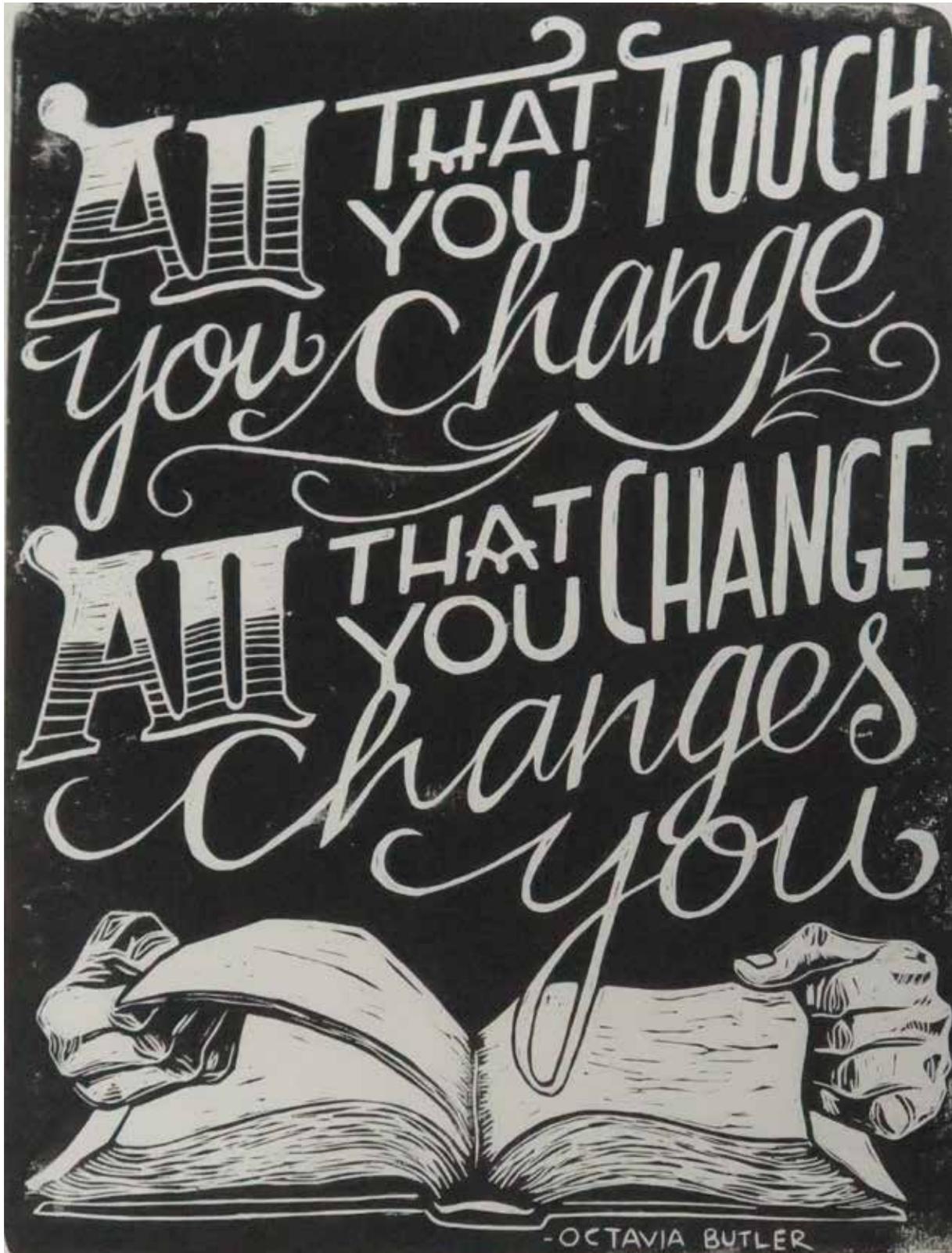
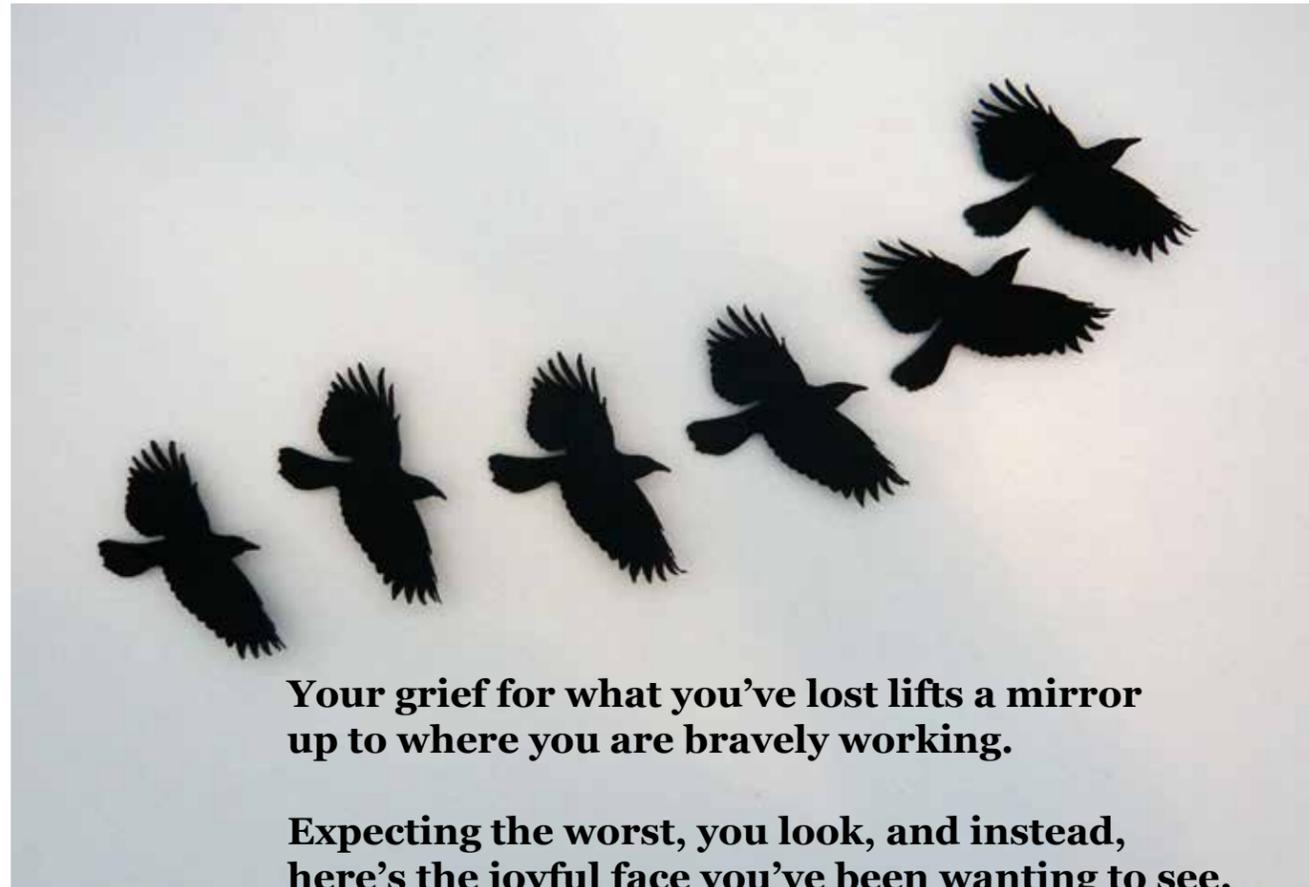


