Seeking Peace in a World of Imprisoned Beauty

Kathy Kelly has spent her life trying to open our eyes to the beauty of people targeted by U.S. bombs in war zones, and the sacred lives desecrated by poverty.

by Terry Messman

While serving nine months in federal prison after her arrest for an anti-nuclear protest where she planted corn on a nuclear missile silo in Missouri, peace activist Kathy Kelly had a vivid awakening that she was living in "a world of imprisoned beauty."

In prison, Kelly met women who were captives in this world of imprisoned beauty, women who could just as easily have been her sisters-in-law or her next-door neighbors. To this day, she cites the courage of the women she met in prison as a guiding light in her work for peace and justice.

Kelly was stunned to realize that there was no mercy for women who were cut off from their families for many years, often for very minor economic crimes. Yet, it was life-changing for her to witness at first hand the courage demonstrated by these women in facing years of imprisonment.

It was nothing less than a revelation of the beauty of the human spirit — a world of beauty buried in the prison system. The women were separated from their children, branded with a heavy social stigma, yet they found a way to carry on despite these crushing burdens. In an interview with Street Spirit, Kelly said, "So you have this world of imprisoned beauty and it is almost as though it’s erased from the mindset of the rest of the country."

This jailhouse epiphany opened her eyes to the countless precious and irreplaceable lives that our society has caged behind prison walls, cast off into refugee camps, banished in homeless shelters, or left to die on remote battlefields.

It changes everything, this revelation that all around us, in the poorest neighborhoods nearby, in the almost forgotten jail cells of our cities, and in the far reaches of the world’s refugee camps and war zones, beauty has been put on trial, imprisoned, erased and extinguished.

Kathy Kelly is one of the most respected peace activists in the nation. She has lived in solidarity with people in war zones, and returned home to launch protests on their behalf in the halls of Congress. Kelly and her friends also organized 70 delegations to deliver medical supplies to civilians in Iraq, in violation of U.S. economic sanctions.

She has spent her life trying to open the eyes of a nation to see the beauty of innocent people targeted by U.S. bombs in war zones, and the sacred lives desecrated by poverty. She has been arrested dozens of times for acts of resistance to the high-ranking officials and corporate executives responsible for war crimes and economic deprivation — the pillars of society who are almost never jailed for their crimes against humanity.

Kelly said, “The main people that threaten us are in the corporation offices and in the well-appointed salons at parties, and they really threaten us. They make weapons. They make alcohol, firearms and tobacco, and arms for the military. They steal from us, and they rob us. And who goes to jail? A woman who can’t get an economic stake in her community unless she agrees to be the lookout for a two-bit drug transaction.”

Albany Officials Demolish Homeless Encampment

Dozens of lovingly built homes were smashed to pieces by bulldozers, and turned into rubble.

by Lydia Gans

I t has now been almost a year since the Albany City Council decided to turn the Albany Bulb Waterfront Park over to the East Bay Regional Park District. The Albany Bulb, a former landfill, has been a source of controversy for many years. State parks do not permit overnight camping, off-leash dogs and works of art, all of which continue to happen in creative abundance on the Bulb.

Homeless people started to camp at the Albany Landfill more than 15 years ago. Ever since, they have been planting trees, clearing out debris, cutting trails, building shelters for themselves from salvaged materials, and establishing a community.

They all have little or no income and there are no homeless shelters, and practically no affordable or low income housing, and no medical or social services in Albany. Living on the Albany Bulb turns out to be a viable alternative.

Some want to be close to nature and to have access to the outdoors, while for others it is important to be part of a community. Some have medical or mental health issues and can’t find a housing situation that meets their needs. Several live with service or comfort animals and are forbidden to bring their companion animals with them into the shelters.

“I feel free here, I’m happy here,” a camper said recently. “I have been homeless since I came here six years ago,” another person asserted.

They are artists, musicians, carpenters and machinists. They build houses and

See Seeking Peace in a World page 6

See Albany Demolishes Homeless page 5

Albany officials sent in bulldozers and haulers to destroy the camp. Lydia Gans photo
Global Day Against Militarism: Move the Money Home!

by Stephen McNeil

O

n Monday April 14, more than 33 local groups distributed more than 14,000 “Move the Money (from military to human needs)” brochures to BART riders throughout the Bay Area. Calling for riders to tweet or call their members of Congress to shift spending from war and nuclear weapons to human needs, the actions were part of the Global Day of Action on Military Spending (GDAMS).

Each spring, the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute releases global military spending figures (in which the U.S. spends far and away the most) indicating the public about our obscene military spending won’t bring change, the action created both a sense of community and movement. Those not caught up in the morning rush to get to work took the fliers.

Many times, community activists who distributed fliers at the end of the workday heard from BART passengers that they had already received the flier and read it.

Last year, only 15 BART stops were covered. This year, early organizing had over 100 activists covering 30 BART stations and three neighborhood areas. Bay Area New Priorities guided the cooperative actions. Requested actions in the brochure included a call to members of Congress to cut military spending, a twitter share, and a QR code to the New Priorities Campaign principles. We included one panel on the proposed increase in nuclear weapons spending.

A noon press conference was enlivened with Chulkay’s creation of a greedy Pentagon symbol grabbing all the money. Mayors Jean Quan of Oakland, Gayle McLaughlin of Richmond, and the City Council of San Pablo issued Proclamations in support of the Global Day of Action on Military Spending. Women for Genuine Security’s Reverend Deborah Lee said, “It’s time for the war money to come home. Not be shifted to increased militarization in the Asia-Pacific. There are tremendous needs for that money to be spent on jobs, housing and education.”

“More than 17,000 nuclear weapons, most held by the U.S. and Russia, continue to pose an intolerable threat to humanity,” declared Jack Cassel, executive director of Oakland’s Western States Legal Foundation and North American Coordinator of Mayors for Peace. “Our government should be putting faith to eliminate all nuclear arms, not stealing more of our tax dollars to modernize these weapons of mass destruction.”

Meanwhile, the Obama administration’s FY 2015 budget request seeks a 7 percent increase for nuclear weapons research and production programs. With that, its FY 2015 budget request for maintenance and modernization of nuclear bombs and warheads in constant dollars exceeds the amount spent in 1985 for comparable work at the height of President Reagan’s surge in nuclear weapons spending, which was also the highest point of Cold War spending.

Money (from military to human needs) is war funding going up? Our country is spending more on the military than all other countries combined, spent more than 6,000 U.S. soldiers killed in both Iraq and Afghanistan and trillions of dollars spent on endless war.

But spring may finally be emerging. March 2014 marked the first month in over 12 years that there were zero U.S. casualties among troops engaging in conflict — which should certainly be looked upon as a military victory. We are slowly beginning to pull down our troops from Afghanistan and looking toward most of the troops coming home by year’s end.

If we continue to move forward into a new era focused on a truer version of security, one that addresses what we need to survive and even prosper: investments in health, education, and other social programs that have been starved during this cold season of war spending. Sadly, that seems to be far off on the horizon.

The president’s FY 2015 budget proposal has taxpayers spending $549 billion for military programs, a 5 percent increase over last year — that’s 57 percent of our federal discretionary dollars.

And that’s not all. You might be shocked that this investment of over half a trillion dollars in military spending doesn’t include war activities — and that war spending is also going up while the war is winding down. War spending is part of a separate budget known as the “ Overseas Contingency Operations” (OCO) account. This budget is not subject to spending caps or wars councils put in place by the sequestration process and has become a convenient slab fund for the Pentagon.

In fact, according to the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, in the FY 2014 budget, the Pentagon moved $20 billion in operations and maintenance costs from its base budget to the war budget. On top of that, Congress added another $9.6 billion of base spending on salaries and benefits to the OCO. This allows the Department of Defense to avoid cutting wasteful pet projects such as the failed F-35, because they have transferred essential base costs to this uncapped account. While this budget gimmickry goes on, urgent needs at home go unaddressed, and the debt continues to grow.

Our entire country has been frozen in a brutal cycle of human and economic loss, with more than 6,000 U.S. soldiers killed in both Iraq and Afghanistan and trillions of dollars spent on endless war.

By the end of this year, most of our troops will be home from Afghanistan after more than a decade of war. So why is war funding going up? Our country must switch its priorities to move the money from waging wars to addressing pressing human needs.

