



# Fertile Ground

Journal of Peace House, the Kalamazoo Quaker/Catholic Worker

Issue 16

December 2016

## Peace House News

By Jerry Berrigan

The fall was uncommonly warm and long. Last weekend we finished leaf collection, got everything put away or buttoned up outside, and just in time, as it turns out. It has snowed since Wednesday and the extended forecast holds for snow until perhaps next Friday. We're in the middle of a storm that stretches from Denver to Baltimore.

Snow—especially a lot of it—is an arresting phenomenon. It's the new thing going on, a reassertion of the presence of Nature. It accentuates in oh-so-satisfying a way the extra lights we strung this year in an Advent attempt to push back the darkness. The sleds and the box of gloves came out Thursday at Peace House; we have lots of sidewalk and driveway to clear; plans are adjusted based on a calculation of safety and necessity versus whimsy and inclination.

I cannot draw my eyes away from the window, where near-whiteout conditions prevail. The beauty of a geometric swirl of snow borne on a wind gust from the big white pine inspires a reverie far different than that claimed by the black hole of bad news conveyed across the computer screen since November 9<sup>th</sup>.

Like many of our readers, we at Peace House have been struggling this year (and especially this season) with waves of anger, sadness, and dread. Much of substance has been written in the wake of the election, as many talented writers have used powerful adjectives to describe what they were witnessing and feeling. In the weeks since the election Peace House has been part of a local group beginning to organize in defense of our neighbors and our values. There is hope in that story and in that small things are happening

nationwide in support of racial harmony, defense of immigrants, people-centered economic priorities and environmental concerns. We have to hope in this local, small-scale, fragile work, because the system will not save us. We are all changed in this new era, but we have to hold on to our joy, finding it where we can in the work, in our friendships, in the righteous power of a winter storm.

We have taken great encouragement from last week's victory, in North Dakota, of the Water Protectors. Granted, the Army Corps of Engineers' stay represents but a temporary reprieve in the corporate onslaught of the land. The Trump administration will want to open things right back up. But the real story here is the strength and efficacy of nonviolent resistance. Moved by ancient spiritual reverence, Native leaders rose up to challenge the most powerful economic forces of our time. Moved by environmental concern, a sense of outraged justice, and in a spirit of followership, many others joined in the work. Together, with uniform discipline they persevered through conditions made difficult by weather, political sabotage, and official violence, in so doing they gave us a living example of what is possible in the coming time.

Right after the spring issue of *Fertile Ground* went to press we learned that the US Missile Defense Agency was holding yet another public forum to test the waters regarding their proposal to install ground-based ICBM interceptors at Fort Custer, twenty miles east of here. This was the second such event to prepare the way for a \$13 billion installation of missiles which allegedly are able to shoot an incoming ICBM out of the sky, somehow rendering it harmless. It is a massive fraud: critical tests of these systems have been deeply flawed; the



Swiss chard, anyone? On Monday evenings during the summer, neighbor Tomme brought homegrown produce to share.

(Continued on page 10)

December 2016

Friends,

This time of year, we typically use this space for the Annual Peace House Appeal. So here it is: On behalf of Peace House and our neighbors, thank you for your support in 2016- and thank you in advance for your support of our work in 2017. Your dollars, your gifts in kind, your hours of effort, your prayers and well wishes all keep this boat afloat. We appreciate you and everything you do. In your name, we will continue to offer hospitality to our neighbors, to speak truth to power and to fight for what is loving and just.

Now, a second plea. Are you worried about what will happen under a Trump administration? Are you alarmed at the rise in hate speech and white supremacist crimes? Do you see how Trump is filling his staff and Cabinet positions, and fear for our civic institutions? Are you following the legislative agenda of a right-wing Congress salivating over the elimination of the veto threat, and despair for the future of our social programs and rights protections and environmental regulations? Do you remain concerned for the safety and well-being of our most vulnerable and marginalized? Do you cry out for an end to war?

If you said yes to any of these, then, please, in 2017, vote. Vote with your life.

In other words, let's dig deep. People we care about are under threat. Poor folks, minorities, immigrants, Muslims, women, the disabled, the LGBTQ community. In unprecedented times, we need to step up with our energy, our time, and our resources in unprecedented ways. Life is so full, and everything we have is so precious, but the situation truly demands this from us. We need to speak up and speak out. We need to take to the streets. More than anything, we need to reach out to each other and build loving community. We need to live every day as though the struggle is real and the stakes are high.