FOOLS FABLES
2015



Reflection

BIRD WINGS



Your grief for what you've lost lifts a mirror up to where you are bravely working.

Expecting the worst, you look, and instead, here's the joyful face you've been wanting to see.

Your hand opens and closes and opens and closes. If it were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed.

Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding,

The two as beautifully balanced and coordinated as bird wings

Rumi

We are grateful to Lex Non Scripta, a multi-media artist & activist, for the cover art work. Lexononscripta.com

YOUR HAND OPENS AND CLOSES ... OPENS AND CLOSES



Sometimes I wonder, what is the maximum capacity of the heart and mind of the Fools? How many creative and essential programs, how many meetings and personal conversations and doorbells can we host or attend to within 24 hours? How far does the purple ball of yarn extend as we toss it to yet one more new person or group that appears in our circle as we ask their names and what has brought them into this community of Fools? With each toss of the yarn, the web of relationships and the work of Faithful Fools grows richer and broader and more wonderfully diverse and complex. To have room in our hearts and minds, to have the necessary trust and discernment, requires constant reflection. Kay Jorgensen's voice is ever-present reminding us that "our reflection must be as intense as our action."

Kay and I used to say that it was a good thing that we never made a 5-year or 10-year plan because our imagination did not contain all that has come to be a part of the life of Faithful Fools. We had ideas and wrote a mission statement. We desired to be present on the streets and to creatively respond to the needs around us. We walked with a deep trust and we were open to being surprised. We would often read aloud the poem by Rumi that ended with the line, "Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding, the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated as birdwings."

The tremendous energy and expansion this past year in all areas of our work have felt similar to our beginning years. Our advocacy work has become extremely important as San Francisco now struggles with an income inequality that is growing faster than any other city in the U.S. It is people who are being displaced. This means our work of accompanying of individuals who need housing and services has intensified. It requires more people to pay attention and care.



