us to our original goodness—to know by experience the sacredness of all life. We can protect this sanctity only with this love that is nonviolent.

To be authentic, nonviolent love and its "many sides" needs to be lived. This living truth is also historical in that seekers since Jesus and those who came before him have sacrificed greatly to live in this spirit. They have refused wars and have been martyred, like Austrian conscientious objector Franz Jaggerstatter who refused induction into Hitler's army. They have stood up to economic and racial oppression like Martin Luther King Jr. They have lived with the poor and refused to support the drum beat to war against Nazi Germany, like Dorothy Day. They have loved their oppressors into friends like Mahatma Gandhi. Those who seek peace have cultivated the quiet beauty of compassion like the Buddha, through a fierce commitment to the introspection of mindfulness and meditation. When we know and study this history we begin to make it our own.

But we need to be duly warned—nonviolent love becomes a lasting truth only by way of practice. In practicing these techniques, we experience the powerfully reconciling effects of its language and disciplined love of the enemy. As handed down from the ancient Sufis and Yogi's through the Hebrew Prophets and the first Christian Communities to the modern Quakers, seekers of peace recognize that authentic peace begins by remaking ourselves. We spread peace each day by the way we live, the words we choose to speak, and the powerless outcasts we choose to stand with.

Nobody is born fearless and the ways of change from violent to nonviolent are not easily made in our culture of privilege and the violence that protects that privilege. Therefore, we need to pray earnestly from the deepest part of our yearning heart for the strength and courage to make this peace a reality. Our prayers will protect those delicate currents of compassion while we progressively forsake the myriad forms of violence we have been conditioned to rely on, replacing them with the "many sides" of this loving kindness that is nonviolent.

Discovering Tolstoy at Agape

Continued from page 6

the day, but to allow us to be more mindful of problems so we ourselves can solve them. If I remind myself of a problem often enough, I may be more likely to search for a solution and do something rather than forget about it.

Since the time of these feelings first aroused in me from my reading of Tolstoy and through subsequent feelings as well, I have come to the tentative conclusion that the truth in life is love, at least that it is approximately the truth.

The ideal of the brotherhood and sisterhood of man and woman, and nonviolent love are both ways of getting at it. But I am still questioning what love means exactly. I may not be able to convince myself that love is the absolute truth (I have yet to nail down precisely what it means), or that I could ever find any truth, which is why I still call myself an agnostic.

Since finding the idea of love within me, others have shown themselves to share similar ideas. It is in this sense that they call themselves religious. Religion, which I had previously viewed

as black and white, became much more nuanced, revealing a much larger spectrum of colors.

So I could perhaps call myself religious. Truth is God, and the approximation of Truth is Love (in some form which I am still exploring). Insofar as I base my actions on something, if that constitutes belief, I believe in God. Perhaps this isn't enough. Perhaps I'm just trying to join the crowd. I don't know. But I have found I share much in common with many more people, who I had regarded as foolish for believing such things.

Even those who claim to lack religious belief, in the sense that I apply it to myself, I think they have it. Some say they live solely to survive and procreate, as our evolutionary history may suggest. I believe we operate by a higher principle (I don't mean "higher" in the sense that there is some being in control of everything, but that it is more than simply surviving). For me, I didn't acknowledge my underlying principles until searching more deeply within myself. Digging deeper, I may find I am actually operating by a "lower" ideal, but so far love remains my truth.

## Voices

I often think about how liberating it is to realize that Christianity as it exists today was not even a concept in Christ's time; Jesus did not define himself by a religion; he was defined by the trajectory of his life, by his impassioned pacifism and wisdom, his cutting voice of truth and love. I realized here that I am still very deeply Christian – the problem is simply that fundamentalist and evangelical traditions no longer resonate with me; I really believe that every individual's religion is vastly different because our notion of God can only be as large as our experience... and that we should celebrate and learn from that diversity.

*Rachel Ravina was a summer intern at Agape through the Smith College Praxis program. Rachel was a dynamo in the garden, harvesting and steaming vegetables, and shared her love of C.S. Lewis and her abundant musical talent during daily prayer and Scripture reading.*

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I think that taking such a radical stance is something that will work for some people but that is not a viable or practical option for others. Some of us are too connected to other people and family members and careers to be

able to renounce the way of life to which we've become accustomed. However, this sort of drastic measure is what's necessary to get people's attention and begin a social movement that will result in positive changes for the environment.

It is note-worthy that the money spent on war each year could otherwise be adequate for many other meaningful activities. It can help every child on earth to go to school; it may be spent to feed the hunger; it is enough to improve the impoverished environment; it can also be spent on investing for research to find renewable resources, which are gradually depleted by humans' over exploitation. Furthermore, I personally think that a person who insists on non-violence is often environmentally friendly, and vice versa.

*These comments came from students in a class on environmentalism taught by Nikki Strong at St. Olaf's College, MN, where Suzanne and Brayton taught a seminar on Sustainability last April. They will return to St. Thomas College in April, 2011.*

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I am finding every day to be a new adventure here in Jerusalem... I have made my home in a hostel right outside of the Damascus Gate leading into the Old City. It is located in East Jerusalem, which is mostly populated by Palestinians. I love it here.. the

vibrant culture of families, sounds, colors, smells.

I visited a neighborhood last week called Sheik Jarra, where I met a man named Nasser. He and his family have been living in a tent for over half a year outside of the house that he built and once lived in with his family. After a long process of (clearly corrupted) court hearings in which he was asked to present papers validating his ownership of this home, he and his family were evicted so that a Jewish settler family could move into their home. Listening to him explaining his situation (which countless other Palestinian families have experienced in the past AND recently) left me in disbelief.