Consider getting involved with some groups doing good justice work. We have some favorites in the Kalamazoo area:

Michigan Immigrant Resource Center	ERAC/CE
Michigan United	Eastside Network
Open Doors Kalamazoo	Disability Network
Kalamazoo Islamic Center	Progressive Kalamazoo

Look them up. Support them. And if that means that you need to give a little bit less to Peace House this time, okay. We still need your support, but we are feeling pretty strong right now.

Please know— as you intensify your effort, so do we. And if you find yourself in need of support yourself—physically or emotionally— reach out to us. These are trying times. We need to stick together.

Peace,

Mike DeWaele

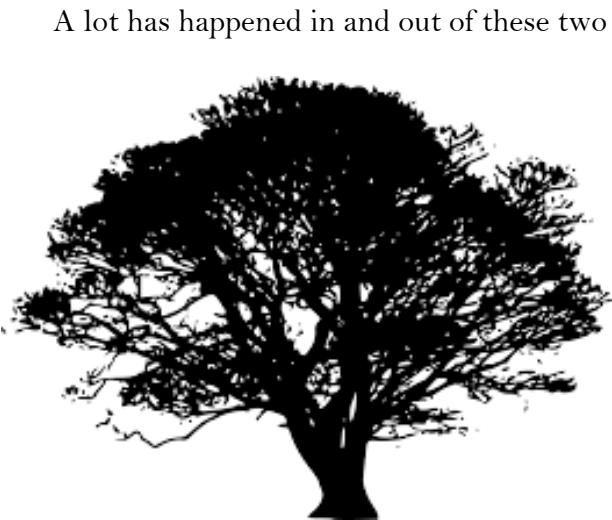
On behalf of Peace House

# Ten Years On...

*On July 1, 2016, Peace House celebrated ten years on Phelps Ave. We were in the middle of our summer program and the day itself passed without notice. However, we recognize that ten years is a significant milestone and is deserving of reflection. Each of us wrote a short piece about what ten years means to us.*

## **Mike:**

It used to be, in our first few couple years of writing newsletters, that there would always be some sort of tree metaphor at the top of our House Notes. One issue, we were putting down roots, the next, digging deeper, eventually we grew some leaves, and a trunk, before finally letting our branches spread and bearing fruit. Go through our back issues. You'll find it. For a while those images of growth were so important. The House was new, finding its space, creating its anchor, reaching out to create the canopy that would both bring it energy and help it provide shelter and sustenance for our growing circle. After a while, though, that tree image sort of faded away. Maybe it's because we ran out of good metaphors. Maybe there was nothing more to say than, "Another year, another ring in the trunk," and there wasn't much excitement in that.



A lot has happened in and out of these two houses in the last two handfuls of years. Along the way, we've had brilliant successes and silly mistakes. We've witnessed times of tremendous sorrow and experienced moments of enormous grace. We've watched our children, biological and otherwise, grow from babes to brilliant boys and girls, from toddlers to teens. Third graders have become adults and some of our young friends have become parents in their own right. We've been here as new families move into the neighborhood, then leave, and then come back again. Over ten years, we've been a place to come home to for literally hundreds of kids. We've seen so many others move in and out and into our circle again: supporters, volunteers, interns, friends. Each one spends their time with us—sometimes a day or a month, sometimes a year or two. Others are with us for the long haul.

And so we stand here, solid, like a tree. Feeling real. We have mastered, I hope, that most special skill of the best Catholic Worker communities: durability. Planted in friendship, grounded in trust, sustained by the love of many who come in and out our doors. Amazingly blessed to do this thing we love.

## **Jen:**

Two stories from the last few months have stayed in my heart, and they seem to represent a lot of how I feel about the last ten years. A few weeks ago, our friend LaTae returned to the after school program after a long time away. He lived for many years just a few houses up from us, but has since moved across the neighborhood, and we don't get to see him hardly at all anymore. He's now tall enough to look me straight in the eye, and is in sixth grade. We visited for a long time while he sat at the peninsula, eating snack, and letting the hub bub of homework help rise up around our catching up. He asked about all the things we did, and asked after all the things he remembers doing here, and through his asking I heard what a home he always felt here. Now he was a big kid asking after all the great memories that filled his early childhood from Peace House.