This tax day, April 15, a diverse group of organizations mobilized around the Global Day of Action on Military Spending (GDAMS)/US Tax Day. I asked Congress to get rid of the Pentagon slush fund in the OCO. With the United States spending more on the military than the next 13 biggest spenders worldwide combined, worried handwringing from the Pentagon and Congress about cuts seems disturbingly disingenuous.

On tax day, I made visits on Capitol Hill with my daughter and 66 other young people from around the country who spoke out about the disinvestment that their generation has been experiencing over the last 13 years of war. They want and desperately need sustainable schools, up-to-date educational materials, after-school programs, food stamps for those in need, affordable college tuition, community health programs, and not more wasteful Pentagon spending.

Join us, Tell Congress to end the Pentagon slush fund within the OCO and accept the tax cut set to expire. Let’s cut and melt this slush fund away so we can help this generation and their communities blooming, grow and thrive.

Mary Zerkel is co-coordinator of the Wage Peace program of the AFSC. Copyright, Truthout.org. Reprinted with permission.

Time to Declare A New War on Poverty

Alameda County Supervisor Wilma Chan speaks out on the Global Day of Action Against Military Spending

I join in the bipartisan voices to ask President Obama and Congress to meet the urgent local needs of our communi-
ties. Several months ago, on the 50th anniversary of the War on Poverty, I led Alameda County to declare a New War on Poverty as persistent poverty contin-
ues to plague close to 200,000 residents of Alameda County.

“In fact, California today, when you take into account the cost of living index, has the highest rate of poverty in the nation and the highest rate of pover-
ty among seniors. 29% of our children are poor and there are 15 neighborhoods with child poverty rates above 50%.”

Income inequality has never been worse with the richest 10% of Americans controlling 75% of the wealth. The only weapons of war we need to expand are weapons in the War on Poverty! Congress must reinvest in human lives and not on increased militarization!

Our entire country has been frozen in a brutal cycle of human and economic loss, with more than 6,000 U.S. soldiers killed in both Iraq and Afghanistan and trillions of dollars spent on endless war.

by Claire J. Baker

Too many street sleepers, doubly wounded, earned the nation’s Purple Heart, even the Bronze Star. Now they don’t have a home, a job or a car.

Pavement for a pillow is as hard as it gets for these so-called “residuals of war,” our vets — cast offs from Walter Reed doubled over in need.

Wounds and Wounds

by Mary Zerkel

Children of my daughter’s genera-
tion have spent their entire life-
time in a country at war. She is just about to turn 12. She was born into an era of war that she and her peers rarely hear about. She is just about to turn 12. She was born into an era of war that she and her peers rarely hear about.

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by Matt Werner

Every Sunday morning for the last 17 years, Zyg Deutchman has gone over to JC Orton’s house at 6 a.m. to help prepare breakfast for homeless people in Berkeley. One morning, about a decade ago, JC opened his door to find Zyg slumped over on his doorstep.

JC first thought Zyg was drunk but then saw that Zyg was actually in a major heart attack. JC called 911 and continued preparing the meal after the paramedics arrived and took Zyg to the hospital.

Years later, JC recalls how he was able to finish getting the meal out on time that morning. He filled his van with oatmeal, grits, sweet rolls and fruit; arrived at People’s Park in time to feed the 80 or so people who’d gathered for breakfast; then drove downtown to pick up breakfast for the Catholic Worker, which he delivers from the Catholic Worker house in Berkeley’s City Hall, where he fed about 80 more people. This was all in a day’s work for JC, who heads up the Night on the Streets Catholic Worker.

JC lives below the poverty line. He suffers from diabetes. Skin cancer has left scars below his left eye and left forearm. His wife is bipolar and recovering from drug addiction. Despite these odds, he and the Catholic Worker serve breakfast in the park every morning for three nights a week. Aided by a few college students and recent graduates, JC distributes hundreds of sleeping bags and runs the small shelter on cold and rainy nights.

JC is a skilled negotiator who tracks price fluctuations of staples and dry goods on spreadsheets, and recently asked the City of Berkeley to let him set up a PO Box, and they can pick up the mail he distributes to homeless people. For those on the street without an address, JC starts out distributing food and clothing, rain gear, sleeping bags and Street Spirit newspapers out of his van.

JC Orton delivers mail, soup, clothing, rain gear, sleeping bags and Street Spirit newspapers out of his van.

Stattuck, it’s as if he’s Berkeley’s other mayor, a celebrity among the homeless. Folks line up on the sidewalk stand up, wave and smile at him. One man shouts, “Hey JC, Where’s my (Street Spirit) papers?” With his window down, JC shouts back to the man across the street, “Meet me at the Quarter Meal.”

When asked why he does his service publicly on the streets of Berkeley, JC said: “People watching can see what their fellow citizens are doing and think about what they could do to help feed and clothe those in need. We’ve called our Catholic Worker effort ‘Night on the Streets’ because the streets is where we do our service. Hopefully someone will be inspired seeing us out there to also help those in need in our community.”

Brandon Gutierrez, who drives the van to deliver soup Monday nights, said: “Sometimes that bowl of soup is all these folks get that night. A gentleman may be cold and on the ground, but this shows him that he’s human, that he’s cared for. It makes a world of a difference.”

Like Costco’s Back Room

Out of his humble duplex off University Avenue in West Berkeley, JC operates a food pantry in his garage, equipped with industrial fridges, racks of canned goods, sacks of dehydrated potatoes. Next to the dried goods, JC stores volumes of the Catholic Encyclopedia.

Gutierrez, a volunteer for over six years, describes JC’s house as being “like Costco’s back room.” He’s meticulously organized. He can tell you four years ago who served corn at the MLK dinner.”

JC’s attention to detail and felicity with numbers has kept him as the representative payee for a dozen East Bay residents, mostly homeless or institutionalized people in Berkeley. At one point the City of Berkeley paid him to manage the finances of people who city social workers found elusive due to mental illness, drug issues and jail terms.

JC said that, after the city ran out of funds to pay him, he kept at it: “The need didn’t go away,” he says.

With JC’s organizational skills and thoroughness, if he were applying for jobs as a bookkeeper, commodities trader, or corporate administrator, he’d be in high demand. He holds “office hours” at Peet’s Coffee at Shattuck Avenue and Kittredge from 7:30-9 a.m. six days a week.

People stop by to help him for assistance applying for Social Security, Medi-Cal or Section 8 housing.

JC uses his coffeehouse “office” as one of several mail distribution points, and if he sees that someone is receiving a W-2, he’ll ask if they’re doing taxes to get their withholding back. (Sometimes a tax refund is enough to afford housing for a month or two.) Using TurboTax on his home computer, he fills out 1040EZs.

JC Orton on his cell phone at (510) 684-1892. Email: noscw@sbcglobal.net

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Street Spirit welcomes submissions of articles, artwork, poems and photos. Contact: Terry Messman

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Matt Werner photo

Good Samaritan at Work on the Streets of Berkeley

“People watching us can see what their fellow citizens are doing and think about what they could do to help feed and clothe those in need.”

— JC Orton, Catholic Worker

JC peppers his conversation with phrases like, “We see the face of Christ in everyone.”

Night on the Streets Catholic Worker is an all-volunteer effort that JC coordinates without pay. He recruited Zyg Deutchman and fellow volunteer David Hahn at a Bible study group in 1997. The group was discussing the passage from John 21:15-19, where Jesus tells Peter, “Feed my sheep.”

JC chimed in that they could continue talking about the passage or come out with him one evening and actually feed hungry people on the streets of Berkeley. Hahn and Zyg joined him.

JC relates to people with mental-health problems easily. As a teen growing up in Los Angeles in the 1960s, he was a patient in the mental health system in Southern California. He says, “We’re all wingnuts, a bit loopy for renouncing wealth and most material possessions.”

Add to that categorization the fact that many of his clients are aging radicals wary of organized religion, and it makes sense why JC wore a hardware-store wingnut string on a shower stopper chain around his waist.

David Hahn says of JC’s efforts, it’s an understatement to say that Night on the Streets has made a difference in Berkeley. JC has actually created services for the homeless when they did not exist.

JC started out distributing food and necessities, then expanded his services to include visiting the sick, helping people find housing, and even helping with income taxes. JC now speaks at local schools to get students involved in issues of poverty and homelessness.

JC Orton looks like a street-smart Santa. He wears Bill-Gates-1980s-style glasses, a black button-down shirt, gray vest, black jeans and worn, black tennis shoes. His trademark black Stetson has frames his white beard.

