A Letter from Maloy

Dear Friends,

Betsy wrote this column/letter to you in our last issue as we were finishing the harvest and storing away the year’s produce. As I take my turn for this issue, snow geese are wheeling around the sky over our little town and we are getting ready for the spring. Betsy is starting to make soil blocks to start the early garden plants. Since we don’t use artificial light in the chicken barn, our flock of hens, depleted by predators to only four, are getting back into production, responding to the lengthening days by giving us one blue or brown egg every other day or so. We are taking a rare hiatus from milking, waiting for our goats to “come fresh” (have their kids) Bonnie expecting in April and Ruby in June.

I am grateful to be able to continue a pattern of living on this farm, in residence here about half the time, then travelling and agitating around the big world as circumstances, invitations and events call me. Both are incredible privileges and challenges, too, neither of which can be easily refused.

Elsewhere I write of my visit to New York in December, where the Catholic Workers and others have been raising the issue of the war and the manufactured state of famine and pestilence inflicted on Yemen. I also write of the protests in Washington, DC, sponsored by Witness Against Torture, calling for the release of the prisoners held on Guantanamo.

On January 20, I was invited to speak at a solidarity rally in Columbia, Missouri, where some 1600 people gathered to oppose the “Trump Agenda” on its first anniversary.

Later that month, I was at the test site in Nevada for “Down Winders’ Day” remembering the first nuclear bomb detonated there and the victims of radiation resulting, past, present and future. From Nevada, I took a bus to Los Angeles, a visit with my brother Brett and his family before embarking on a speaking tour in LA, San Diego, Orange County and in Sonora, in Central California.

At the end of this western tour, I visited the “Earth Abides” CW farm in Sheep Ranch, CA, and walked among the tall Sequoias in Calaveras County before going home.

The winter quiet of the farm was broken by a rousing carol sing with neighbors and guests at Christmas, including Betsy’s sister Kathy and some of our kids’ old school friends. While I was on the road, CW farmers Alice from Ames, Iowa, and Shay from Lake City, Minnesota, and her friend Haley wove rugs and helped prepare the house for the craft retreat that Betsy writes of.

For me, the sweetest aspect of the retreat was to have our house filled with Catholic Workers and friends of different generations and perspectives, heartfelt laughter and prayers, deep reflection and discussion amid the busyness. A happy reminder to me and Betsy of the value of the life we have here.

We are grateful, too, for all who help make this life sustainable, including our donors and my colleagues at Voices for Creative Nonviolence. Our best hope, still, is that some generous souls will see the possibilities of making a life here with us on this farm.

Love to all, Brian
“a swirl of images”

A Catholic Worker Craft Retreat

by Betsy Keenan

My mind is in a swirl of images as I try to catch in words our recent Craft Retreat. Do I start with the people, Catholic Workers from around the Midwest and neighbors from towns around, diverse in age, experience and background? Do I start with the schedule? packed with plans and activity, teaching and learning, busy with making and doing, but lightened with rest, time for reflection, dancing and joyful meals? I could focus on the products of our labor, formed by our hands from cotton, wool, wax, willow branches, flour, water, and yeast, color, water, recycled clothing and bedding. I will try to describe the result of cooperation and attention, creativity and time taken for this long weekend in Maloy.

Our first arrivals were Thursday night, February 15th, Maria from Chicago, by train and Monique and Elizabeth from the Quad-Cities (Rock Island and Bettendorf) by car. Friday morning Nate, Alice and Allyson arrived: from Ames. One loom was already set up with a warp for rug rugs, and the second with a wool warp about 6” wide in a “gooses eye” pattern was ready to go by the end of the morning. Monique, who had brought along rags from an old rug she disassembled for reweaving was ready to begin immediately with the rug warp, and I got Elizabeth started with the pattern and directions for making either a mat or narrow strip with the wool. Several folks brought interesting odds and ends of wool to use for this pattern. Alice took some folks foraging in the attic for material to tear for the rugs.

