



THE

SOWER

True justice is the harvest reaped by peacemakers

from seeds sown in the spirit of peace. James, 3:18

Strangers and Guests Catholic Worker Farm, Maloy, Iowa

Number 8, Fall-Winter-2011

Twenty Five Years of Life on the Land at Strangers and Guests in Maloy

By Betsy Keenan

Twenty-five years ago, October 17th, 1986 eight people, four adults and four young children, from Catholic Worker backgrounds from Davenport, Iowa and Rock Island, Illinois moved to Maloy. Many details have grown fuzzy with time, but those first days have some vivid memories. Tumbling down the little grass slope from the driveway toward the house—out of the car with three of the kids and Mary—the beginning of a new chapter of life, lying in our new grass, imagining all the work ahead of us.

That first year we broke a lot of ground, literally and figuratively, on our 4 acres of garden, orchard and pasture; finding a place in a new parish and neighborhood, making a home with a new community, planting fruit trees, launching into keeping dairy goats. Jim got started fencing and building a shed for the goats, as well as meeting people by substitute teaching and helping with parish youth, Mary weaving and meeting other crafters, Brian working as an aide at the nursing home and home brewing, myself playing music at church, planting and drying herbs, making contact with the local food buying club, checking out public libraries and parks with the kids. I had a chance to take a permaculture class in Ames and came home with a lot of ideas for making our spot more sustainable.

From the first day we were welcomed and supported by pastor John Zeitler and Sr. Bernadine Pieper, CHM, living down the hill in the rectory attached to the Catholic church. They cooked for us as we unpacked and got situated, and continued getting us connected with local folks, praying with us, being the best of neighbors in a myriad of ways.

When our first days of getting settled were done, we invited folks in for a house blessing service, and 20 or so neighbors and parishioners joined us for that celebration. Surely God heard those prayers and has blessed this house and home with safety, good food and many, many guests.

In those early days, trying to meet some needs in the community, we worked with others in making the old Store/Dancehall building, derelict for many years, available for use, and opening a store The “Maloy Community Store” as a place to drop in and visit. By the time of the town’s Centennial in June 1987, it had expanded to offer local crafts and there was a rug loom usually set up for weaving in the store. Later with Regina Lynch’s inspiration and help we added repacked dried fruit and spices and herbs to the offerings.

Those first years were years of some unusual hardship locally—the loss of farms as land prices fell, and severe drought in 1988 and 1989 added to the usual disadvantages in Iowa’s rural southern tier. “Renewing Rural



Elijah helping his dad herd the goats, circa 1990



Founders of Strangers and Guests Catholic Worker, Jim, Kate, Mary, Dan, Betsy, Clara, Brian and Elijah, October 1986

Iowa” was an effort to identify and discuss these issues in a faith-based context, through Scripture Study in the “base community” model, developed by Rev. Gil Dawes and offered in our area. There developed several ecumenical groups of pastors and lay people examining the Good News for the poor and those at the margins. We met at different towns around the area and made good friends in these contexts. We continue to the present setting Tuesday mornings aside to continue Scripture discussion and reflection, around our dining room table.

In Spring of 1988, Jim and Mary and their kids Kate, Dan and Luke moved to Illinois, where the rest of their families were located. Their farm upbringing had helped bridge the adjustment from the Quad-Cities to tiny Maloy. Betsy endeavored to keep the store going, with help from Regina and Sr. Bernadine (and 4-year-old Clara). We replaced the rug loom that had gone with Jim and Mary, who had passed on basic weaving know-how, with help from Rock Island friend, Chuck Trapkus, Betsy has pursued this craft ever since.

Don Ray and Veronica Mecko Ray visited for the first time in late 1988, and returned the following year to the area, gardening with us and biking around the county, investigating possibilities of buying some land.

John Zeitler went to Tanzania in early 1990 as a Maryknoll associate, Fr. Dave Polich had arrived for one year (of exile) - the last resident pastor of the Maloy parish. Sr. Bernadine stayed in Maloy several more years, helping with the parish, nurturing the prairie restoration on the former railroad right-of-way, her vegetables, fruit trees, flowers and trees and the local community.

Many people came and went from our Catholic Worker circle in the ‘90’s. My sister Kathy purchased the small house and lot adjoining ours,

up the hill. We acquired a new (flat!) garden space there, a bit more pasture and a shed.