At age 65, he owns few possessions. His only extravagaries are the iMac and iPhone that he uses to keep track of sleeping bags, copies of Street Spirit, and the mail he distributes to homeless people. For those on the street without a street address, he set up a PO Box, and they can pick up their mail at free meals around Berkeley.

He takes pictures of the hundreds of people he delivers mail to, and these photos sometimes serve as a person’s only identification record. JC holds memorial services for the homeless, enlarging the deceased’s photo and posting it in the person’s favorite spot.

JC Orton says he will continue serving on the streets until he can’t do it anymore. Conversation with him leaps from details like who is doing the laundry that day for the shelter, to stories from the lives of those who inspire him, including Martin Luther King Jr., Henry David Thoreau, Archbishop Oscar Romero, and Catholic Worker founders Peter Maurin and Dedy Day.

JC Orton delivers mail, soup, clothing, rain gear, sleeping bags and Street Spirit newspapers out of his van.

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Matt Werner photo
CIVILIAN POLICE REVIEW COULD HELP HOMELESS PEOPLE

by Steve Pleich

I recently read a very excellent treatise on the concept of citizen oversight of law enforcement in the City of Santa Cruz. But that work was completed in the early 1990s, before the generalized public policies and ordinances aimed at homeless people in our community first gained acceptance and became local law.

The police review board that ultimately grew out of that concept was hamstrung by no structural policies or processes to persist to this day and was disbanded amid frustration with the process and a lack of substantive impact. As I read the article, I wondered aloud what relationship that model of civilian oversight had to present-day Santa Cruz, to our common interest in the protection of individual rights, including those of people experiencing homelessness, and to the pursuit of public safety. I found some interesting answers.

As a Santa Cruz resident, I have seen a growing concern for public safety, coupled with an expanding public mandate for law enforcement to use whatever means and methods they think best to curb the perceived uncontrolled growth of the homeless community. In point of fact, if this chasm were not real and existing, there would be no need to call attention to it as a problem. But it is.

In recent times has called for a policy of positive engagement to bridge the perceived gap between the police department and its chain of command and the homeless community. In point of fact, if this chasm were not real and existing, there would be no need to call attention to it as a problem. But it is.

The Santa Cruz Police Department responds to the nonviolent occupation of a vacant bank building.

I have watched our elected officials support a marked and noteworthy increase in the number of sworn officers serving in the police department, while seeming little concerned about the chilling effect that heightened police presence inevitably brings to those considered to be less desirable members of the community, i.e., the homeless people.

But it is not the expansion of the police department or the overarching presence of law enforcement in our city that concerns me most — or for that matter, even the extra money singularly has upon the homeless. Rather, it is the almost complete lack of citizen participation in the development of new policies and the complete absence of civilian oversight of this ever-expanding aspect of our community that prompts these observations.

But it is not the expansion of the police department or the overarching presence of law enforcement in our city that concerns me most — or for that matter, even the extra money singularly has upon the homeless. Rather, it is the almost complete lack of citizen participation in the development of new policies and the complete absence of civilian oversight of this ever-expanding aspect of our community that prompts these observations.

I respectfully suggest the creation of a nine-member Civilian Police Review Board composed of representatives of neighborhood groups, homeless and behavioral health advocates, and social service providers who would be charged with review of police policies and procedures and tasked with oversight of our police department. Understand that when I say “oversight” I do not mean control.

Such a board would be committed to ensuring that Santa Cruz has a police department that acts with integrity and administers justice fairly and evenhandedly for all of its residents. However, to insure the independence of such a body, the board would consult directly with the police department and would pass along advisory opinions to the Santa Cruz City Council for informational purposes only.

That is the only way to depoliticize the process while creating a clear line of accountability between the community and the police department. This is particularly important in light of the fact that our City Council has historically worked to criminalize homelessness in Santa Cruz and continues to enact ordinances that substantially abridge even the most basic human rights of our homeless residents.

What powers would this new, modern Citizens Police Review Board have? If, as we say, the board is to be composed of citizen representatives, it cannot, for example, be restricted to consideration of already completed internal police investigations into allegations of police misconduct toward homeless people.

A truly reformist board must be given the power to conduct parallel investigations to supplement and inform those conducted by Internal Affairs.

Independent investigative authority would have the power to make recommendations to the chief of police concerning disposition and discipline.

This model would create a direct and substantive review process that would provide a voice to a homeless community that is often ignored and marginalized when their basic freedoms are abridged by police procedure.

On issues of operational policy and commitment of resources, any such board would need to have direct input to achieve any degree of real effectiveness. The obvious benefit of this input would be that resource allocation and policing priorities would more accurately reflect the community’s concerns, providing a more inclusive base of opinion about how best to make our safe city while giving equal weight to the preservation of civil liberties.

For example, if the board felt that public safety would best be served by spending more money on gang suppression and less on petty theft investigations, resources could be allocated accordingly. If the board recommended more money be devoted to the investigation of sexual assaults and less to enforcement of the so-called “quality of life” ordinances such as the camping ban that exclusively impact the homeless community, then that policy could drive fundamental reallocation of resources.

These are matters upon which reason- able minds will surely differ and will ultimately be the product of a long public input and review process. But it is a conversation we must have if a truly effective oversight process is ever to become a functional part of protecting the civil liberties of persons experiencing homelessness both individual and collectively.

Finally, I will say this. I have always found some considerable fault with the idea that “those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” Rather, I believe that we must let go of the excised and omissions of the past and make our own history, taking from it the lessons we learn along the way. This is the only sure way to chart a future that ensures the promise of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all our citizens, the homeless and the housed alike.

Steve Pleich directs the Homeless Persons Legal Assistance Project in Santa Cruz.

A GOOD MAN

by George Wynn

Homelessness only makes sense when you live it. He tells me down around the Cal Train Station it’s his 80th and we share a sunny afternoon beer and before he departs he holds his hands in prayer, “Thank you God, I’m still alive,” and waves, “Thank you pal.”

Urban Spring

by George Wynn

After the church meal in the winter, he tells me he often feels like he’s in a silent movie. When people see him coming down the street carrying duffel bags and so weary-eyed almost on the brink of falling asleep on his feet they never make a sound, they only frown as if they’re sore at him for being around.

“My self esteem comes when I dream: Mama’s face beams with a delicious smile and before he departs and walks out the door.

But my self esteem comes when I dream: Mama’s face beams with a delicious smile when he tells me down around the Cal Train Station it’s his 80th and we share a sunny afternoon beer and before he departs he holds his hands in prayer, “Thank you God, I’m still alive,” and waves, “Thank you pal.”

“This is only my way of being around. I’m still alive,” and waves, “Thank you pal.”

“I’m still alive,” and waves, “Thank you pal.”

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“The is only my way of being around. I’m still alive,” and waves, “Thank you pal.”

May 2014

STREET SPIRIT

4
My Dream Is For All Animals to Have Rights

by Rafael Pepper-Clarke age 9, Rosa Parks School, Berkeley

Marin Luther King Jr. said, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” That’s why I’m writing about my own dream. My dream is for animals to have rights and for us to respect them. Each of us without animals would all die of starvation. They are the top of the food chain but below us. They help us because they supply us with food and keep the world balanced.

Bees pollinate flowers and give us honey. Actually, we take it from them. The bees don’t give it to us, we steal it. Like we stole land from the Native Americans.

Ants also get rid ofextras which we don’t realize and we kill them. So there are dung beetles, which we think are gross because they are rolling a ball of poop around and we kill them even though they’re getting rid of extras. Kiling them is dehumanizing/deanimalizing. Also, animals get rid of pests like weeds, flies, locusts, etc. to help us stay alive. Animals also can warn us of storms like tornados, earthquakes and hurricanes. They’re also adorable pets.

But animals don’t have a voice. That’s why we can hurt, kill and torture animals and nobody stops us.

What would you do if you were an animal? Put yourself in their paws, hooves, or fins. I believe that animals have the same emotions as humans, like fear, pain, sadness and joy.

Animal rights groups believe “that every creature with a will to live has a right to live free from pain and suffering.” This is why we should help animals and give them a voice and I hope you agree after reading this. All we need is to start.

Animals are awesome.

"Si se puede!” "Once social change begins, it cannot be reversed,” said César Chávez.

Plant gardens. And, as can be seen from the homes they built for themselves out of construction debris, scrap materials and items retrieved from dumpsters, they are superb scavengers.