*Alicen Roberts, a Smith College Junior, sent this email to Agape during a summer trip. Alicen is co-founder of Spirituality in Action at Smith College, members of whom have shared their many talents at Agape.*

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As soon as our mission team arrived at Agape we were informed of our schedule for the next few days, which included working in the garden, collecting wood, cooking, cleaning, and of course many group discussions. Another condition we had to follow was that all electronics had to be shut off, that included phones and iPods, but surprisingly we didn't really miss them. We took part in conversations without any interruption of ringtones

and with the four guitars that accompanied us on the trip; we were able to make our own music. It was only five days that we stayed at the Agape community in Massachusetts. Yet, we as group and as individuals had grown so much within those five days that it's hard to believe it happened in that short amount of time. Agape provided us all with peace, peace with the environment, with animals, with others and with ourselves; and we recognized how it all intertwines. At Agape we learned to close our eyes and open our hearts.

*Megan Jahoda was a team leader for a group of students from Iona College in New Rochelle, NY, who are returning this spring for another rural immersion.*

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I am grateful for the Hermitage, a simple, solid way station on my life's journey. On this occasion, its wood-hewn walls and floors absorbed tears of grief on the passing of two close friends. Surrounded by the verdant green of late summer ferns and trees in full bloom, I felt cradled and soothed as I heard the gentle rustling of leaves in the breeze from the Quabbin Reservoir.

*John Paul Marosy, a member of Agape's Mission Council, recently spent a few days in Agape's Hermitage.*

## News Notes



### Omar and Ali at Agape: An Appeal to Aid an Iraqi Family in Need

by Eleanor Maclellan, RSCJ, member of Agape's Mission Council

"I found a frog!!! I found a frog!!!" Little Omar raced up from the pond waving his weighted down net with one of the biggest frogs I have ever seen! For the moment, his wounds were forgotten.

Omar is scarred over 85 % of his body from burns suffered when the car he and his family were riding in caught on fire after having been fired upon by American soldiers in Iraq. His mother was killed, his father badly wounded managed to push Ali, Omar's brother, to safety.

Through the intervention of No More Victims , a group based in California, Omar is being treated at Children's Hospital, and Sabah, his father, at Mass General, both in Massachusetts.

Omar recently had a big toe removed in order to create a thumb on his right hand and will soon have more surgery to create an ear. They all live in a small apartment at 418 Massachusetts Avenue, in a building owned by Haley House in Boston. Their accommodations are inadequate, to say the least. They have one room and a bedroom the size of a walk-in closet for the three of them.

Whenever possible, they visit Agape where the boys slosh around in the pond in search of frogs, tadpoles, and scalawags. They are experts at capturing Salamanders hiding under rocks! Agape gives them the opportunity to be outside and to experience the healing forces of nature.

Unfortunately these opportunities come rarely for them. The boys attend school in Brighton and there is little opportunity for outside play, when the bus finally returns them to the city. Sabah is quite ill and has been hospitalized several times since his arrival here. They are in need of everything, especially adequate housing which they cannot afford. Donations sent to Agape would be gratefully accepted. **Checks may be made out to Sabah Kader, Ali and Omar's father.**



The Creatively Maladjusteds is a group of former interns, college retreatants, and friends, all out of school or grad students, who are forming community around their relationship to Agape.

April Brewer grew up in Barre, Massachusetts and recently graduated from American University in Washington, DC. She received a Bachelors degree in Communication Studies with a focus on International Media and a minor in theatre. She is currently working as an office assistant with Agape, and also as a staff assistant for Mount Wachusett Community College's Center for Democracy and Humanity. She has been nominated for a Peace Corps assignment which would potentially leave in January 2011, but looks forward to whatever life has in store.



Hazel Dardano, born in El Salvador, member of Agape's Mission Council with Mario, from Guatemala, who has been a great summer assistant on Agape's work day.

We at Agape said good-bye to Christa Elliott, who grew up here at Agape, our first and only, office assistant, who is currently serving on the island of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the Caribbean as a Peace Corps Volunteer working in youth development. For the past several weeks, Christa completed her in-service training and was recently inducted as a full Peace Corps Volunteer. She will be serving with the Peace Corps through fall 2012. For more information, please visit her blog, [Christa61687.blogspot.com](http://Christa61687.blogspot.com).

### URGENT MESSAGE:

MAILING AND PRINTING COSTS  
HAVE RISEN ASTRONOMICALLY:  
PLEASE ALERT US BY RETURNING THIS FORM

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- I can't subscribe, but please keep me on your mailing list.
- Enclosed is a donation of for the work of *Agape*.  
 \$100  \$50  \$25  Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_
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## AGAPE CALENDAR



Dec. 4<sup>th</sup> —5:30 pm—Advent Vigil—Come celebrate, pray and chant our way into the mystery of Advent. Pot luck offering. Music and Poetry will follow.

Dec. 6<sup>th</sup>—Nativity School for Boys—Advent Day retreat, Nativity of Worcester is an independent, Jesuit middle school that provides a quality, all-scholarship education to under served boys of all faiths in a special academic placement.

Feb. 5<sup>th</sup> — St. Brigid's Day—Mid-winter poetry fest. Annual Mystical musical evening honoring Bridgid of Kildare.

Weekly Friday Vigil for Peace—5-6pm— To pray and oppose wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Join us in downtown War at the War Memorial