Personally, I've always felt at home here, but I've also held that in healthy tension with feeling like I'm a guest; this place, this phenomenon has become home to so many; so many spirits have passed through and have left a little piece of themselves here, and taken a little piece of us with them.

The other story stems from a comment that our friend (and sis to one), Kate Berrigan, voiced the other

*(Continued on page 8)*

# In Gratitude for Community

By Jen DeWaele

Summer is a busy and hectic time at Peace House. Four days a week we have 25-40 neighborhood kids over. In addition to open time, it takes a significant effort on all parts to prepare the many activities keeping all ages and interests engaged in positive fun, to be emotionally and physically open to the kids while we're open, and to clean up afterwards. On top of this, we are making dinner for each other, trying to keep the house from falling apart, hanging out with our kids as much as possible, because it's THEIR summer too, and we don't want to miss that. And it's fun. Each of us enjoys our work and fall in love again and again with the work and the people we get to be with every day. It's a blessed and joyous and intense business, keeping our heads above water here, but especially during those summer weeks.

Maybe I had a little extra chaos in my eyes one week, and maybe this is why two dear friends of Peace House separately approached me within days of each other offering help. It was an insistent intervention on their part

(thank goodness), and I think one of the things that made my heart fall open and allowed me to say yes was the insistence from Kelli Redman that "you have to open yourself up to receive help in order to build community". Holy moley, and I mean HOLY moley— this was a moving of the spirit for sure, because that was MY line. I can't tell you how many times I've said that to others, in offering or insisting on being able to help, and here it was being offered up to me. I took a deep breath at the first offer, and when the second offer came from someone else entirely, (thank you, Diane Donovan!), I took another deep breath and said—Yes. Ok. THANK YOU.

In a few weeks we were all around the table- Diane and Kelli met each other for the first time, and Mike, Molly and I joined them to talk about what this would look like. A few weeks after that, Diane and Kelli launched the Peace House meal train, to support us with delivering two meals a week for our families. It has been an incredible widening of community for each of us. It has taken enough of the burden to lighten up afternoons for preparing the house for our neighbors, writing newsletter articles, organizing for Peace House, and just being more present to our own families.

What an incredible gift. We hope that it offers something in return— our gratitude for our extended community, and our knowledge, daily, that if it weren't for others— many, many others, Peace House would not be here. We are blessed by receiving so many gifts— from volunteers who come every week to tutor or play, from

kids who come every week to build our work together, to many others who have taken the time to make us a meal. We are filled with thanks to Kelli and Diane for finding another way that the Kalamazoo community can offer its gifts to support Peace House. Thank you to each of you for what you are willing and able to offer to our community and our neighborhood.

*Each day holds a surprise. But only if we expect it can we see, hear, or feel it when it comes to us. Let's not be afraid to receive each day's surprise, whether it comes to us as sorrow or as joy It will open a new place in our hearts, a place where we can welcome new friends and celebrate more fully our shared humanity.*

Henri Nouwen



# Let America Be America Again

By Langston Hughes, written in 1935

Let America be America again.  
Let it be the dream it used to be.  
Let it be the pioneer on the plain  
Seeking a home where he himself is free.

(America never was America to me.)

Let America be the dream the dreamers dreamed--  
Let it be that great strong land of love  
Where never kings connive nor tyrants scheme  
That any man be crushed by one above.

(It never was America to me.)

O, let my land be a land where Liberty  
Is crowned with no false patriotic wreath,  
But opportunity is real, and life is free,  
Equality is in the air we breathe.

(There's never been equality for me,  
Nor freedom in this "homeland of  
the free.")

Say, who are you that mumbles in  
the dark?  
And who are you that draws your  
veil across the stars?

I am the poor white, fooled and  
pushed apart,  
I am the Negro bearing slavery's  
scars.  
I am the red man driven from the  
land,  
I am the immigrant clutching the  
hope I seek--  
And finding only the same old stupid  
plan  
Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.