Albany officials announced that the first step in carrying out the transfer to the East Bay Regional Park District would be to evict all the campers and dismantle the encampment. Not surprisingly, there were loud protests, both from the campers and from activist supporters in the community.

City officials then brought in Operation Dignity to set up trailers to provide temporary shelter for six months and Berkeley Food and Housing Project to help the campers find housing. After that, the campers would be on their own. The city would do nothing more to help them.

The whole thing was a crashing failure. Nobody stayed in the trailers, and practically nobody got housing. The campers were not moving, because there was nowhere for them to go.

Instead, they filed a civil rights lawsuit asking for a restraining order to prevent Albany from evicting the campers until the city found adequate shelter for them. Meanwhile, the police put increasing pressure on them. A 10 p.m. curfew was imposed and citations were issued with threats of court actions. A camper reported being harassed in the middle of the night by a police officer. A policeman shot and killed another camper’s dog.

The campers’ appeals failed and ultimately they negotiated a settlement to take effect Friday, April 25. In the settlement, 30 people were offered $3000 each to cover relocation expenses. A total of 28 accepted, and two people refused as a matter of principle.

In accepting the money, they had to agree to stay away from the entire area — all of Albany city property west of the freeway — for the next 12 months. They cannot even come for a visit with friends.

City spokesperson Nicole Almaguer said that “the settlement agreement allows the City to continue assisting people, connecting them with human services and housing through the city’s service provider, Berkeley Food and Housing Project.”

It need hardly be said that $3000 can’t go very far for people with little or no income, since rents and living costs are so high throughout the Bay Area.

A few people finally found housing, but it is not clear how many campers were left out of the settlement and how many remain in the camp at the Albany Bulb.

Everyone was required to move out by Friday, April 25, when the bulldozers came and began to demolish the houses and dump trucks hauled away whatever the people may have left behind. But some people did not leave. They had nowhere to turn, and no home in sight. They had only what they could carry with them and no place to go. One camper felt terrible having to keep his cat confined to his carrier, another worried about how he would take care of his dog.

Being evicted from one’s home can be traumatic for anyone — even more so if they have built it themselves and now have to see it destroyed.

The house that Sharon and Luis built under a protecting tree with an upstairs bedroom that looks out through the branches on a spectacular view of the Bay — done by Stephanie, they spent more than a year building, and the careful laying out of garden guarded by pink flamingos — demolished. Jimbow’s free lending library and dozens more homes — smashed to pieces by the bulldozers, and all turned into rubble.

The Albany Bulb has evoked strong feelings. What is to happen on that little piece of land since it was created is controversial. There are those who feel that nobody has the right to occupy public lands, and others who have an unpleasant or frightening encounter with a camper’s dog, or simply disapprove of the campers’ presence. On the other hand, many people appreciate the eco-consciousness of the campers, their reuse of discarded materials to construct their homes. Hikers and dog walkers have become friends with some of the campers.

Over the past few years, the campers have been gaining increasing support from people and organizations in the community. A weekly pizza was brought to the encampment from Solano Community Church, and sandwiches and juice were delivered by Food Not Bombs. Volunteers providing for medical needs or a ride to apply for social services are evidence of widening community support.

Several filmmakers have made documentaries about the Albany Bulb. A website, SHARE THE BULB, has been created to tell the story and solicit support.

Albany has been trying to turn the Bulb over to the state for many years and it appears to still be a long way from happening. The campers may have been officially evicted, but the dog walkers are resisting the prospect of losing a favorite place of recreation. And the art lovers declare that they are determined to protect the art works that mean so much to so many people.

“On Our Way Home” Photo Documentary by Homeless Elders

May 2 — May 16
Uptown Body and Fender, 401 26th Street, Oakland

“Else to Survive.” (Oakland man with shopping cart.) by Keith Arivuwine

Charles Ford explained, “When I was homeless, I often felt very bad and with- out hope. I did not see a way out. I needed some help. At St. Mary’s, I began to feel better about myself and about building a more fulfilling, productive life.”

Keith Arivuwine reported that, after squatters in vacant homes for several years, he felt “a desire for change from within. I started making changes in my life. At St. Mary’s, I was around positive people who also wanted to do something different with their lives.”

Pedro del Norte said, “At St. Mary’s Center, I felt a sense of belonging. We shared experiences and collaborated in overcoming adversity.”

A growing number of seniors in Oakland are caught in the housing crisis. The Census Report tells us there are more seniors living in poverty in Oakland than any other urban area in the state.

As the title suggests, this exhibit is also about hope. “On Our Way Home,” celebrates the wisdom of elders as they offer a personal look at life on the street and what we can do to help create change.

For information contact Susan Werner 510-923-9060 x 231, stmaryscenter.org
Seeking Peace in a World of Imprisoned Beauty

from page 1

RECLAIMING THE RADICAL HISTORY OF NONVIOLENCE

Two of the most meaningful aspects of Kathy Kelly’s lifelong experiments with nonviolence are the passionate commitment that gives rise to her solidarity with victims of war and poverty, and the diverse dimensions of her resistance. Passionate and multidimensional.

The dauntingly radical and imaginative history of nonviolence has been forgotten to such an extent that our present-day concept of civil disobedience often consists of the staging of a strangely passive and bloodless drama. Activists politely submit to arrest, and then the powers that be carry on business — and warfare — as usual.

Yet, the history of nonviolence is filled with unforgettable images of rebels and agitators who passionately resisted injustice as though their lives were at stake. If we are to uphold a movement that fights for a better world — a world where beauty is no longer imprisoned — it is imperative to reclaim this legacy of truly radical resistance.

Our heritage of resistance was passed down to us through the breathtakingly brave acts of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, Alice Paul and her sister suffragists staging hunger strikes in jail, and the women of Greenham Common peace camp in their never-say-die protests of U.S. cruise missiles in England.

Our guiding lights are housing activists who defied the police and put evicted families back into their homes, anti-nuclear activists who sailed their boats directly into the path of nuclear submarines, and the Alabama schoolchildren who found the courage to march for freedom and refused to turn back, even when confronted with attack dogs and police clubs.

Our reckless blueprint for action was drawn up by the Catonsville 9 who burned hundreds of draft records during the Vietnam War and Flowshares activists who hammered nuclear warheads.

Building a movement that fights for a better world may be as though their lives were at stake. If we are to uphold a movement that fights for a better world — a world where beauty is no longer imprisoned — it is imperative to reclaim this legacy of truly radical resistance.

Our course ahead into a more humane future was navigated by Kathy Kelly and Voices in the Wilderness when they delivered medical supplies to the children of Iraq, in fearless defiance of U.S. economic sanctions.

At its heart, nonviolence arises from a deep reverence for life that leads us to subordi- nate ourselves to serve U.S. national interests, we are prepared to eliminate you, to slaughter you.”

In 2003, Kelly was arrested for trespass- ing at Fort Benning in Georgia at an army training center originally called the School of the Americas. She spent three months in prison for protesting a “school” where the U.S. taught military officials how to utilize torture, assassinations and death-squad massacres of unarmed civilians to prop up right-wing Latin American dictators.

Kathy Kelly (center, at top) lives with members of the Afghan Peace Volunteers during her frequent stays in Afghanistan.

“Keep the faith”

There was a sense that she was keeping faith with the children she learned to care about in Afghanistan and Iraq. They should have been teenagers now. We’ve lost all of their lives.” — Kathy Kelly, speaking at Livermore Laboratory

“The abolition of war”

In inviting people to step across the line into civil disobedience at Livermore, Kelly expressed a hope that may sound utopian in the present moment, but may someday turn out to be essential to survival itself.

“We want to abolish war,” she said, “and we’ll hang onto that claim for dear life. Yes, we want to abolish war. We want to stop the wars”

Where does one even begin on such a far-off journey as the abolition of warfare? For 40 activists who were arrested at Good Friday this year, only the next step was certain — a single step across a white line.

“So we gather together,” Kelly said, “shoulder to shoulder, arm in arm, believ- ing in nonviolence, believing that, yes, we shall overcome. And so we gather together, ready to say that we will not let incon- venience get in the way of acting in accord with the deep, profound desire to end war. Let us step across the line. Let us get arrested today. Let us say together, ‘We shall overcome.’”

The photo on page 1 is courtesy of Judith W. Sandoval.
May 2014

Street Spirit

Interview with Kathy Kelly

"We crucify the poorest and neediest among us on the cross of military spending. We have a responsibility to claim our right not to kill."