In the ‘90’s, many things shifted. Elijah and Clara were both going to school in Mount Ayr and we got involved with visiting there, volunteering for various things. There were chances to be in various community theater productions. Don and Veronica came back to Maloy, now joined by their son Wendell, they purchased a house and lot at the top of our hill and built a house there. Sr. Bernadine “retired” yet again, to the warmth of Mississippi. In the winter ‘94-95 Brian did a 4 month sentence in Marion Prison Camp, for protesting against nuclear weapons. We began a tradition of summer solstice parties, with food, dancing and a large fire to celebrate the glories of summer and the gifts of nature around us, and the joy of being with friends. This has proved a popular annual event.

For a time the rectory sat vacant, then three religious sisters came to inhabit it, bringing a special presence and willing service to the local community: Joanna Rettenmeier, Marion Klosterman (in 1995) and Nan Ross (in 1996).

In 1996 Brian and I became Benedictine Oblates of the Benedictine Sisters of Perpetual Adoration in Clyde, Missouri about 40 miles from Maloy. This community has supported us with fellowship and prayer and friendship so many ways in the years since. They gave major support for Brian’s trip to Iraq during the period of sanctions, and help in various emergencies. Their wonderful liturgies and sharing of the Rule of St Benedict have provided so much nourishment for us, and meetings with their other Oblates, and retreats have been a blessing as well.



Sister Bernadine working in the rectory garden, down the hill from Strangers and Guests



Elijah, Betsy and Clara visiting Brian in Federal Prison, Marion, IL, Christmas, 1994

The Maloy post office was closed and in 1999, the Maloy store as well. Competition from a new Amish store in Redding, 7 miles away was too much to continue such a marginal effort. I did some substituting as a teacher's aide at school, and worked part time helping at the Mount Ayr Vision Center.

The millennium dawned and we were still here! Brian began work as director of Catholic Peace Ministry based in Des Moines and started commuting once a week spending 2 or 3 days there, staying with the DMCW. We enjoyed visits by Catholic Workers from England, Germany and New Zealand, as well as many houses around the US.

As our own children left home and pursued their interests and choices, Mike and Violet, students from Carlton College spent parts of their summers with us, till they graduated, then married going on to other Catholic Worker house.

I was seeking new customers for rugs, displaying in shops, craft shows and Farmer's Markets in various towns around the region. A new opportunity opened, to assist in music for Spanish and bilingual liturgies at the parish in Osceola, Iowa, and occasionally in Lenox with Sr. Marion. The cycle of life with garden and goats still continued, kidding in the Spring, milking through Summer and Fall, and sometimes winter, chickens were added at various times, depending on local fox, coyote and or wildlife depredations. People kept coming and learning, sampling rural life, acquiring skills and moving on. Alex Iwasa came to us, after gardening with CW Larry O'Toole in the "Growing Home" program in Illinois and has returned for many summers now, milking, mowing, weaving and studying.

With the end of Brian's employment with CPM, a new transition occurred. Brian and I had both kept writing

through the years, being published in a variety of CW papers, and Brian had produced a quarterly newsletter for CPM and made the transition from our old "paste up" style, we had used in our Davenport years to word processing, and digital layout. We felt the time had come to try sending our own newsletter and began printing "The Sower," also begging for support in order that Brian might continue the work that calls to him, organizing, writing and witnessing against the never ending wars and violence our country has been involved in.

In 2009, Richard Pates, as new bishop of Des Moines, summarily eradicated the 125 year old community of the Maloy Catholic parish with do discussion or appeal. Though the parish still had a faithful core who prayed together weekly, encouraged and blessed by the presence of Sisters Nan and Joanna, and supported itself, the church refuses to ordain enough priests to serve smaller populations. The sisters left and went home to their Motherhouse in Dubuque. The "local" pastor now resides in Osceola, 50 miles away- there is one Mass per weekend in the county, in Mount Ayr.

Beginning in January 2010, we offered Catholic Worker craft retreats and had busy days of planning and hosting a gathering of folks who decide to learn and practice handcrafts. It is exciting to see the skill and craft being nurtured in CW communities, both urban and rural, the increase of farms and urban gardens throughout the Midwest.

So as we look back, especially with gratitude to all who have helped us, we look forward too, with both hope and doubt. Will we be able to replace the roof? How long will the car last? Will people keep coming to work and learn?

*As the Silent Leaven
Works its secret way,
Or as grows the seed grain
Through the night and day;
Lord, so be the increase,
Peaceable but sure,
Of your Word within us
And your kingdom's power.*



*As the hidden treasure,
Or for matchless pearl.
When at last discovered,
All for it is sold;
So, when breaks the vision
Of that kingdom fair,
Ours shall be its riches
and its beauty rare.*

*As the tender seedling
Grows up tall and strong,
And the birds of heaven
To its branches strong;
So all God's children
From the east and west
Gather to God's kingdom,
In its shadows rest.*

Text c1951
United Reform Church

AND MORE RECENTLY...