I am the young man, full of strength and hope,  
Tangled in that ancient endless chain  
Of profit, power, gain, of grab the land!  
Of grab the gold! Of grab the ways of satisfying need!  
Of work the men! Of take the pay!  
Of owning everything for one's own greed!

I am the farmer, bondsman to the soil.  
I am the worker sold to the machine.  
I am the Negro, servant to you all.  
I am the people, humble, hungry, mean--  
Hungry yet today despite the dream.  
Beaten yet today--O, Pioneers!  
I am the man who never got ahead,  
The poorest worker bartered through the years.

Yet I'm the one who dreamt our basic dream  
In the Old World while still a serf of kings,

Who dreamt a dream so strong, so brave, so true,  
That even yet its mighty daring sings  
In every brick and stone, in every furrow turned  
That's made America the land it has become.  
O, I'm the man who sailed those early seas  
In search of what I meant to be my home--  
For I'm the one who left dark Ireland's shore,  
And Poland's plain, and England's grassy lea,  
And torn from Black Africa's strand I came  
To build a "homeland of the free."

The free?

Who said the free? Not me?  
Surely not me? The millions on relief today?  
The millions shot down when we strike?  
The millions who have nothing for our pay?  
For all the dreams we've dreamed

And all the songs we've sung  
And all the hopes we've held  
And all the flags we've hung,  
The millions who have nothing for our  
pay--  
Except the dream that's almost dead to-  
day.

O, let America be America again--  
The land that never has been yet--  
And yet must be--the land where every  
man is free.  
The land that's mine--the poor man's,  
Indian's, Negro's, ME--  
Who made America,  
Whose sweat and blood, whose faith and  
pain,  
Whose hand at the foundry, whose plow  
in the rain,

Must bring back our mighty dream again.

Sure, call me any ugly name you choose--  
The steel of freedom does not stain.  
From those who live like leeches on the people's lives,  
We must take back our land again,  
America!

O, yes,  
I say it plain,  
America never was America to me,  
And yet I swear this oath--  
America will be!

Out of the rack and ruin of our gangster death,  
The rape and rot of graft, and stealth, and lies,  
We, the people, must redeem  
The land, the mines, the plants, the rivers.  
The mountains and the endless plain--  
All, all the stretch of these great green states--  
And make America again!





# summer smiles



# Radical Hope

By Junot Díaz

This article appears as part of a larger feature, "[Aftermath: Sixteen Writers on Trump's America](#)," in the November 21, 2016, issue of the *New Yorker*.

Querida Q.:

I hope that you are feeling, if not precisely better, then at least not so demoralized. On Wednesday, after he won, you reached out to me, seeking advice, solidarity. You wrote, *My two little sisters called me weeping this morning. I had nothing to give them. I felt bereft. What now? Keep telling the truth from an ever-shrinking corner? Give up?*

I answered immediately, because you are my hermana, because it hurt me to hear you in such distress. I offered some consoling words, but the truth was I didn't know what to say. To you, to my godchildren, who all year had been having nightmares that their parents would be deported, to myself.

I thought about your email all day, Q., and I thought about you during my evening class. My students looked rocked. A few spoke about how frightened and betrayed they felt. Two of them wept. No easy task to take in the fact that half the voters — neighbors, friends, family — were willing to elect, to the nation's highest office, a toxic misogynist, a racial demagogue who wants to make America great by destroying civil-rights gains of the past fifty years.

*What now?* you asked. And that was my students' question, too. *What now?* I answered them as poorly as I answered you, I fear. And so I sit here now in the middle of the night, in an attempt to try again.

So what now? Well, first and foremost, we need to feel. We need to connect courageously with the rejection, the fear, the vulnerability that Trump's victory has inflicted on us, without turning away or numbing ourselves or lapsing into cynicism. We need to bear witness to what we have lost: our safety, our sense of belonging, our vision of our country. We need to mourn all these injuries fully, so that they do not drag us into despair, so repair will be possible.

And while we're doing the hard, necessary work of mourning, we should avail ourselves of the old formations that have seen us through darkness. We organize. We form solidarities. And yes: we fight. To be heard. To be safe. To be free.

For those of us who have been in the fight, the prospect of more fighting, after so cruel a setback, will seem impossible. At moments like these, it is easy for even a matatana to feel that she can't go on. But I believe that, once the shock settles, faith and energy will return.