Kathy Kelly: I have a friend, Milan Rai, who had coordinated Voices in the Wilderness in the U.S. and is now the editor of Peace News. Mil once said, "One of the ways to stop the next war is to continue to tell the truth about this war."

So how do we tell the truth about our wars? I think if the U.S. public understands the choices that are being made in their name — and if the public understood those choices outside the filter of the forces that are marketing those wars — eventually there might be a hope of non-cooperation with the wars.

So Afghanistan is still very, very important in terms of the choices confronting the people of the United States. But also, just on the purely ethical matter of not turning away from people who are dying, we owe reparations to the people of Afghanistan for the suffering that has been caused.

Spirit: You wrote recently that thousands of Afghan children have no home and are forced to live on the streets or in squalid refugee camps, and that poverty, hunger, and disease are widespread. For those who have not been to Afghanistan, can you give us a picture of the conditions faced by civilians after all these years of war?

Kelly: On a recent trip during the winter when it’s very cold in Kabul, a youngster came in the door. The child’s name was Safar and he was shivering so convulsively, I put my arm around him, just trying to calm him down. When he turned towards me, I could see that he had a welt across his cheek. He was a shoeshine boy. He was wearing plastic slippers with no socks. He had no earmuffs. He had thin pants, and was completely inadequately dressed for this weather.

Because he’s a shoeshine boy, he has to thaw his hands out because it’s so cold. So he had gone to a barbecue spot and started warming his hands over the fire.

I think, understandably, the owner of the shop who was making the kabob thought he was trying to steal something. But, unacceptably, the man hit him over the face with a hot skewer and that’s what caused this bright-red welt.

And they’ll pick up and run, and the over-crowded cities can’t accommodate them.

Spirit: You have charged that, while Afghan civilians live in terrible poverty, the U.S. is spending $2.1 million per year for every soldier stationed in Afghanistan, according to a 2014 report by the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.

Kelly: On this last trip, I was in a camp where fire had broken out. Mercifully, the women just kept repeating, “No one was killed, no one was killed.” But all of their belongings, what little they had, were destroyed, and they’re freezing out in the cold with nobody to come and help them.

Nearby, there’s a U.S. military base that is huge and sprawling. You could drive for 20 minutes and not reach the end of the base. The trucks are going all day long, bringing food and fuel and water and supplies. Now, of course, you can’t leave the troops hungry, but how can it be that U.S. troops are in a situation where it costs 2.1 million dollars to keep one soldier in Afghanistan for one year?

Spirit: The obvious question is why the U.S. continues to spend that amount on the military instead of trying to create a lasting peace by helping the people of Afghanistan rebuild their country.

Kelly: We could have, over all these years, said to people in Afghanistan, “We are sorry for what the soldiers did. They should never have destroyed your orchards. Let us help you plant saplings. Let us help clean your irrigation ditches. Let us help you plant crops so you won’t have to import food. This is something we, as a people, want to do.” We could have said, “We’re sorry that your land gets mined by planting poppies for opium, and we want to help you plant other crops.”

Instead, 93 percent of the world’s opium is now coming from Afghanistan. You’d think that the drones flying overhead might happen to notice convoys carrying many truckloads of opium. The roads are controlled by Taliban drug lords and warlords, and even with U.S. drones flying overhead 24-7, 93 percent of the world’s opium comes from Afghanistan.

[Editor’s note: The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime has reported that 93 percent of the world’s opium comes from Afghanistan, and the money is funding Taliban military operations.]

Spirit: You stay with the Afghan Peace Volunteers during your trips to the region. What is the nature of their work?

Kelly: Part of their work involves living together inter-ethnically. These are youngsters who have every reason to feel high levels of retaliation and to feel a high desire for revenge. Reasons like: “My father was killed by the Taliban.” Or, “While our family fed the Taliban, your family looted our household.” Or, “My brother was killed right before my eyes by members of your family.”

It cuts that close. So they have been living with the Afghan Peace Volunteers.

Women and children at the Chaman e Babrak refugee camp in Afghanistan where a fire destroyed 70 homes in January 2014.

Kathy Kelly with Safar, an Afghan child who arrived with a red welt on his cheek.

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The Street Spirit
Interview with Kathy Kelly

from page 7

struggling to learn one another’s languages and cultures and live together inter-ethnically, and it’s difficult. They also want to say to people who live in countries — like my country — that are part of the war-making: “We would like to be in touch with you. We want to have a dialogue with you.” So they welcome us right into their hearts and we love it.

They also try to channel to others whatever resources have been made available to them. So the Duvet Project has been very, very important — the making of heavy blankets by groups of women.

The women of the sewing cooperative are paid as well by the project, and that has been very important to them. This last year, they made 2,000 duvets and those are distributed free of charge to the neediest people, because these kids are like little social workers. They bring these duvets to the women who are the least cared for, who are neglected because they don’t have anyone to provide an income for them. Especially the young women have been brilliant in organizing this. It’s been so edifying to see.

Spirt: You’ve described harsh conditions facing women in Afghanistan, yet Hillary Clinton and Madeleine Albright claim that the U.S. has created better conditions for women and children there. From what you’ve seen, is that true?

Kelly: One out of every 11 women in Afghanistan dies in childbirth, a torturous weekly event of daily life. But in the last 20 years, median age for women is between 42 and 47 years of age, on average. And then they talk about how they’re educating girls! Only six percent of Afghan young women are in a school by the end of the year. What kind of a track record is it when you can say that six percent of girls were in school by the end of the year?

The U.S. subsidized the Taliban and the U.S. exacerbated the war just by its very presence. They don’t seem to be limited to the availability of new recruits, both within Afghanistan and, quite likely, from Pakistan. Even General McChrystal, former head of the International Security Assistance Forces, said that the arrogance of the drone attacks jeopardizes the security of people in the U.S. because it increases the likelihood that people will fight back.

[Editor’s note: General Stanley McChrystal, the former commander of International Security Assistance Forces and U.S. Forces Afghanistan, said, “What scares me about drone strikes is how they are perceived around the world. The representation created by American use of unmanned strikes is much greater than the average American appreciates. They are hated on a visceral level, even by people who know little or nothing about them.”]

So when they want to fight back, they can join the Taliban or any of the other fighting groups that don’t have secure housing or water or warm clothes for women and children in Afghanistan. If anything, the peacekeepers are off running and possibly doing more harm than good, according to what some of the young people told me.

But you can get U.S. soldiers stationed over in Kandahar, Afghanistan, having these Skype talks with beautiful girls in Baltimore, Maryland, covered by local newspapers in their Military Life section, who can maybe catch the claim that at least we’ve made things better for girls in Afghanistan. Well, the sixth-graders in Baltimore aren’t going to be able to confront them on that. And the people in the United States who are making money because they’re creating helicopters for combat brigade units flying over the mountainside with their protruding weapons killing people in cold blood they’re not going to contest that claim.

Spirit: Who is going to contest it?

Kelly: We try. And the Afghan Peace Volunteers are, because they get on our Skype phone calls and they put out videos and they host internationals and they really do their best to keep on trying to put things out that the world might not otherwise understand.

Spirt: They’re finding that computer technologies are an effective way to make their voices heard around the world?

Kelly: Yes, they are using Skype and the Internet and Facebook. I find it all kind of an annoyance, to be honest, because there’s so much sports and entertainment and distractions available, but I find that on what limited Internet usage time they have, they do try to use that effectively. I guess you have to keep up.

Spirit: Can you describe how Afghan Peace Volunteers are helping children attend classes by providing oil, rice and clothing to their families, so the kids can reduce their working hours on the streets?

Kelly: It’s so heartwarming to see it in the boys, as proud as you can be, wearing a blue shirt with a crease in it because it has just come out of a new package. It’s also heartwarming to see kids like Safar, who is shivering from the cold, wearing socks and a jacket and gloves.

It’s good to see the kids young come over and get a huge can of oil and a big bag of rice for their families to make up for what the children might have earned out on the streets selling, and it’s good to see them starting to learn two times two is four and starting to catch up because they all need remedial help with studies in order to be able to enter school.

So it’s a whole new life of hope and dignity for the entire family, really.

Spirit: How did the Afghan Peace Volunteers respond to the Martin Luther King Center’s “Choose Nonviolence” campaign? The King Center recently asked people to ring a bell to show their resistance to poverty and discrimination.

Kelly: Seamstresses and students and Afghan Peace Volunteers and some of the young women that were coordinating the various projects all thought together about why this call was issued. They knew about Dr. King and they care about him.