August and September saw- along with hot growing weather for the gardens, some special celebrations with friends who have marked many of the passing seasons with us- the Hynek family, with the wedding of Amanda and Karl, and the Ryans with the wedding of Emilie and William –Veronica Mecko and I (Betsy) were able to be at both these ceremonies (and parties) - though Brian was away traveling.

The annual Midwest CW gathering at Sugar Creek, in September was huge again and inspiring to see so many young people growing in commitment to their communities and lives of service. Among that group there were a number of weddings this year also! Brian and I both got to attend the Sugar Creek event, due to Alex being in Maloy, but when we got home, he took off to warmer places. Adios, Alex!

Daughter Clara visited for a few days, and then we got busy again, weaving for the Fall season of craft events, harvesting for the garden, Brian preparing for trial in Syracuse-and another trip to Las Vegas for the National CW gathering-

Then I was off to Buffalo for a week with my sister, Kathy who was having surgery, and Elijah who had a birthday. Then Brian and I met up in Maloy again, just in time for a potluck party to celebrate the completion of 25 years in Maloy-with good food, good friends, dancing and a great jam session.



On October 28, neighbors and friends joined Strangers and Guests at Foxtown dance hall to celebrate 25 years in Maloy

Photo courtesy of the Hynek family

Brian's continuing travels and trials

This issue of "The Sower" comes to you late as it does due mostly to my travels and distractions. Only by looking at these last months with some detachment as I write this does a pattern of order emerge from the appearance of frenzied activity. It comes to me as I write that I have actually maintained an uneasy balance, one that in my business I have not often been aware!

For most of the summer I was home with the garden and the goats, with a few visits to Chicago and Voices for Creative Nonviolence, where I am a co-coordinator. In August, the St Francis Catholic Worker in Columbia, MO, arranged for me to speak at the university's Newman Center about my visit to Afghanistan and resistance to drone warfare.

In September, the Chiara Center of the Franciscan Sisters in Springfield, IL, invited me to speak on the topic, "Remembering Dorothy Day." While I appreciate opportunities to speak of Afghanistan and drones, it was good to step back from weapons of war and the suffering they cause to think about where this all began for me, meeting Dorothy many years ago. It was helpful to reflect along with the sisters and their guests on the roots of this amazing work that we do.

In October, I was in Las Vegas for the National Catholic Worker gathering, which ended with direct actions at the Nevada Nuclear Test Site and Creech Air Force Base, headquarters for the USAF's drone program, one of the sites from which war is being waged in Afghanistan and other places by remote control.

Returning to Creech, the scene of the crime (I was arrested in a protest there in April, 2009) I joined 17 other Catholic Workers and Code Pink activists in blockading the base, blocking with our bodies the evil work that goes on there if only for a short time.

From Nevada I travelled to California where I spoke to groups in Sacramento and San Francisco about the Afghanistan and the part drones play in the US war against the people there. I got home to Maloy in time for Betsy to leave for Buffalo and to finish the canning season, putting up quarts of tomatoes, many pints of hot peppers and drying pears for winter storage.

After Betsy's return and a rousing celebration of our 25 years here, I flew to Syracuse, New York, to stand trial with 30 some others for our alleged "disorderly conduct" at Hancock Air Base, from where members of the New

York Air National Guard fly drones, spewing “hellfire” missiles on the other side of the globe.

To our minor violation, much like a traffic ticket, a crime not even rising to the level of a misdemeanor, the court gave unusual consideration to our arguments in a trial that lasted more than 40 hours. Over the efforts of a very young and inexperienced Assistant District Attorney, the attention of the court was directed away from allegations of our alleged petty offense and towards the high crimes of the government perpetrated at Hancock.

Former US Attorney General Ramsey Clark, as witness for the defense, established that under international law the activities at Hancock are war crimes and crimes against peace and that US citizens have a positive obligation under US and international law to resist those crimes. He also testified to the place of international agreements as the “supreme law of the land” under the US Constitution and to obligation of local judges to consider international law in their judgments.

After hearing Mr. Clark and the impelling testimony of several defendants, Judge David Gideon deferred judgment and ordered our return to hear his verdict on December 2.