Because let's be real: we always knew this shit wasn't going to be easy. Colonial power, patriarchal power, capitalist power must always and everywhere be battled, because they never, ever quit. We have to keep fighting, because otherwise there will be no future — all will be consumed. Those of us whose ancestors were owned and bred like animals know that future all too well, because it is, in part, our past. And we know that by fighting, against all odds, we who had nothing, not even our real names, transformed the universe. Our ancestors did this with very little, and we who have more must do the same. This is the joyous destiny of our people — to bury the arc of the moral universe so deep in justice that it will never be undone.

But all the fighting in the world will not help us if we do not also have hope. What I'm trying to cultivate is not blind optimism but what the philosopher Jonathan Lear calls radical hope. "What makes this hope *radical*," Lear writes, "is that it is directed toward a future goodness that transcends the current ability to understand what it is." Radical hope is not so much something you practice; it demands flexibility, openness, and what Lear describes as "imaginative excellence." Radical hope is our best weapon against despair, even when despair seems justifiable; it makes the survival of the end of your world possible. Only radical hope could have imagined people like us into existence. And I believe that it will help us create a better, more loving future.

I could say more, but I've already imposed enough, Q.: Time to face this hard new world, to return to the great shining work of our people. Darkness, after all, is breaking, a new day has come.

Love, J



Peace House friend Matt Gross brings some truth to a Trump rally, Grand Rapids, MI, Dec. 9. Photo by Aaron Van Heest.

day in a visit on her impression of Peace House. In thinking of Peace House, she shared that she thinks of Peace House as a place where each person has the space and support to become the individual that they are supposed to be. I loved that image, and immediately realized that I, all of us, were included in that. We are so much more than an after school program, or a safe spot for neighbors. We are a place where each is welcomed with their gifts, and an understanding that not one of us knows where it is going, but we will all try our best to be fully present to each moment and each person, to honor each step of the journey we are on together. From kids, to parents, to the nine of us who live here, volunteers, supporters who send us notes from across the country, we are all equally a part of the Peace House experiment.

It feels that the last ten years have been both so long (long enough for each of us to have a head full of memories), and yet we are just getting our feet under us, and opening our hearts wider. Our hearts are filled with gratitude for each who has a home here, and for the deep knowledge that a Peace House life for the nine of us has been nothing if not profoundly grace filled. We have so much to learn and so many ways to grow, and we look forward to doing it at the side of every one of you.

**Jerry:**

Ten years!

There are lots of ways to look at this milestone.

First, the kids. Amos is twelve. When we moved here, he was two and a half. Now, he uses hair stuff, his voice has dropped.

Jonah, then Clara joined us in our first year together. Baby crying and baby needs and baby joy defined the time, along with an overall hope that our coming together was not a mistake. Then Alice and finally Leah rounded out our number, and we somehow managed to run our summer program with babies on the hip for about five straight years.

These young people, a society unto themselves, share our life and work. They are patient with the difficult and tedious aspects of Peace House, and they appreciate the benefits and the friendships. They jump on the couch, make lots of noise, religiously undermine prayer at dinnertime, and feast on the snacks when we host an event. The kids, as they say, are alright.

Then, the neighborhood. We are proud of the ongoing transformation that is happening on Phelps Avenue. Feedback from neighbors has been positive and appreciative. Long-time residents say things feel more stable here now. We like to think we might have had a hand in that.

Over the years families have moved in and out of our lives. We are fortunate to be able to stay in one place; life for many of our neighbors is much more transient and unstable. We remember so many children and families who have joined our lives for periods of a year, or two, or three, and moved on, often with misgivings and apprehensions. It's hard to say goodbye, and the circumstances remind us of our own powerlessness to "fix" anything for anyone. We can offer friendship, security, if only for a time and in a limited way. We do believe that friendships are stronger than battleships.

Friendships! Jen, Mike, Molly and I have now been buds for over half our forty-some years. Peace House brought us together with many great, great people. Thank you all so much for your love and encouragement and support. We never knew how wonderful life could be. We are going to need to deepen our roots together in the coming time, as things get less friendly and more difficult for the most vulnerable among us.



Last minute photo for the newsletter in Jen and Mike's kitchen. First community picture in seven years!