By lunchtime our old friend Kathi arrived from Des Moines and from Mount Ayr, Mary Ellen, first of our ‘guest teachers’. As soon as lunch was cleared up, Mary Ellen was prepared to begin a marathon bread-making session, and our friend Cassie from Lamoni pulled in with her two little boys, and our friend Sophie to share in the fun. Kathi popped the chili she brought into a crockpot, and supper was tucked into a corner, while Mary Ellen proceeded...
with a hands on demonstration making French bread, hamburger buns, bagels and focaccia. While the smells of fresh bread filled the house, folks were busy at the looms, or preparing rags to be used in rug making. Cassie, Sophie and the little boys headed home after a little tea party.

Our neighbors Don Ray and Mercedes joined us for supper, and another crafter from Lamoni as well, Alison.

After supper Alice took the lead and in the basement, buckets were filled with vibrant dyes of yellow, purple, green and blue. Some fabric was destined for the rug weaving and some items were clothing that people brought to transform with fresh color. The fabric was allowed to rest overnight, and Saturday morning we rinsed the dyes from it thoroughly and washed in the washing machine in several loads. We had the prettiest clothesline for miles around!

As we finished up our morning prayer Saturday, Sandy arrived from Lenox to instruct us in using willow to make a tray or basket. The day was starting to warm up as we headed outside to harvest willow rods from my rows of basket willow by the garden. Beginning with three long rods to make a hoop, we tied our round shape to hold its form as we worked about 20 other pieces together. We positioned them as directed and then felt that amazing tension that holds the base of the basket in its sturdy form. Then binding around the edge we worked to complete them with a few variations as Sandy showed us in her samples.

Through the day people were also taking turns in weaving, cooking and there were some other crochet and knitting projects that people brought along to work on. In the basement Brian had melted wax and toward the middle of the day, the dipping of candles began, working through several shades - yellow, orange and dark reddish purple - or the carrot colors as some gardeners remarked. By the evening the first warp on the rug loom was completed and we conferred on setting up a second one - a brighter one with some very bright stripes. Material from the dying session the night before was dry and could now make its way into the rugs. Several people participated in the set up this time, starting Saturday night and completing it on Sunday.

Sunday morning most of us took a field trip to Missouri for Mass at the Benedictine Monastery at Clyde. They invited us for coffee and treats so we had a chance to visit.

“A Swirl of Images” continued on page 7
A Story of Two Blockades

New York City and Yemen

by Brian Terrell

On December 11, in response to the growing humanitarian crisis in Yemen, more than 50 concerned people including representatives of various peace, justice and human rights organizations and communities, gathered in New York City’s Ralph Bunche Park, across First Avenue from the United Nations. Our message, which was communicated on signs and banners and by speakers addressing the rally, was simple and direct: end the war crimes being committed by the military of the United States along with Saudi Arabia and its coalition partners abetted by the US and end the blockade of Yemeni ports.

For more than two years, Saudi/US bombing has targeted civilian infrastructure: Hospitals, schools, factories, markets, funerals, sea ports, electrical power stations and water treatment facilities. US drones strikes and incursions by US Special Forces into Yemen have killed civilians as well. Armed conflict has directly taken the lives of some 12,000 people, but that tragic number is greatly exceeded by the number of those who are dying from a combination of malnutrition and otherwise easily preventable ailments and diseases like respiratory infections, measles, and cholera, including more than 1,000 children each week. 20 million of Yemen’s population of 28 million people are food insecure and few have access to clean drinking water. More than half of the hospitals in the country are not functioning.

Early in November, the already onerous blockade of Yemen’s ports was made practically total, prompting the United Nations Under-Secretary for Humanitarian Affairs to warn that, unless the blockade of Yemen was fully lifted, “... there will be a famine in Yemen... It will be the largest famine the world has seen for many decades, with millions of victims.”