So we got a lot of paper and markers and started to write down the circum-
stances of killing that had just gone on in the past week. It was across the board. There were Afghan policemen that had been killed, there were U.S. civilians that had been killed, there were Europeans killed, there were Taliban fighters killed and there were Afghan civilians killed. It was just a bloody, bloody week.

So they assembled that list. They didn’t have a bell and it really would be too expensive to go out and buy a bell, so Zekerullah got an old paint bucket and managed to bore a hole in the lid of it, and then he suspended a piece of rope with the heaviest spoon he could find so it sort of made a “thud” rather than the peal of a bell. We formed a circle. With each clunk of the spoon in this makeshift bell, the names of those who had died were read.

Spirit: You said that the young people you work with in Afghanistan know care about Martin Luther King. How were they influenced by Dr. King?

Kelly: The first time I ever got the hang of who these kids really were was in January 2010 when we were fasting in Washington, D.C., with the Witness Against Torture. Bob Cooke, who is prominent in Pax Christi, asked us if we realized that there were young people fasting with us in Afghanistan, living on a mountainside, it was the cold, and they wanted very much to be in touch with us.

So we all sat down to a Skype phone call and it was a wonderful call. We were on their cell phone. Carmen Trottia of the New York Catholic Worker asked me, “It’s Martin Luther King’s birthday on January 15. Do you think I should tell these kids about King?”

I said, “Yeah, go ahead.” So as Carmen starts to tell these kids about Martin Luther King, there was a commotion because they had been trying to decide which one of them would deliver a memorized quote from Dr. King’s speech — by candlelight in the dark in the lit- tle tent. I thought then that I really wanted to meet these young people.

Spirit: That’s an amazing demonstration that the words and example of Martin Luther King still have such an impact on young people in Afghanistan today.

Kelly: Well, in 2014, they now have an entire shelf of their library in their home dedicated to King, Gandhi, Noam Chomsky, Barbara Deming and Dorothy Day. They get it right away that people were taking significant risks in order to stand up to people that were abusing their basic human rights.

So they’ve watched videos on the civil rights movement and they’ve benefited from the “A Force More Powerful” videos on nonviolent social change that David Hartsough and others have sent over.

They’ve had discussions and tried to share the knowledge that they have gained with other groups, and, of course, they want to make the connection with the Muslim Gandhi, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

So it’s a very exciting time in that regard because the Skype technology allows them to connect with young people at Jeju Island (off the coast of South Korea), who are having demonstrations every morning trying to prevent construction of a U.S. military base.

Spirit: Do you feel that the insights and strategies of nonviolent movements are being replicated all around the globe, maybe more than ever before in history?

Kelly: It’s a very interesting time because I think, as people begin to connect and unite their various struggles, the idea of the 99 percent and the 1 percent becomes more tantalizing. As people start to see that if we only focus on our part, which is only a tiny fraction of the 99, then we aren’t the 99. But if we really find ways to link with ourselves, there could actually be some greatly needed change in the distribution of resources and the socioeco-
nomic disparity.

These young people have lived under the bomb, those who have cowarded while they hear the gunshots and the battles raging, when people in that situation can say, “I don’t want retaliation and I don’t want revenge,” then we start to see nonviolence teaching the rest of us because of the courage people are catching from one another.

Spirit: We’ve been told that the U.S. military plans to leave Afghanistan at the end of this year, in December 2014. Should we believe that is going to happen or do you think that the U.S. military will go back?

Kelly: Well, I think we have to begin to learn about the 21st century military, and let go of the idea of reliance on a huge, bulky war machine. With the kind of retool-
ing that involves combining the drone surve-
illance and the Joint Special Operations commandos — these are the Navy Seals, the Green Berets, the Army Rangers and Marine commandos — then, that group-
ing can, with the drone surveillance, achieve the kind of control that the United States wants in order to have geopolitical influence in the region, and if they are able to accomplish it, build pipelines and railways and roads that would func-
tion for the extraction of resources. This would mean that the U.S. would
then control the pricing, and controlling very precious resources. Underneath the Hindu Kush mountains, in Afghanistan, there are lithium and rare earth elements used in our cell phones and our computers. And surrounding the Caspian Sea basin is a very rich supply of natural gas and fossil fuel. Whoever controls the pricing and flow of those resources gets an economic edge. The United States does not want China or Russia to have that economic edge. So I think about the Lawrence of Arabia stories. It was built on water, it was built on one line, and somebody comes out and blows it up, then that’s a problem. But if you’ve got drone surveillance, if you’ve got people giving you information about who might be moving where with a weapon or with an intent to blow up what you’re trying to construct, then you can get that upper hand. And I believe the United States is remaining in Afghanistan with nine bases, three major airfields, several big prisons, interrogations, night raids, assassinations, and death squads. They can do that with mercenaries. And the former Blackwater, now called Academi, is building a huge group called Camp Justice just outside of Kabul. So they won’t need the big bases. Almost certainly, whoever wins the runoff in the election will sign the bilateral security agreement and there are elites from Afghanistan, Europe and the United States who will be there, hands on, and the warlike situation will go on. It’s pre-posterous to think that the warlords and the drug lords are saying, “We’re done with war and we’re done with Afghanistan’s resources and people.”

Spirit: When you go to Afghanistan, Iraq and Palestine, why is it important for you to live with people in the war zones?

Kelly: The trauma we’ve been taught is that where you stand determines what you see. I could point specifically to Gaza. I was there in 2009 during Operation Cast Lead, and the so-called Cast Lead was a three-week battle between Israeli and Palestinian forces in the Gaza Strip from Dec. 27, 2008 to Jan. 18, 2009. A bomb was exploding once every 11 minutes, from 11:00 at night to 1:00 in the morning and again from 3:00 until 6:00. Once every 11 minutes, a bomb explosion. Now, I know nothing about ballistics. Zero. But I started to recognize when it was a Helfine missile fired from an Apache helicopter or when it was a 122mm rocket, a bomb dropped from an F-16. The way I learned that was because the children taught it to me. Children — they weren’t even teenagers yet — taught me how to identify the bombs falling over our heads. Then, after the ceasefire was declared. It was a children’s hospital with a doctor whose hands are shaking while he’s taking a call from a farmer who is saying, “Our oranges are covered with some white, sticky substance and don’t know what it is, but it makes our hands itch.” The doctor is trying to calmly tell him, “Don’t touch them. Wash your hands. And don’t sell the oranges.” Then he takes me to visit a woman whose arms are bandaged up, and she has actually been hit by a tank-fired missile that was firing white phosphorous into her home. It was so nightmarish I didn’t know what to say. It was a time when I wasn’t able to go to her home and I could see the horrific damage. I got my notes to someone at the L.A. Times and they wrote a brilliant article on their front page.

So it is important to go and try to learn what you can. The disproportionate use of force against the civilian population is a war crime, a crime against humanity, and I think it should be reported.

Spirit: You helped organize delegations that brought medicine to civilians in Iraq as a way to “violently resist” U.S. economic sanctions. How did you become involved in organizing that campaign in defiance of the sanctions?

Kelly: George Lakey was doing a peace teaching in Chicago in 1995 at Christmas time. Most of us at that training had been to Iraq in 1991 as part of a Gulf Peace Team. So we knew a lot, compared to most Americans. We also knew that Sister Anne Montgomery and Sister Eileen Storey and Jim Douglass had been going over to Iraq and coming back and saying that it was really bad over there. They were telling people about the consequences of the economic sanctions. I’m not proud of this at all, but sometimes Sister Anne or Sister Eileen would call me and I would be afraid to answer the phone because I knew they were going to tell me about Iraq when I was taking care of my aging Dad and I was supposed to be a part of these actions about nuclear disarmament. And I’m not keeping my head above water about anything, so how could I take on more?

At this time, we also had the George Lakey workshop asking us to record our selves talking about what we would do if we took action about a serious problem in the world. So Anne Montgomery and I and a few others took on the issue of the sanctions against Iraq.

On January 15, 1996, 12 of us wrote to the Office of Foreign Assets Control of the U.S. Treasury Department saying our plan was to break the economic sanctions as often as we could, and that we would do this openly and publicly, and that we would bring medicine and medical relief supplies to Iraq. By that time, we had 300 additional signers.

Boy, we got a letter back right away from the Office of Foreign Assets Control saying, “You keep this up, and you will risk 12 years in prison, a million-dollar fine, and a $250,000 administrative penalty.”