From Syracuse, then, I happily spent the time I had expected to be in jail with son, Elijah and Betsy’s sister Kathy in Buffalo. I was able to spend a few days in New York City at Mary House (where I began my CW career in 1975) conspiring with the group, Witness Against Torture, organizing for the National Day of Action to Close Guantanamo that will take place in Washington, DC, on January 11, the tenth “anniversary” of the first hostages arriving there.

From New York, I went south to Columbus, Georgia, for the annual vigil to close the School of the Americas, where elite soldiers are trained by the US Army in techniques of “counterinsurgency” and torture. With friends from Code Pink and Creech and Hancock codefendants, I participated in a workshop on drones and also took part in a reading of a play based on our previous Creech trial that was received to rave reviews.

After another week home in Maloy, I was in Syracuse again to be found guilty of disorderly conduct and sent off to the Jamesville Penitentiary for ten days to pay for my crime.

I expect to be close to home, now, until January 2, when I travel to Washington, DC, to fast with the Witness Against Torture until the day of action on the 11th. My short sentence of discomfort and inconvenience at Jamesville deepened a sense of urgency toward the plight of the prisoners at Guantanamo, Bagram, and many other sites who face torture and do not know when they will be freed to rejoin their loved ones.

I am grateful to all I have encountered in this time of flux and change, thankful especially to Veronica, Betsy,

Don and Alex at home, to the Voices community in Chicago, to the resisters in Las Vegas, Syracuse, New York and Georgia who have welcomed me into their communities. I am blessed to have had some time, too, with family and old friends on the road and deepen relationships with many. Encounters with “Occupy” groups from Wall Street to San Francisco, Syracuse, Sacramento, and Des Moines, to name only some, give courage and hope to a long time protestor!

Love and thanks to all! **Brian**



Tucson CWs John Heid and Rachel Winch with Brian at Creech AFB on October 9

photo by Felice Cohen-Joppa

Maloy CW Craft Retreat Returns! February 16-21, 2012

Again we offer a rich blend of learning, sharing, making music, making useful things and celebration. Here is a tentative schedule- let us know if you have skills to offer as well.

Thursday: Arrival, organizing, planning and loom set-up

Friday: Rag preparation and weaving, cheese making

Saturday: Basket weaving (with newspaper) class, weaving on loom

Sunday: Liturgy, Sabbath relaxation and in the evening, pot luck, folk dancing and singing with our neighbors.

Monday: Weaving continues. Candle-dipping

Tuesday: Scripture study, finish projects, clean-up, Good-byes

Space is limited- please contact Betsy to reserve a spot



Greetings from Friends from over the years....

Reflections from a few of the many who have graced our home over the last 25 years

**From Bernd Büscher- a Catholic Worker
from Dortmund, Germany:**

Catholic Workers in Germany agree, "Maloy is the most visited CW house in the US!"

I remember when Sabine and I stayed with you at the Quad Cities CW Houses in 1986 and you were taking us with you on trips around the countryside looking for a rural place to live out the "agronomic university" side of the movement more radically. So finally it was beautiful Maloy, with Father Zeitler, Sr. Bernadine and their parish



Elijah (on the left) with German friends Nicklaus, Bernd, Sabine, Benjamin and from the right, Gieselle Simon and Johnny. Photo (we think) by Hanno, 1996

inviting you to come here. For me Maloy, of course, became "home away from home", as you, my longest and best friends in the US, are living here and have been welcoming our family over the years several times. Memories include soccer games, sing-a-longs, Betsy running the village shop, Brian being mayor, spotting out birds of prey with Veronica, Bible studies in the living room, picking vegetables and fruit in the garden, watching a movie in the rectory, meeting Hanno's family (friends from Germany) after years in Maloy, of all places...

At a meeting of German Catholic Workers and friends we noticed, that Maloy was obviously the most visited CW in the US - EVERYBODY of us had stayed with you! So thank you for your presence over a quarter of a century - and please, stay on. We all intend to come back...

**From Tiffany Martinez, who lived and went
to school in Mount Ayr, the county seat town:**

'As Dorothy Day said "the more I read my Bible, the more radical I become....."'