On November 27, limited exceptions to the blockade were made for humanitarian aid shipments alone. The resulting tightly controlled deliveries have been decried as an empty and vastly insufficient gesture by humanitarian aid groups, who are calling for the ports to be opened to all humanitarian and commercial shipments. Under this pressure, President Trump issued a very brief statement calling upon the Saudis to “completely allow food, fuel, water and medicine to reach the Yemeni people who desperately need it.” Trump’s uncharacteristically polite request was not backed by anything much at all, much less by a freezing of US arms sales to the Saudis, nor did it address the practice of the US Air Force refueling Saudi fighter jets in mid-air or the US’ own drone strikes in Yemen.

Clearly, the times demand that more be done to counter this dire threat and some voices are being raised. Along with robust diplomatic efforts, there are legislative attempts to curtail arms sales to the Saudis. There have also been fasts, vigils and protests such as occurred in New York and other cities on December 11.

After speeches, songs and a powerful minute of silence, the rally moved up First Avenue to both the US and the Saudi Permanent Missions to the United Nations, led by banner reading “STOP US-SAUDI WAR CRIMES” and “LIFT THE BLOCKADE”, followed closely by officers of the New York City Police Department. Some of us felt compelled by conscience to stand in the doorway of the US Mission and after a short time, we were arrested for violating the “obstructing vehicular or pedestrian traffic” provision of the New York Penal Law regarding disorderly conduct. Fifteen of us, carrying photos of Yemeni child victims, were taken into custody and transported to the cells of the 7th Precinct on the city’s Lower East Side.

I could not help but wonder as we were handcuffed...
Solidarity from Central Cellblock to Guantanamo

by Brian Terrell

On Thursday, January 11, the sixteenth anniversary of the opening of the US military prison at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba was marked by a coalition of 15 human rights organizations gathered in Lafayette Park, across Pennsylvania Avenue from the White House in Washington, DC. An interfaith prayer service was followed by a rally featuring song and poetry and addresses by activists from the sponsoring organizations, including attorneys for some of those detained at Guantanamo.

Despite his declaration that “In the dark halls of Abu Ghraib and the detention cells of Guantanamo, we have compromised our most precious values,” President Obama failed to fulfill his promise to close the prison. As a candidate, Donald Trump advocated for keeping more detainees, “We’re gonna load it up with some bad dudes, believe me, we’re gonna load it up.” Days before his inauguration last year, President-elect Trump tweeted, “There should be no further releases from Gitmo. These are extremely dangerous people and should not be allowed back onto the battlefield.”

I participated in the day’s events as part of the Witness Against Torture community. This was our fourth day of fasting, reflection and action together and many of us wore orange jump suits and black hoods representing the 41 Muslim men still held there. Five of these have been cleared for release and thirty-six others also remain at the island prison, most of whom have never been charged with any crime. Earlier in the day the Center for Constitutional Rights filed in federal court a major new lawsuit — the first under the Trump administration — challenging the legality of arbitrary and indefinite detention at Guantanamo.

After the rally, WAT performed a simple ritual, serving 41 cups of tea one at a time to “detainees” who each lifted their hood to accept their cup and take a sip before laying it down in a row on the sidewalk. The names of the men were spoken aloud and had been written on each of the styrofoam cups, remembering that drawing and writing on such cups has been one of few outlets for expression for many detainees.

Immediately after the tea was served, five of us stepped into Pennsylvania Avenue, walking toward the White House with a banner calling for the release of these 41 along with the thousands imprisoned in immigration detention centers and the millions of victims of hyper-incarceration in the US. To approach the White House, we needed to cross under yellow police line tape and were immediately arrested by uniformed Secret Service police.

I have been attending protests at the White House since Jimmy Carter lived there and with each succeeding administration, the space allowed for political discourse has been reduced and the once protected free speech of citizens increasingly criminalized there. Under Trump, half the width of the formerly public sidewalk in front of the White House is fenced off, the inner perimeter now patrolled by officers armed with automatic weapons. Pennsylvania Avenue, long ago closed to vehicular traffic, is now closed off to pedestrians at the hint of a demonstration. This public forum, a place of protest and advocacy for more than a century, the place where the vote for women and benefits for veterans were won, has been strangled to the point where no dissent is tolerated there.