So then, we sent that letter out to our 300 signers and asked them to let us know if they were still on board, and 80 people were still on board. So those 80 people were the beginning, really, of Voices in the Wilderness. We gave ourselves that name, and we opened a bank account.

In March 1996, the first five-member voices in the Wilderness delegation traveled to Iraq. We snuffled in our duffel bags whatever medical supplies and medical relief supplies that people would donate to us.

Spirit: Since you had told the U.S. government in advance that you were going to take medicine to Iraq, did they try to prevent you from going?

Kelly: No. We went to Jordan by plane and a plane was going to stop you from going to Jordan because you’re not violating any laws. We held a press conference before we left every time we went and we held a press conference when we came back. We were always open and public. They can’t stop you from going to Jordan. Then we traveled by vehicle to Iraq. At that time, it was always a very, very difficult kind of interaction. We didn’t want to be at all subservient to the aims of a cruel and brutal dictatorship. But at the same time, we couldn’t walk away from the bedrooms of dying children, and say, “Well, it’s really too complicated. We can’t be in Iraq, we have to be in our own best interest. If you want to wait until you’re perfect, you’ll wait a very long time. It was always a campaign with an inherent flaw.

Spirit: The stated purpose of the economic sanctions against Iraq was to weaken Saddam Hussein’s hold on power. Since you refer to Hussein as a cruel and brutal dictator, why were you acting in resistance to the sanctions?

Kelly: We could see clearly that the sanctions actually strengthened the government of Saddam Hussein. That was true. If you want to isolate a cruel and abusive dictator, then strengthen the country’s social services, strengthen its education, and strengthen the possibility of civil society staying in touch with people outside the country. But the sanctions isolated civil society, ended education for all practical purposes, and cut off any kind of social services so that people became more dependent on the cruel and brutal dictator.

So we could see all that. We didn’t come out and say publicly, “Saddam Hussein is a cruel and brutal dictator.” We would never have been allowed into the country and anybody that helped us would have been killed.

Spirit: Did the U.S. government ever press charges against Voices in the Wilderness for violating the sanctions?

Kelly: They would bring us into court with some regularity. It was curious because at one point there was a $50,000 fine. I thought, “What are you going to take my contact lenses?” I just had to laugh. I mean, I hadn’t paid a dime of taxes the U.S. government as a war tax refuser since 1980. So there is nothing they could take from me. The people that would go over were in the same boat. So good luck collecting from them!

Spirit: But as it turned out, they did fine your group $20,000, didn’t they?

Kelly: Yeah, they finally took us into court. And I think Condeleeza Rice inadvertently might have saved us this. It is speculation on my part, but this much is true. Chevron settled out of court, acknowledging that they had paid money under the table to Saddam Hussein in order to get very lucrative contracts for Iraq oil. Condeleeza Rice was the international liaison for Chevron while it was paying money under the table to get these lucrative contracts. So when we finally had our day in court, Sen. Carl Levin’s staffers were still digging up this information and it was beginning to become public evidence that Chevron, Olin Marine Inc., Mobil and Coastal Oil had all been paying money for these oil contracts under the table to Saddam Hussein.

So there were big fish in the pond that broke the sanctions and there were little fish in the pond that broke the sanctions. I think some of the big fish said, “That is one hot potato. You drop that hot potato as fast as you can, and don’t make a big deal because those people are little fish but they’re mothly little fish.” So they never tried to collect a dime from us. The money was sitting there.

Spirit: Well, what exactly did happen to you when the U.S. government took you to court for violating the sanctions?

Kelly: We were found guilty and fined $20,000. Federal Judge John Bates wrote in his legal opinion that those who disobeyed an unjust law should accept the penalty willingly and lovingly.

Spirit: Unbelievable! A federal judge lectures you about lovingly accepting this unjust fine using the words of Martin Luther King?

Kelly: Yes. We said to Judge Bates, “If you want to send us to prison, we will go, willingly and lovingly. We’ve done that before already. But if you think we will pay a fine to the U.S. government, then we ask you to imagine that Martin Luther King would have ever said, ‘Coretta get the checkbook.’ We are not going to pay one dime to the U.S. government which continues to wage warfare.”
At that time, supplemental spending bills appeared every year, sometimes two or three times a year, and congressional representation had a high level of disappointment of my adult life. We tried hard but we didn’t succeed. So we began to question continuing to use the name of the corporation offices and in the well-earmed pens. They were very polite and they handcuff us and haul us into the vehicle.

One time after an arrest, I was left by myself in handcuffs with one young soldier in a jeep. I kept asking to be let out of the silence. So I asked him, “Do you think the corn will grow?” And he said, “I don’t know, ma’am, but I sure hope so.”

Why did you get much jail time for these actions?

Kelly: I was sentenced to one year in prison but I only served nine months of it in maximum security prison in Lexington, Kentucky.

Spirit: Nine months is a long time to spend in a prison.

Kelly: It was very educational. I was able to read a great deal of whatever I was interested in. I had a pen and a pencil, I’ll read books. I would go into the infirmary and I was there for a few weeks and I was able to read books.

Why did it give you more backbone?

Kelly: I think because I felt at times, “I’ve got nothing to lose. I’ll stand up to this warden. What is he going to do, shoot me?” I found myself standing up to authority figures and raising my voice. You do, you are going to do what you’re going to do. I’m already in prison. If they put me in solitary confinement, I’ll be happy. I thought that if I can’t make a difference if we can’t have visitors, if we have a pen and a pencil, I’ll read books.

Why didn’t you miss your freedom and your life outside the prison?

Kelly: No, not really. It’s all a matter of attitude. If you go in saying, “I’ve got nine months ahead of me so I’m going to learn as much as I can, and forget about the outside world.” It’s true that during that time I was very close to my heartPatients. No matter how hard you try to say, “I’m here where I am,” there’s always the pull of the outside world.

But what I learned from the other women, I could never, never have learned if I had been a chaplain or a social worker in the outside world. What you learn sitting on the bench next to someone who has a jail number just like you have a number is very, very important, and it helped shape my views for a long time.

Spirit: Could you explain a little about what you learned in prison?

Kelly: Well, I learned that the prison was a world of imprisoned beauty. I was able to see the faces of people who had been wronged by our sisters-in-law, my next-door neighbors, my colleagues. I learned that there is no mercy and that people get these lengthy, lengthy sentences and they’re cut off from their families.

The main people that threaten us are in the corporation offices and in the well-appointed salons at parties, and they real-ly threaten us. They make weapons. They make alcohol, firearms and tobacco, and they’ve stolen the military out of us. They steal from us, and they rob us. And who goes to jail? I’ve got nothing to lose. I’ll stand up to this warden. What is she going to do, what is my life going to be like? I’m going to be a mother carrying a bundle that is the dead body of your starved child.

The conservation of the warden.

I can’t look the other way! But the drones are not sending the intelligence we really need. Because the drones will never tell us what it’s like to be a widow in Afghanistan trying to make your way up that mountainside carrying water. The drones will never tell us what it’s like to be a mother carrying a bundle that is the dead body of your starved child.

The drones have no way to tell us that. They just give us this cartoonish notion of what those bad boys, and somehow, the bad guys, the high-value targets, are supposed to be people that might pose a threat, but there aren’t any questions asked.

The mother of a son killed in Iraq said to me, “They do not ask ‘Who is this? Who is that?’” She knew you’re at least supposed to ask questions before bomb- ing people. She said, “They killed my son, and now I am an old poor woman. Who will bring bread into this house?”

Spirit: Can you describe the protest against drone warfare at Hancock Field Air National Guard Base in DeWitt, New York, in April 2011?

Kelly: I walked out to Hancock Field and met with a wonderful group of people—so active, so much singing, so much camaraderie and good will. They had already done long marches and they had done their homework. We walked from a park to Hancock Field and we crossed the line and laid down as part of a die-in.

People put white sheets and roses on those that were lying down. Then we were arrested and taken to the DeWitt County jail. That decided to cause the entire DeWitt County jail and court system to say that this has got to stop because it’s costing a great deal of money.

Kelly with children who come for tutoring with the Afghan Peace Volunteers.
It so rattled the military people that the commander of the Air National Guard Base has taken out an order of protection saying that he is in fear for his life. The IRS is a personal threat to his safety.

