

Local Progressive News from the Nashville Peace & Justice Center

Prison Letter from Don Beisswenger

A warm hello to you, my friends,

April 27, 2004

Thank you to all who have written. Each card and letter brings a sense of the community within which I live and brings encouragement, comfort, insight. And this has been important as my term has begun.

I arrived here at the prison on Tuesday, April 6th so have been here about three weeks now. The time has been confusing with "counts" six to ten times a day, with a quarter of a mile walk up and another going back. I am getting exercise. And telephone and mail rules escaped me for some time. But my spirit has stayed alive, mainly because of the support I have received from you. And there is holy presence, which becomes evident now and again.

My roommate, in my 6 by 8 cell, comes from western Kentucky and I learn much from him and others. Most persons come from KY and Tenn., but from all over: Indiana, South Carolina, Missouri, Ohio, Idaho, Laos, Mexico. About 90% are here on drug related charges. "Mandatory sentencing minimums" have meant many have rather trivial charges, but punishment reigns in our culture. One fellow was given 8 years for a small amount of marijuana.

I have become acquainted with many inmates already, having a bit of a celebrity status as a prisoner of conscience. Many are supportive of my dissent, though often from a strong anti-government bias which blames government for all societal problems, including the Oklahoma bombing, which one fellow believes was organized by the government.

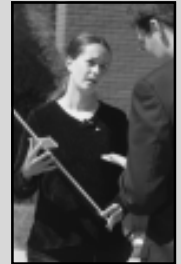
Religious life here seems to be shaped by Southern Baptist values and liturgical style. The Catholics have a liturgy I appreciate since it follows the liturgical year and focuses on the paschal mysteries.

Coming into the prison during Holy Week gave a special vitality to the Jesus story. I came on Tuesday, following the story of Jesus weeping over the city, and then a celebrative entry into that city. He turned tables over, met with his friends in a holy meal, and washed their feet, was scourged and then executed. Following much confusion, he came among them and they received a new spirit of life, love, hope. What a story to juxtapose with life events. It provided a liturgical context to live each day here.

I have come to see that resurrection reminds us all of the resurrection of all life, including our own. It stands as a witness to the value of Life before God, especially when life is oppressed, marginalized and denied or where persons are tortured, killed, raped, or abused. They will be honored. Thus we share in that honor by remembering them. This includes the victims of the SOA (Western

Letter from the Center

For the past two weeks, I've been walking around in something like a state of amazement at my incredible good fortune, ever since I learned that I would be joining the staff of the Peace and Justice Center. What an extraordinary blessing it is to



Jenn Cartwright
Education Director

be able to devote one's energies, full-time, to the ideas, projects, and sense of community that make life, as I perceive it, so rich and beautiful. What an exceptional opportunity to learn in whole new ways from my hometown... to become a student of this city, its people, its neighborhoods, its generations, its history.

More and more, I am also realizing the deep responsibility that such good fortune implies. Every day, I meet local activists who have been waging important struggles for decades... many of them have been activists longer than I have been alive. Many have lived on the front lines of struggles I have only read about, others have achieved great organizing successes while enduring life on the streets, in prison, in fields and factories and under conditions of oppression that I have never even experienced. I feel simultaneously awe-struck, inspired, and profoundly humbled by the depth of this local experience and wisdom. This communal well of experience, I believe, is one of the

greatest resources any people can have... if tapped into, if heard, if valued, if translated into plans for future action, such a resource has unlimited potential. This, to me, is what popular education is all about.

In the months and years ahead, I want to be a student, to draw deeply from this well. I want to learn how such a precious resource can be shared, preserved, and expanded. I sense that our communities hold enormous potential for positive change and I want to use my energy toward that goal bycontinued on page 2



Megan and Carolyn Hughes listen to Tim Wise reveal the real obscenity of war at the March 20 rally. Wise addressed the sickness of a culture that obsesses about the human body while spending much of its time, money, and resources in creating, glorifying, and sustaining violence and war. Photo by Al Levenson.

Nashville Peace and Justice Center

A community-based, multi-issue center for the Middle Tennessee region seeking to promote peacemaking, social justice, and environmental issues in our society and the world.

MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

Americans United for Separation of Church and State

Amnesty International

Bring Urban Recycling to Nashville Today

Common Cause

Cumberland Greens Bioregional Council

The Emma Center

Earth Matters

1st Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville

Greater Nashville Unitarian Universalist

Homeless Power Project

Interfaith Alliance of Middle Tennessee

Latin American Central American Solidarity Association

Living Wage Campaign of Nashville

Middle Tennessee Presbytery / Peace With Justice Committee

Mideast Peace Coalition

Nashville Friends Meeting

National Organization for Women

Pan Africa

PeaceRoots Alliance

Radio Free Nashville

The Scarritt Bennett Center

Tennessee Coalition to Abolish State Killing

United Nations Association

Veterans for Peace

War Resisters League

ALTERNATIVES

is the official bimonthly publication of the Nashville Peace & Justice Center

EDITORIAL COLLECTIVE

Christina Van Regenmorter, Jean Lynch-Thomasen, Al Levenson, and Gene Kelly

SUBMISSIONS

We seek cartoons, articles, letters, and photos related to peace and justice issues relevant to the Tennessee progressive community. We will try to respect the integrity of your submissions, but we reserve the right to edit for clarity, grammar, spelling, and length. Objections? Write us a letter.

Fax: 615-320-8897 P: 615-321-9066

christina@nashvillepeacejustice.org

Calendar May June Spring 2004

May 1: May Day Bike Parade! Bi-Centennial Mall. 10am bike decorating. 11am parade. Organized by the Firebrand. Check out: www.thefirebrand.org.

May 1: Firebrand Community Center Dinner Banquet. Come eat vegetarian food and learn about Nashville's newest community project. 6-8pm at Belmont United Methodist. (Acklen and 21st/Hillsboro). For more information: Chris at 593-0304.

May 9: Mothers Day, Mothers Words 3-5pm at the Nashville Friends Meetinghouse (Torbett and 26th Ave, just north of Charlotte). Join us for a time of radical children's books and creative play (for adults and children). For more information: Christina at 321-9066.

May 12: Globalization: Making the Local Connection 6-8pm, catered reception from 5-6pm. Who benefits from Globalization? How do our consumer habits affect people around the globe? We'll be discussing these questions and more at the Scarritt-Bennett Center's Harambee Auditorium in Fondren Hall (between 18th and 19th Avenues in Nashville, across the street from the NPJC).

May 19: Is it a Crime to be Poor? 7-8:30 p.m. There are laws, bureaucracies, and stigma that dehumanize and criminalize people around the country and right here in Nashville. Learn ways that you can deepen your relationship with the poor and the Nashville Power Project, who are presenting this workshop. Held at 1808 Woodmont Blvd., Nashville, TN 37215, 615-383-5760

May 26: Women in Custody: An Abuse of Power 7-8:30 p.m. Though crimes in prison such as rape are prevalent, few perpetrators of violence against female inmates are ever held accountable. Randy Tatel and Lynn Robinson, from Amnesty International, will speak about their current campaign to *Stop Violence Against Women*; come learn what you can do. Held at 1808 Woodmont Blvd., Nashville, TN 37215, FUUN: 615-383-5760

May 26: Introduction and Expectations 7-8:30pm at 1st Unitarian Universalist Church of Nashville. Session 1 in **Progressive GLBT Principles in Action**, a series of workshops designed to reduce prejudice by increasing understanding and acceptance among people of different sexual orientations. Held at 1808 Woodmont Blvd., Nashville, TN 37215, 615-383-5760

May 28-30: Activist Summit Peace Roots Alliance hosts international, national, and local activists in Summertown Tennessee for a weekend of workshops, strategy, and community building. Contact Judy Meeker for more information: ahimsaimu@aol.com.

June 2: Experience of GLBT Individuals 7-8:30pm at 1st UU. Session 2 in Progressive GLBT Principles in Action. (see May 26).

June 9: Religion and Homosexuality 7-8:30pm at 1st UU. Session 3 in Progressive GLBT Principles in Action. (see May 26).

June 16: What Now? 7-8:30pm at 1st UU. Session 2 in Progressive GLBT Principles in Action. (see May 26).

June 24-28: International InterPlay Conference. Want to get to know yourself better, connect with others, have fun, and learn a powerful tool for social change? For more info: call Diane at 615-884-8074 or check out www.interplaytn.org.

June 28: Unbelievable Beauty of Being Human 8pm at Hume Fogg High School Auditorium (Broadway and 8th Ave). 40 actors, dancers, storytellers, expressing their humanity, in concert. \$15

Weekly Activism

Sundays: Food not Bombs 1:30-3:00pm at Legislative Plaza (between from Capitol and Sheraton, at 6th and Union). Contact beckyr@riseup.net for more information.

Wednesdays: Peace Coalition 6-7:30pm at NPJC*. Join the 2 year old NPJC Peace Coalition as they plan protests and educational events.

Thursdays: Women in Black 12:00-1:00pm on Broadway between 12th and 11th. Silently Stand in Black: to Mourn, to Remember, to be a Presence for Peace.