The five of us were vigorously searched and taken to a local DC Metro Police station where we were photographed, finger printed and charged with “crossing a police line.” My four friends were released from the station after a few hours with a pending court appearance date, as is usual for such petty crimes as ours. I, on the other hand, was transferred by the Secret Service to the Central Cellblock to be brought before a judge the next day.

The booking sergeant told me that if it were up to the Metro Police, I would go home with my friends. The arresting authority, however, was the Secret Service and they wanted me held over due to an apparent outstanding case from Las Vegas. Last April, I was arrested at the armed drone operation center, Creech Air Force Base in Nevada, for the alleged crime of disturbing the peace. The District Attorney in Las Vegas declined to file any charge against me (maybe because I was disturbing the war?) but the chief judge of the Las Vegas Justice (sic) Court summoned me to appear before him on September 25 anyway.
I made a motion to the court for clarification and received a response from another judge that I was not required to appear in answer to the summons. I also got official notice from the DA’s office that they had “determined not to file formal charges at this time.” Apparently, the chief judge was not happy with that decision and decided to take the role of prosecutor himself and issued a warrant for my arrest.

Central Cellblock is a crowded, noisy, roach infested hot box where all those arrested and held for various crimes around the city are collected for their initial appearances in court the next day. I was one of more than 90 men who spent the day shunted in chains from cell to cell between the jail and the court. Of these, there was one Latino and a young man from Mauritania, the rest African American. I was the only white man arrested in all of Washington, DC, on January 11 that the authorities chose to keep in jail.

Late Friday afternoon the United States Attorney decided not to press the “crossing a police line” against the five of us and so I was released before coming to court. Had I appeared before a judge, the government would likely have asked the court to hold me over for extradition as a fugitive from justice in Nevada. If this were granted, the Las Vegas authorities would then have had three days to come to DC to fetch me if they cared to. For the five of us our detention was an inconvenience for a few hours, or in my case, overnight. Five men in Guantanamo, “cleared for release” just as we were, face perpetual confinement.

In our group planning the events of January 11, the question came up about the usefulness of risking arrest for this cause. For myself, beyond strategic benefits, is the issue of solidarity. Just as we fast for a few days as a small gesture of sharing the suffering of the brothers in Guantanamo on hunger strike, so arrest and a few hours in a police station cell can bring us closer to understanding their unjust confinement. My intention was more than realized this time! The suppression of free speech in front of the White House is not the crackdown on the Arab Spring in Bahrain and Central Cellblock is not Abu Ghraib. My would-be extradition to Las Vegas is not “special rendition” to Jordan or to Guantánamo. These evils, small or large, are all growing from the same roots of imperial arrogance and in our different places and conditions, we are in this struggle together.

Two Blockades

continued from page 4

and loaded into vans, how those police officers could listen so impassively to the denunciations of crimes against humanity being committed and to the disclosures of a blockade that threatens the lives of millions, orchestrated from the buildings we stood before. How could these officers, then, after hearing our pleas and the stories of starving children without reaction, move so decisively to remove our nonviolent obstruction to the perpetrators of those crimes? Did they not wonder if they were arresting the wrong people?

The blockade of Yemen is an atrocious crime of the highest category, a violation of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international pacts. The US participation in the war on Yemen is a violation of the war powers provisions of the United States Constitution, at the very least. The imposition of our modest “blockade” of the United States Permanent Mission to the United Nations, in contrast, threatened no one. No one got sick or died because we stood in that doorway. In New York State, disorderly conduct is a violation, not even considered a crime at all. Still, the NYPD choose to ignore murder committed on its beat and to expend its prodigious resources to arrest and to prosecute law abiding citizens who demand an end to the crimes against Yemen.