So Cynthia Banas, who is 79 years old, says: “I don’t even know what he looks like!” [prolonged laughter]

Kelly: We were very respectful of the many people who didn’t engage in across the country to protest congressional funding of the war in Iraq. But we thought, when we take those vigil lights right inside the congressional offices and said, “We’re not going to leave until you assure us that you’re not going to continue to exacerbate the war in Iraq, and put your boys on the phone with us.”

So people across the country did that and it was a very, very good thing. The U.S. Congress is a very poor place to make no law to abridge the right of the people to assemble peacefully for a redress of grievances. So we assembled peacefully for a little bit more than a week in a little place where the grievance is being perpetuated.

There were many arrests, and of those who were arrested, people who were not U.S. Congress and Senate, every single one of them was from a place where these nonviolent activists had peacefully assembled. It was very important.

Kelly: You have also been a war tax refuser.

Kelly: I’m a war tax refuser. I don’t give money to the Mafia.

Kelly: Yes, I’m a 100 percent withholder, like many war tax resisters. I don’t own any place that I’ve lived in. I just don’t have any money. But I don’t have a savings account, and I don’t own anything. The IRS is like my spiritual director [laughs]. I don’t know how to drive a car, and I’ve never driven one. So I’ve learned. I just don’t have anything to take.

Spirt: So has the IRS given up even on trying to collect?

Kelly: Once they came out to collect in your house, people really care taking care of my dear Dad, who was wheelchair-bound, and a bit slumped over in the chair. Dad liked to listen to opera and I had a really awful old recording of a tenor who was a sensation back in the day. I had been in the back of the house and I didn’t know she was coming, so I ran downstairs and opened the door while the player was making such a horrible noise. The apartment was fine but it only had a few stacks of furniture.

There was a woman asking me if I was going to get a job, and I told her I couldn’t leave my father. Then she asked if I had a bank account, and I said no. “And you’re a tax delinquent?” she protested. “You don’t even know how to drive.” And I said, “That’s a very good idea.” [laughs] They’ve never tried to collect since. There was just nothing to take. Very nice.

Spirit: You were the keynote speakers on Good Friday at Livermore Laboratory this year. Why was it important for you to join in resisting Livermore Lab’s role in making that dangerous warheads?

Kelly: I greatly admire the people who have never wavered from drawing attention to the labs. They’ve sometimes been astonishingly of their time, and many are part of a faith-based perspective. I think that we crystallize the poorest and neediest of people’s lives, involve them in very high military spending. We care more about our bombs and our bullets and our capacity to have nuclear weapons than any other issue.

We care more than that we care about people’s ability to have housing and food and education. We will pursue our attacks against poverty, even though we say we’re a Christian nation, and that’s why in line with it. It’s really a huge gift.

Kelly: I think the first question we must ask is something Gandhi pointed out to us: How does our action affect the most vulnerable? If that is our rudder or guideline, it becomes much easier to make decisions about how to act nonviolently.

Spirit: I agree that Gandhi’s question about how our actions affect the poorest person is the very heart of it all. How did you guide your decisions in taking stands?

Kelly: I think I choose the question we must ask is something Gandhi pointed us to: How does our action affect the most vulnerable? If that is our rudder or guideline, it becomes much easier to make decisions about how to act nonviolently. 

Spirit: Are there any books on nonviolence that have impressed you lately?

Kelly: I’m very, very impressed by Moshin Hamid’s novel about circumstances inside a prison in Pakistan (formerly Bombay). I just finished reading it.

Spirit: I have great thanks for Amy Goodman. I think we can become kindred spirits.

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Spirit: Are there any books on nonviolence that have impressed you lately?

Kelly: I’m very, very impressed by [prolonged laughter]. I have a novel about a place where these nonviolent activists had peacefully assembled. It was very important.

Kelly: You’ve been involved in delivering medical supplies to Iraq, planting corn on a nuclear missile site, doing tax resistance, caring for your ailing father, and living in war zones in the Middle East. How did you understand your nonviolence lead you to be involved in these very diverse kinds of actions?

Spirit: It so rattled the military people that the commander of the Air National Guard Base has taken out an order of protection saying that he is in fear for his life. The IRS is a personal threat to his safety.

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Good Samaritan at Work in Berkeley

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brings them back for signatures, supplies envelopes and postage, and walks each client to the mailbox. If someone’s in prison, rehab or a psych ward, he holds onto their mail until they return. He freely gives out his cell number. On the first of each month, he routinely receives over 100 phone calls inquiring about checks.

Before he began volunteering with the Catholic Worker full-time, JC studied in Greece, studied computer programming, raced motorcycles down “The Snake” on the Mulholland Highway in Southern California, collected coins, and worked at a lumber yard in Millbrae.

He held this last job until he wasn’t rehired after serving time in prison in 2003. JC was arrested when he protested at Fort Benning in Georgia.

The annual School of the Americas vigil, attended by over 10,000 Catholics, honors the six Jesuit priests who were killed by Latin American commandos trained at the U.S. base. JC said that, after hearing the peace activist Fr. John Dear speak, he felt compelled to join the nonviolent demonstration.

“It was as a direct action of civil disobedience showing our opposition to the U.S. government teaching torture,” JC said. He was cited with trespassing onto a U.S. military base along with 84 other marchers. He was fined $1,000 and served 90 days in federal prison.

In addition to protesting against violence, weapons and war, JC advocates on behalf of those without medical coverage. He’s been in their shoes as an uninsured patient seeking surgery for skin cancer at Highland Hospital.

A homeless man, who asked not to be identified, outside the Canterbury House on Bancroft Way said, “If it wasn’t for JC, I wouldn’t be alive today.” A man named Lawrence said he calls JC a friend who “goes above and beyond the call of duty.”

JC himself barely scraps by. He took out a home equity loan on his house and relies on the generosity of friends to keep Night on the Streets operating on less than $30,000 a year. His only income besides Social Security is $6,000 a year from the city of Berkeley for running the shelter, and $750 a month from the American Friends Service Committee for coordinating the distribution of 20,000 copies per month of the homeless newspaper Street Spirit to vendors in the East Bay.

At a Presidents Day meal in February, JC said a prayer: “We need to treat the homeless as human, as our brothers, as children of God. We need to see that spark of divinity within each and everyone we meet. We need to see the living Christ in the soup line. Only then can we be radically transformed by love and kindness.”

GIMME SHELTER

When it rains in Berkeley, JC and the Catholic Worker go into high gear. JC runs the Emergency Storm Shelter, which opens up for 65 homeless people on especially cold and wet nights between Thanksgiving and Easter. If rain is forecasted that evening, he creates a flier on his computer titled “Gimme Shelter!” (a reference to The Rolling Stones song) and sends an email to 140 addresses, including the Berkeley Fire Department, Highland Hospital, John George Psychiatric Hospital, and many social service organizations throughout Alameda County. He drives around Berkeley posting the flier at shelters and parks.

He arrives at the shelter at Durant Avenue and Dana Street around 8:30 p.m. and hands out printed tickets numbered 1-65. These tickets guarantee a bed for the night inside the First Congregational Church. JC tells people to find a place to take cover from the rain and return at 9:45 to be admitted at 10. On nights when the church hall is being used for a concert, the shelter is closed.

JC said that, since the City of Berkeley increased the number of beds from 50 to 65 this year, he’s only had to turn away five people total in 25 nights. Looking at the stats, he said that nearly 15 percent of the shelter occupants are veterans, and the population is aging. There’s been an increase in the number of people over 55 in the shelter.

Roberto, who frequently stays at the shelter with his wife, Alicia, said of JC, “He does a lot for us. He does it all. He’s really good at helping homeless people out.”

Some nights the homeless patrons will ask JC to say “the prayer” before bed. JC Orton will stand up and give a traditional Irish blessing: “May the Lord support you all the day long, ’til the shadows lengthen and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over, and the day’s work is done. Then in His mercy may He give you a safe lodging, a holy rest and peace.”

JC walks laps around the space, gradually turning the lights down. He makes sure people are settling in and turns the lights completely off at 11. He bids goodnight to the shelter workers and heads back home.

Why do the volunteers keep coming back? Hahn says JC Orton inspires and challenges him. Zyg figures that, since he has enough to get by and others don’t, he’s compelled to give back. For Brando, “It’s a state of mind. These people aren’t things to step over when going to the movies, but they are human beings and deserve to be cared for.”

Matt Werner, 30, has been a volunteer with the Catholic Worker for 10 years. Visit its website to learn more about Night on the Streets Catholic Worker. This article was first published on April 24 on Berkeleyside, Berkeley’s independent news site.