The Maloy Catholic Worker House, Strangers and Guests, means so very much to me because it was the first time that I had been exposed to people who were devoting every aspect of their lives to Christ and the Christian Mission. Religion had been just that; a regiment or protocol to follow on Sundays and meal times and sometimes bedtime, saying the right thing at the right time but not following or understanding what I read or heard. Meeting people who lived what they read in the Bible, and not just the polite, kind, health/wealth and prosperity stuff, was so



In 1994 Clara sang the lead role in a "Moonlighters" production of *Amahl and the Night Visitors* in Mt Ayr. Tiffany, at left, played Amahl's mother. A Record-News photo

new to me! People who sacrificed their own status quo, basic standards of living, and desires to be happy and comfortable in the same way as their worldly neighbors was foreign and strange and yet so appealing. Your life-



Rachael, with her signature spyglass at upper right, at home with the Holy Family CW community in Kansas City

style made me hunger for that peace that I knew you felt; your unconditional love of all, even those who (gasp) didn't agree with you! Meeting, getting to know, and fellowshiping with those who make Strangers and Guests their home, and home away from home, has helped fill that hole in my life that most others try to fill with material possessions, drugs, money, and numerous other spackles. But in the end, living for God part time, is just that, spackling... never part of the firm, solid structure that is a living life built on Christ and His teaching. I fall so short, and you in your humility will say the same of yourselves, but your presence in our small community made a huge, lasting, long term impression on me and now my children, and your efforts are nothing to be scoffed at, and know this; that you have personally left your mark on my life, my children, and now my community.

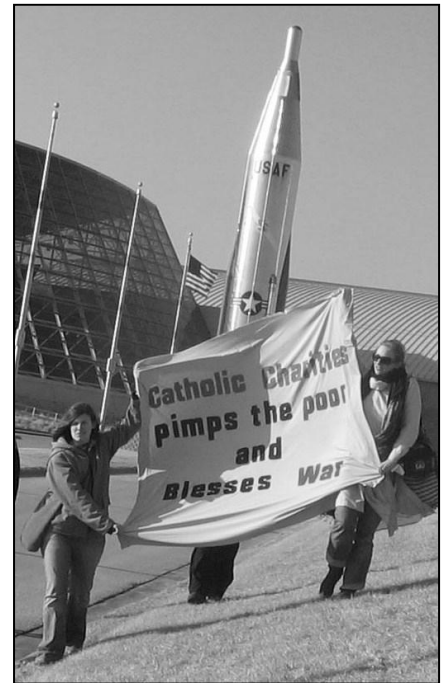
I've known you and your family since 1990, so 21 of your 25 years, I just wish I had gotten to "know" you and your work better while I lived there full time, and reaped the benefits I reap now in just a few weeks a year. Your work with social justice has inspired me to do what I can, howbeit, in a different manner, through giving of clothes, food and helping find shelter for those without. Your work and that of the Catholic Worker has changed my life, viewpoints and actions, and has been spawning such awesome fruit in my children as well. "Train them up in the way they should go....." Thank you for helping train me. As Dorothy Day said "the more I read my Bible, the more radical I become....."

From Rachael Mary Hoffman, a CW in Kansas City at Holy Family House, and joined in one of our craft retreats.

Strangers and Guests Catholic Worker Farm has helped me (a 26-year-old, new Catholic Worker, beginner farmer and crafter) envision a life of beauty and simplicity. You see, when you spend your whole life in cities- Chicago, Omaha, and Kansas City- you dream a little dream of cottage industries, goats & chickens, food straight from your backyard. Yet, until seeing this dream manifested in the flesh of Brian and Betsy it remains just a dream. Thank you Brian and Betsy for sharing with me the possibilities of delicious food, making a living and a life from the work of your hands, and the companionship of animals!

From Tracy Robson, who visited us while she was living and working at the Des Moines Catholic Worker

Although I've only been down to visit Strangers and Guests a few times in the last few years, I've immensely enjoyed my time there, and always find it a struggle to return back to my home in Des Moines. It's such a lovely escape and a relaxing learning atmosphere. And although I grew up on a farm in Iowa, Strangers and Guests is such a different model, it feels absolutely nothing like what I grew up with--and I love it for that fact. The complete local-mindset, do-it-with-your-hands attitude is encouraging and contagious. The lessons I've learned, as well as the knowledge that there's "something" different, a model that makes more sense, out there, will never leave me, even if I find myself far from Maloy and the little farm there.



Tracy on the left, responding to Omaha Catholic Charities fund raiser at the Strategic Air Command museum
photo by Mona Shaw



Ade Bethune

What is so terrifying about the Christmas story is that it offers us nothing but the protection of a vulnerable baby, of a God so pathetic that we need to protect Him. The idea of an omnipotent God who can calm the sea and defeat our enemies turns out to be a part of that great fantasy of power that has corrupted the Christian imagination for centuries. Instead, Christians are called to recognize that the essence of the divine being is not power but compassion and love.

Rev'd Dr Giles Fraser

THE SOWER

Strangers and Guests

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