Bi-Weekly Activism

School of the America's Watch: 7pm **Tuesdays, May: 4, 18; June 1, 15, 29** This group focuses on US-Latin America foreign policy and the secular support of Nashville prisoner of conscience, Don Beisswenger. Newcomers welcome. Meetings at *NPJC

Fair Trade Nashville: 7pm **Tuesdays, May: 11, 25; June: 8, 22.** Do you want to support family farms? Do you object to the power held by multi-national corporations? Join FTN. Meetings at *NPJC.

* NPJC offices and board room are at **1016 18th Avenue S. / Nashville, TN. 37212. Call 615-321-9066 for directions.**

www.nashvillepeacejustice.org

OfficeNotes

Farewell to Divinity School intern **Brian Costilow** (September 2003-April 2004). Brian organized and researched a web-project on Globalization that will shortly be on the web and organized events at Vanderbilt related to global justice. He is graduating from Vanderbilt in May -- off to use his skills in Biblical exegesis in our National Parks system.

Student intern **Jean Lynch-Thomasen**, who joined us in September, will be graduating from her NPJC intern days at the end of May. In her 9 months here, Jean has helped edit the website and newsletter, compiled an NPJC history (on the web at www.nashvillepeacejustice.org/about_us), organized the fledgling Nashville Youth for Peace and Justice (which she will continue working with), and has done everything from speaking at rallies to washing the dishes. We are incredibly grateful for her skills, her patience, and her incredible presence.

Jen Cartwright had her first day at the NPJC on April 12. Off and running as the new Education Director, Jen has been involved in half a dozen events in the past two weeks. Drop by the office sometime and say hi!

Matt Leber and **Christina Van Regenmorter** continue at the NPJC. Matt is focusing on NPJC development while Christina continues her organizing work. Her current focus is international trade deals.

Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation). Different name but the same shame. We must remember . When we called out the names of those killed as we processed in solemn assembly on April 4th, and said, "PRESENTE," each person was honored. And resurrection was anticipated and confessed again. Alleluia.

Continue to pray for the oppressed peoples, especially children, and ask Congress to pass House Bill 1258.

Again I rejoice in you, peacemakers, who are called blessed.



Rev. Don Beisswenger and three of his grandchildren lead a procession to the Federal Building. Over 100 people joined School of the Americas Watch Nashville in the April 4 "Walk the Second Mile with Don." Photo by Al Levenson.

from page 1...listening, asking, watching... by helping people connect to new ideas, strategies and movements... by working to deliver educational resources to those who will use them to build new cultures of inclusivity, fairness, and justice.

I know that, along the way, I will make mistakes. It is my sincere hope that you will help make me aware of my mistakes and correct me when they happen, teaching me new ways of seeing and understanding so that I will grow past my mistakes. This type of nurturing from a community, to my mind, is perhaps the greatest gift I could ever hope to receive.

Church-State Report

Those who attended the March 28 talk by the Rev. Barry Lynn were impressed by his ability to speak on so many hot church-state issues and by his humorous quips. The meeting was put on by Nashville Chapter Americans United for Separation of Church and State and held at Scarritt-Bennett Center. There were ten co-sponsoring organizations and some others which promised publicity. We did not fill the hall, but we had two articles in the Tennessean and coverage by three television channels.

Recently, the cause for the separation of church and state received a serious victory when the Supreme Court in a 7 to 2 decision said that Washington state does not have to pay for a Bible college student to become a minister. In the decision, Chief Justice William Rehnquist wrote, "Training someone to lead a congregation is an essentially religious endeavor ..." Also in his opinion he wrote of the opposition to taxpayer funding of religion in colonial times that it was so widespread that it led to occasional popular uprisings. The attorney pleading for the funding called it one of the most important religion cases

Charles Sumner ~ Americans United

of our time. The Religious Right's attitude changed somewhat after losing. You might guess that the only two justices who voted to breach the church-state wall were Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas.

The issue of gay marriage appears to be one which will have a life until the fall elections. Support for an amendment to the federal Constitution has been endorsed by President Bush, leading Barry Lynn, the executive director of Americans United to issue a statement to follow up the letter which the organization sent to the Senate in March.

"I'm not worried about gay marriage," Lynn said. "I am, however, very worried about the marriage between President Bush and Religious Right zealots. Our Constitution has never been amended to take away minority rights, and we should not be taking such an action now.

"The reaction to the Massachusetts ruling has been shrill and over-the-top. There is nothing radical about preserving individual liberty and demanding equal protection for all," Lynn continued. "Nor is it extreme to uphold the separation of church and state, which is also what that decision did."