*(Continued on next page)*



**Molly:**

I'm going to let you in on a little secret -- I didn't want to move to Kalamazoo. Eleven years ago I was very resistant to the idea, primarily because my previous experience in Kalamazoo, four years at K College, was pretty uninspiring. I loved K College and the friends I made, but I didn't think this city was anything special. Instead, I lived in the famous "K bubble," meaning life on campus was everything. I did not spend time downtown, I did not get to know the city or its people.

Jerry, Jen and Mike convinced me to take the leap of faith and move here in July 2006. Ten years later, I have had a complete turnaround on my feelings for this city. It is special. It has claimed me -- the people, the good work being done, the schools, the Kalamazoo Promise, the friendships, our neighborhood. Kalamazoo is a city that compels me to invest in it, because I've learned that *investing in a community works*. It creates a better quality of life for all.

Peace House began as an idea about investing in an under-served neighborhood. When we first moved into a rental house on Phelps Ave., the backyard was depressing -- 20 feet of grass and then garbage and overgrowth that I wouldn't let my toddler approach. There was a former burn barrel surrounded by broken glass. There were pitbulls in the adjoining yard that would bark all day.

In this city I disliked, on this property I disdained, in this beat-up rental house, we chose to invest our time and energy. With a growing community of support around us, we transformed our space into a place where I am proud to welcome neighbors.

The investment we put into this property has been returned to us tenfold with the love we feel from our neighbors, our volunteers, our friends. I am honored to be a member of this city and neighborhood, and it is my humble privilege to continue living and working here. Perhaps most of all, I am thankful for the wisdom and foresight of Jerry, Jen and Mike, who convinced me that Kalamazoo was the right place for Peace House.

**Jonah (10):**

I think it is fun that I almost always have enough kids to play soccer and can play it on summer days. I really cannot believe that we have been running this program for almost as long as I have been alive! I love seeing how happy the Peace House kids are when they are playing outside and doing homework. It's really fun to play with other kids. I cannot wait until the day that Peace House has been running for 11 years.

So, basically, I think Peace House is a great program. We started it in 2006. It is now 2016. We have been doing it for 10 years. Do you go to Peace House? If so, you know how fun it is.

**Leah (6):**

I think Peace house is very loud because outside the kids are yelling because they are playing. But the program is really great because I like how the kids inside are working really hard on their homework. It is such a nice place and I think I am very, very lucky to be here. The kids are really nice to me. I just feel really happy when I am at Peace House. The volunteers are great and I wouldn't be able to choose which one is the best.

The summer activities are really great and perler beads is my favorite. It was cool making cards with Malikah and the face painting was fun. Getting the bounce house in the summer is awesome. I was very excited when we got a snow cone machine.

**Clara (9):**

I like living next to Jonah, Leah and Amos because I always have people to play with. In the winter we make snow forts and sled down the big hill. In the summer we run around and play in the woods. During the fall we rake leaves and jump in leaf piles. In the spring we go outside and see the flowers grow. That's just what we do outside. When we play inside we make forts in the living

room and play hide and seek in the basement. At their house we play legos in the basement and play games like Apples to Apples. I really like being able to play with Jonah, Leah, and Amos. It's nice to have playmates around.

**Alice (7):**

I like Peace House because, in the summertime, we have lots of fun with the neighborhood kids that come. We get to make lots of

new friends. When kids are lonely we can go play with them. My favorite thing to do in the summer is make things out of Perler beads. When kids aren't here, we still get to play together on the playground. In the wintertime, we can have fun sled races with the Peace House kids. Since we live next to Molly and Jerry, we get to play with their kids all the time, and go over to their house when Peace House is at our house.



Perler bead puppy!

vast majority of the \$13 billion investment goes to weapons contractors; by perverse nuclear-age logic missile defense makes nuclear war more likely. And so we went out, gave a public comment in opposition to this boondoggle, went on the record. Now we'll wait and see.

Then began the summer program! This year we were aided in our efforts by Malikah Mahone, a rising senior and art history major at Kalamazoo College. Malikah started her work week by joining us in a planning meeting every Monday morning and continued on to help prepare snacks, run programs, build friendships with the kids, then clean up, do the evening session, and get ready to do it all over again the next day. Malikah's energy was steady, her humor was quiet, her mind was receptive and sharp, her heart was open. She was a great addition to the crew this year.