Our protest began in Ralph Bunche Park, named after one of the founders of the United Nations and the first black American to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950. Carved into the stone pavement there are these words from Mr. Bunche that speak to the present crisis in Yemen and to the many conflicts in the world today:

“Peace, to have meaning for many who have known only suffering in both peace and war, must be translated into bread or rice, shelter, health, and education, as well as freedom and human dignity - a steadily better life. If peace is to be secure, long-suffering and long-starved, forgotten peoples of the world, the underprivileged and the undernourished, must begin to realize without delay the promise of a new day and a new life.”
“A Swirl of Images”

Continued from page 3

Then we headed home for our fancy lunch of fondue, thanks to Monique! After some more time with both looms going again, most of us headed over to Lamoni for a dance at a community center and a potluck at Sophie’s house, while Alice stayed behind to get in some more weaving time.

Kelsey joined us from Kansas City, at the dance, and returned to Maloy. Monday morning we got rolling with some paper-making. Blending, dipping, drying and pressing trying for the perfect mixture, the right technique. The wool warp got finished up and we cut the warp and divided the various pieces for people to knot fringe or hem, as they had determined. We didn’t quite get to the end of the second rug warp, so it was left to me, and I finished the bit that was left after we cut off and removed the others, with a rug as a thank you to Mary Ellen, for facilitating all the bread that we ate all weekend.

By the end of the afternoon, the house was quiet again.

Photos in this article: clockwise, page 2, Betsy advising Elizabeth at the loom, with Alice and Maria looking on. Mary Ellen’s bread. Nate, Allyson and Maria, dying fabric in the basement. Page 4, cutting willow in the garden (thank you for the photo, Kathi) Nate weaving that willow into a basket, Kathi dipping candles, Alison finishing candles. This page, Kelsey dipping pulp to make paper and Allyson’s handmade card.

“Deliver us from Fear”

Offered as a Lenten Meditation

by Dorothy Day, January 1967

It is not just Vietnam, it is South Africa, it is Nigeria, the Congo, Indonesia, all of Latin America. It is not just the pictures of all the women and children who have been burnt alive in Vietnam, or the men who have been tortured, and died. It is not just the headless victims of the war in Colombia. …We are the nation the most powerful, the most armed and we are supplying arms and money to the rest of the world where we are not ourselves fighting. We are eating while there is famine in the world.

Scripture tells us that the picture of judgment presented to us by Jesus is of Dives sitting and feasting with his friends while Lazarus sat hungry at the gate, the dogs, the scavengers of the East, licking his sores. We are the Dives. Woe to the rich! We are the rich. The works of mercy are the opposite of the works of war, feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless, nursing the sick, visiting the prisoner. But we are destroying crops, setting fire to entire villages and to the people in them. We are not performing the works of mercy but the works of war. We cannot repeat this enough.

When the apostles wanted to call down fire from heaven on the inhospitable Samaritans, the “enemies” of the Jews, Jesus said to them, “You know not of what Spirit you are.” When Peter told our Lord not to accept the way of the Cross and His own death, He said, “Get behind me, Satan. For you are not on the side of God but of men.” But He also had said, “Thou are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church.” Peter denied Jesus three times at that time in history, but after the death on the cross, and the Resurrection and the Descent of the Holy Spirit, Peter faced up to Church and State alike and said, “We must obey God rather than men.” Deliver us, O Lord, from the fear of our enemies, which makes cowards of us all.

Thank you, Sara Fuller, LACW, for the graphic
A Sleep of Prisoners

By Christopher Fry

The human heart can go the lengths of God…
Dark and cold we may be, but this
Is no winter now. The frozen misery
Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;
The thunder is the thunder of the flos,
The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.

Thank God our time is now when wrong
Comes up to face us everywhere,
Never to leave us till we take
The longest stride of soul we ever took.

Affairs are now soul size.
The enterprise
Is exploration into God.
Where are you making for? It takes
So many thousand years to wake,
But will you wake for pity’s sake!