With Thanks

We want to take a moment to thank some of the many, many people whose time typing, speaking, cleaning, organizing, counseling is integral to the life of the NPJC. An incomplete list:

Jane Hussain, Benjamin Kite, Ed Belbusti, Cynthia Bennett, Dan Rosemergy, Hibbard Thatcher, Karl Meyer, Pam Beziat, Saqi Maleque, Graham Grubb, Patrick O'Neil, Dan Easterly, Dan Joranko, Carl Evertson, Jeanne Rewa, Chris Lugo, Lisa Abel, Cinny Poppen, Ironelly Mora, Gene Teselle, Juan Canedo, Dot Doherty, Ray Conatser, Chris Anderson, Kaki Friskics-Warren, Donna Hooper, Jill Lashmett, Megan Macaraeg, Becky Renfrow, Laura Masulis, Dave Matthews, Bill Harkey, Susanna Williams, Dex McKinney-Harmon, Marguerite Mills, Roger Weismeyer, Ryan Smith, Kon, Jess Humphrey, Lydia Njorage, Jon Wolf, Rosemarie Mincey, Katey Culver, Howard Switzer, Lucas Reynolds, Sherry Sloan, Randy Tatel, Diane Ault, Arlene Welding, Lynn Robinson, Dave Johnson, Warren Duzak, Reverend Morris, Peter Fossil, John Zirker, Al Levenson, and the tireless members of the NPJC Board.



Dozens of children gather up to watch the Fair Trade Nashville puppeteers report on water privatization at Earth Day on April 17. Photo by Al Levenson.

Free Bicycle Repairs!



I offer free bicycle repairs for NPJC staff and volunteers, NPJC sustaining members, folks who can't afford bike shop repairs, and folks who use

their bikes as their primary source of transport. I have the skills and tools to make most repairs and adjustments. I'm also **looking for bike parts that might otherwise be discarded**, except the hopelessly damaged things like bent or broken frames. Just let me know what you need for your bike, email me at dave@lostfrogs.com and please make the subject line "bike repair."

Don't forget the May Day Bike Parade! (9:30 am, May 1, Bi-Centennial Mall)

Dave Matthews (no, not -that- one!)

A Compass for Tennessee

Conference Brings Together Activists From Around State

Tennessee Alliance for Progress sponsored the Compass II Conference: The Campaign for Tennessee's Future on March 26-27 in Nashville. Many leaders of important social change groups in Tennessee attended with participants coming from Knoxville, Jackson, Memphis and other parts of the state as well as middle Tennessee. The meeting was facilitated by Ron Davis of Committee on Religion in Appalachia (CORA), based in Knoxville.

The focus of the gathering was on creating collaboration between groups and individuals working for social, economic and environmental justice in Tennessee. To this end, TAP brought in Carl DeVilbiss of Aegis Building Concepts (www.aegisbc.com) who shared his collaboration model.

Participants then broke out by issue areas (such as environment, tax reform, criminal justice, etc.) and did a series of exercises designed to help them look at what they required from collaboration and what opportunities collaboration might present. Groups were asked to come up with a visual representation of their issue and the resulting artwork was innovative and striking. This process truly integrated the left and right brains -- balancing the creative and the logical.

The Award Banquet/Silent Auction on Friday night was hosted by activist/videographer/author Molly Secours and featured a keynote speech by the legendary Will D. Campbell, award-winning author, farmer, preacher and social activist sharing words of wisdom from his years in the civil rights struggle and commenting on the dilemmas our country faces today. He was

introduced by noted author, John Egerton.

Badge of Courage and Long Haul Awards were issued to former or current elected officials and citizen activists for their commitment to progressive causes. Among the awardees was Matt Leber, executive director of the Nashville Peace and Justice Center who received a Long Haul Award for his work in the area of criminal justice. A performance by Interplay, led by Diane Ault, concluded the evening.

On Saturday, Cathy Woodson of the Virginia Organizing Project gave an excellent presentation explaining a chapter model of grassroots organizing. After a discussion of how the Virginia model might work in Tennessee, participants broke out into self-determined action groups and came up with plans for moving forward.

A number of innovative working committees emerged from this process including the What's Next committee that will look at developing a long-term strategy plan. This committee is open to anyone who wants to see Tennessee move in a new, progressive direction.



TAP organizer Nell Levin and the NPJC's Christina Van Regenmorter woman the registration table before the Friday evening benefit. Photo by Michael August.

Tennessee Alliance for Progress

phone: 1-888-903-9576

www.tennesseeallianceforprogress.org

Do Not Ask Why

~ Zainab El-Berry, 3/15/04

If you see me at the corner
looking for Weapons of Mass Destruction,
please do not ask why.