This summer we continued our relationship with Kalamazoo Jeter's Leaders. For the month of July we hosted between three and nine high school leaders per day to help run programs and serve as role models to the younger kids. And so one could see Leaders playing basketball and gaga, running arts and crafts, serving snacks, throwing a football, being open to relationship. It was a beautiful thing.

Speaking of a beautiful thing, I must shout-out the summer staff. Antoinette Walker, Dominic



Sariyah chose a big one!

Walker, Marcello Hubbard, and Tonjia Smith, whom we have known since they were small, were indispensable threads in the Peace House fabric this year. Each of these young people carries a deep joy and good humor; each has strong and ever-developing skill-set; each is known in the neighborhood as

authentic and real. When you add that all together, you come out with a huge benefit to Peace House, in legitimacy, efficacy, and spirit. We had good fun

and did good work together through the hot months.

Now they are all forging ahead in the world. Antoinette and Tonjia each have their own



Our summer crew! From left: Tonjia, Antoinette, Malikah (K College intern), Dominic, Marcello

apartment, and are working diligently to cover the bills. Marcello is putting in well over 40 hours a week for Better World Builders, a local insulation contractor. Feedback from the crew is that he is enthusiastic and hardworking. I recall my own youth as a construction laborer: the learning, the camaraderie, the shared purpose, the wide-open future as one's skills develop. Dominic, who graduated from Central High School this spring, is working half-time at Menard's, taking classes at KVCC, and recently bought a good little Toyota.

Our hearts are full of pride in these good young people. They have embodied so many of our hopes as they pursue a future based on strong character and steady work. Plus, you'll have to admit from the photo, they look pretty good in a Peace House t-shirt.

Our numbers have been a little lighter this summer and fall, who knows why. For years, we tracked our progress by a consistent increase in turnout, but by 2015 we were probing the outer limits of our capacity. Now, we're in a sweet spot. We're always busy but never really overwhelmed, and on slower days the kids who show get more one-on-one attention. Our volunteer corps is the very picture of ability and goodness. It remains an ever-increasing blessing to be at the center of all of this. We are affirmed daily, and the work is shared.

Some big events are worth noting. At the end of the summer we were able to run twenty-two of the middle school/ high school crew over to Full Blast, the public waterpark in Battle Creek. It was a great day, sunny and clear and hot, with the highly chlorinated, bright blue water all cool and wet. The slides were righteous. In the week before Halloween, we bought sixty pumpkins, like we usually do, for a big pumpkin carving event. As usual, the event went great, but this year there was a moral boon in that five middle schoolers worked hard to glop out all sixty pumpkins on a cold afternoon the day before the event.

In late October the Peace House core community took its first retreat in I-don't-know-how-long. Over a weekend at Gilchrist in Three Rivers, we took stock of ten years in community and looked at future decisions to hopefully increase the efficiency, sustainability, and impact of our efforts. We had a day and a night for the adults while all five kids stayed with Molly's parents, saints for sure, and a night as a ninesome, when the big conversations gave way to living-room games. A lot of what we talked about assumed a Clinton presidency, and the terrain is different now. But we are still here.

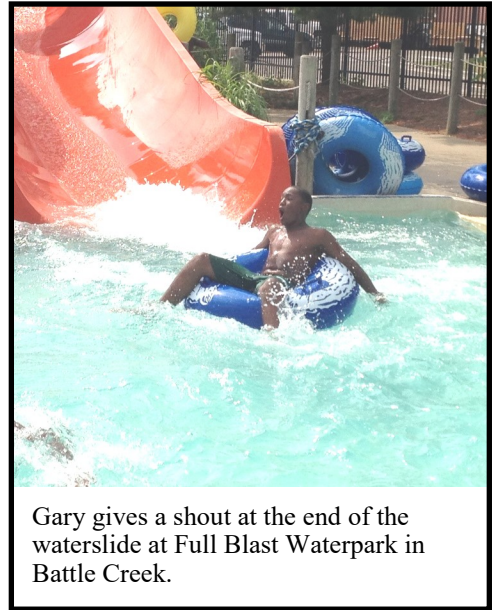
We're still here, dammit! The day after the election, in the middle of Peace House time, it hit me. As a result of many years of presence, we have built limited but real relationships here, based on shared experiences and trust. What happens on Phelps Avenue is by no means a solution to racism

in America, but on the other hand, it flies in the face of what is conventionally done and what is conventionally thought possible by way of racial reconciliation. We will not stop; we will only increase. If this be a limited statement of resistance, at least it is one.

We are very late with this issue, which is due largely to post-election organizing initiatives, and as I write we are preparing for the annual holiday party. In planning the

various workstations for the event, we were reminded of the sudden death, this past spring, of our dear friend Tony Nelson. At each holiday party in years past Tony and Marian helped with post-party cleanup until it was done. Tony scrubbed the pots and pans. If we are diminished by his passing, we are filled with a sense of love and purpose by his memory, with his tall, lean frame bent over a sink full of hot suds.

We're still here! And it's still snowing.



Gary gives a shout at the end of the waterslide at Full Blast Waterpark in Battle Creek.

## Public Witness to Ground the Drones

*All vigils happen at the gates of the Michigan Air National Guard Base, 3357 Dickman Ave., Battle Creek.*

**Monthly vigils** for peace will happen in 2016 the first Saturday of each month from 12 – 1 pm, followed by lunch. The dates are:

- Jan. 7**
- Feb. 4**
- March 4**
- April 1**
- May 6**
- June 3**



*Drones are not necessary and do not make us safe! Please join us in standing for peace.*

The Air National Guard in Battle Creek is ramping up to conduct remotely piloted aircraft missions beginning February of 2017.

The 110<sup>th</sup> Attack Wing in Battle Creek will become one of 12 U.S. military bases to fly unmanned, drone aircraft anywhere in the world, using satellite and datalink technology.

We continue to vigil at the Air National Guard to witness that peace will not come through the work of "Predator" drones armed with "Hellfire" missiles.

**If possible, please join us for our March vigil as we oppose the start-up of the drone program in Battle Creek.**



# Peace House

321 Phelps Ave.  
Kalamazoo, MI 49048

**Fertile Ground** is sent twice a year to friends and supporters of Peace House. If you would rather not receive this newsletter, please return this page with a note to that effect. If you would like to receive periodic electronic updates from us (no more than twice a month), please visit [peacehousekzoo.org](http://peacehousekzoo.org) and click on "Stay in Touch."

*"The greatest challenge of the day is: how to bring about a revolution of the heart, a revolution which has to start with each one of us." —Dorothy Day*

## Who we are

Peace House, a community in the Catholic Worker movement, is dedicated to fostering peace, justice and relationship in the Eastside neighborhood of Kalamazoo. We believe that the good of each person is bound to the well-being of society as a whole; therefore we advocate taking personal responsibility for creating, in the words of Catholic Worker cofounder Peter Maurin, "a new society within the shell of the old...a place where it is easier for people to be good." We are here to be a resource for our neighbors. We rely on the involvement of a loving, dedicated extended community to do this work. **Please feel free to visit, call or send an e-mail.**

**Jen and Mike DeWaele**

**Clara and Alice**

**321 Phelps Ave.**

**Jerry and Molly Mechtenberg-Berrigan**

**Amos, Jonah and Leah**

**313 Phelps Ave.**

**Kalamazoo, MI 49048**

**(269) 492-1206**

**[peacehouse@peacehousekzoo.org](mailto:peacehouse@peacehousekzoo.org)**

## How you can be a part

**We welcome and celebrate ALL people, regardless of race, religion, political affiliation, nationality, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, age or ability.**

- ◆ We are in need of healthy after-school snacks for our homework program: string cheese, fresh fruit, crackers, peanut butter, granola bars.
- ◆ We could use a few more subs to fill in for our regular volunteers during the winter.
- ◆ We always need prizes (\$1–\$2) for our "prize box." These are small rewards and toys that kids select after they have earned tickets through doing homework and reading.
- ◆ Come to our events and vigils.
- ◆ Join our email list to get regular updates and discover other ways to participate. To do this, go to our website [peacehousekzoo.org](http://peacehousekzoo.org) and click on "Stay in Touch" and then "Join our mailing list."
- ◆ Spread the word! If you know of someone who may be interested, please tell them about Peace House!