I want to find some for ransom so I can
turn them in and pay my rent and food and
keep the bill collectors away.

They cost me and millions
jobs and self dignity.
So, if they are not in Iraq,
they might be stashed
at the corner of the corporate
headquarters that laid off
hundreds to foot the search bill
and be part of national pride.

Someone, somewhere, used
this device to distort the
truth and destroy lives.
Brave soldiers are there
and braver families wait
for the safe return or sacrifice.

I'm at the corner with older Americans.
They're searching too,
in fear of losing food and medicine.
The war has silently
taken its toll on their lives.

The only thing we have
to fear is fear itself
a president once said.
Now it's fear for fear itself.

I'm at the corner with fear experts
and war experts and terror experts
and experts of world demise,
searching for hidden shadowy people
all over the globe ready to
devour us in a cloud of terror,
changing everything we hold
and love dearly in
"our" civilization to rubble.

I'm standing at the corner
with the poor and the needy
waiting for the food rations,

the jobs for the able
to build a defense machine.

Although we are in war,
there are no dark streets or closed bars;
we haven't gotten there so far.

Confused, amused,
carelessly naïve,
we go on about our own
business ignoring the reality
ignoring the reality of our humanity.

We are afraid.

Afraid of each other
afraid to talk
afraid to ask
afraid to confront
afraid to demand answers
afraid to get our fair share
afraid to talk of the future
afraid to leave a trail
afraid to love our neighbor
afraid to face the world
afraid to reach out
afraid to feel the pain
afraid to think we'll die
afraid to live as poor
afraid to have no homes
afraid to break the scare
afraid to think inward
afraid to think out loud
afraid to know one another
afraid to accept the truth

afraid afraid afraid

afraid to the core of our being.

We are at war unknown

Zainab El-Berry is a businesswoman and
political activist in Nashville. She read
this poem at the March 20 protest at
Owen Bradley Park. She can be reached
at ilinx@bellsouth.net.



March 20, 2004

At the 1 year anniversary of the war on Iraq, hundreds of people in Nashville gathered throughout the day to pray (about 60 people), dance (40), protest (350), and educate themselves (40). Despite tornado warnings and an aggressive SUV driver, it was a peaceful, well-attended, thought-provoking, community-building day.

Thanks to the 30+ people who made it possible through your volunteer time...and thanks to everyone who came out to commemorate this sobering day.

Photos by Jeanne Rewa, Benjamin Kite, and Hannah Burdine.



Condoleezza is coming



May 13 @ 9:30am
West End Avenue
between 22nd and 23rd
(across from Kinkos)

Join us in public protest of:

- The loss of human life in Iraq.
- The erosion of our civil liberties.
- The lack of veracity exemplified by Dr. Rice's well-documented misstatements.

bring signs. wear black.

Educate those in Power

write. /call. /visit.

President George W. Bush

1600 Pennsylvania Ave., Washington D.C. 20500
(202) 456-1111, FAX (202) 456-2461 president@whitehouse.gov

Citizen Comment: (202) 456-1111

(A 1-minute call before 8 am costs 29 cents)

Congressional Switchboard:

1(800) 648-3516

U.S. Senator Bill Frist

461 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg., Washington DC 20510
(202) 224-3344 senator@frist.senate.gov

U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander

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TN Senator Thelma Harper

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TN Senator Joe Haynes

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TN Senator Douglas Henry

11 Legislative Plaza, Nashville, TN 37243-0021
(615) 741-3291 sen.douglas.henry@legislature.state.tn.us

Take Action

US Congress

S.2132 & H.R.3847 End Racial Profiling Act of 2004 Amnesty International calls this "critical to protecting fundamental rights guaranteed to citizens and non-citizens under the U.S. Constitution and international human rights laws and treaties" Call those in power to make this happen.

TN Legislature

Stop TABOR; it's bad for TN. www.yourtax.org. Learn. Lobby.

Woohoo!!! Getting Positive Results

TN Legislature

HB0421 (the anti-Living Wage bill) failed in the Employee Affairs subcommittee on April 20. Kudos to AJ Starling, the Memphis Interfaith group, and everyone else who helped stop this.

US Congress

It is highly unlikely that the larger trade deals (CAFTA, FTA) will be passed before the elections in November, due to citizen pressure. That gives us six more months. Thanks!

Write Letters to Prisoners of Conscience:

Rev. Don Beisswenger
#92091-020
Qtr 0B1
Federal Correctional Institute
Manchester
PO Box 4000
Manchester, KY 40962-4000

Kathy Kelly
#04971-045
Federal Prison Camp
Pekin
PO Box 5000
Pekin, IL 61555-5000