It requires more financial resources to cover basic needs, and continuous reflection as the social dynamics and the economic forces in the city are complex and even brutal on the lives of so many people and neighborhoods. Students from our educational partner, the University of San Francisco, together with residents from the Tenderloin neighborhood have become part of this conversation and advocacy as their service-learning commitment with Faithful Fools.

The capacity of our hearts and minds and what all happens within 24 hours amaze and surprise us all. We thank you for your contributions and ask for your continued support as donors, volunteers and participants in our day-to-day work, which extends into streets throughout the U.S. and Nicaragua. May we know that together our capacity to act and reflect as a global community of faithful and committed people is as boundless and as beautifully balanced as bird wings.



Carmen



POLISHING THE MIRROR WITH REFLECTION



When someone at the Fools announces that there will be a reflection, I usually have a tickle of excitement. I am always curious about the path that any reflection will take. There are a few aspects of reflection that I find particularly interesting.

First, when I am in a reflection with a group of people, I often find that what I take for granted might not be true at all. For example, last week we were reflecting on the word “hope.” Turns out that two of us had one idea about the beauty and utility of that common word. The other two

Reflection is a review of what we are doing, what we’ve done, and a preview of the next possible moment.

thought “hope” was a set-up for avoiding the present moment and turning away from reality. So, what do we really mean when we say, “I hope everything turns out okay?” In another group, we were looking at the idea of spirituality. Wow, what a confusion of ideas came up around that word, yet we use it as if we are all talking about the same thing. A reflection about spirituality can take us into a conversation about God, a divine amorphous energy, a redwood tree, love, non-duality, compassion, heaven/hell, Jesus, omniscience; the list is long and diverse. I find these reflections really fun, and they help me put my feet on the ground with truly abstract ideas.

Kay Jorgensen

Second, we talk here at the Fools about “reflecting fearlessly.” This definitely takes some courage and letting go of attachments. It is especially valuable when we analyze the effectiveness of an activity or reflect on some new endeavor, digging in deep to figure out if it fits with our mission statement. In reflecting fearlessly, we avoid reflexive pats on the back and work to be open and honest.

I thank the Fools for putting reflection on the agenda and offering us all lots of opportunities to dig into the complex issues we encounter every day.

Jackie Hider

A Meditation For Hope

Can we separate ourselves from others and their experience without feeling isolated or schizophrenic? Or are we, of all things, indifferent to the other’s eyes and now cast adrift in a strange hermit existence? And are we afraid to go to the Tenderloin because of people living in cardboard boxes on the streets? Why? Because we’ve become more insensitive to people, unaware that by doing so we’re further isolating ourselves and our spirit. Maybe by looking in each other’s eyes, the conflicts we have here will recede, wars abroad will abate, our children will have new hope and we will all live more abundantly.

Aieja Tyembye



Dance, Peter, Dance!

“Are you angry, Papa?
Because you got the milk out
and poured it into the cup
very fast.”
It is a marvel to watch
a reflective relationship
blossoming in my home.
How important
to know how you are seen
by someone who cares about
you. To be seen.
To see yourself
reflected
in loving eyes.
The best
eyes through which
to learn who you are
who you can be-
come.
Whose eyes
are on you?
Who sees themselves
in yours?

Alex Darr

Faithful Fools Welcomes Bianca Huerta Our First Mercy Corps Volunteer



Bianca enjoys working with Tenderloin Votes

One of the things I love about this place is that you get this understanding that reflection is part of our everyday life, our everyday relationships and choices. I notice that opportunity, a space allowing this reflection to happen, while I am in the Street Zendo, while I participate in the Bible Study, while I enjoy Write Now! While I talk to my neighbors around me, while I read a book, while my community member and I sing together at home, while I cook and clean, while I talk to my family and friends back home in Chicago. Reflection allows me to just be me; reflection shows me a form of hospitality and it is how I show hospitality for myself. In this relationship with reflection, I continue to grow and expand who I am; then it also welcomes others around me to do the same. I am very thankful for being part of Mercy Volunteer Corps because this experience has allowed me to reflect as a young adult on many topics, stirring up my thoughts and ideas, and creating deeper reflection in solitude and in community.

Bianca Huerta

A Special Note from Rev. JD Benson

From nearly the beginning, when Kay and Carmen first walked the streets, I took to heart the message: *Once we know we’re really Fools—and that it’s a good thing (!)—that’s it.* The switch is flipped and there is no permanent escape from that consciousness. It’s not always easy to speak truth to power. It’s not always the choice any of us makes. As Faithful Fools, we delight in play and folly. We take issues seriously and take ourselves with a huge grain of salt. It all adds up to finding our way, together, in a kind of balancing act.

Kay Jorgensen has been my guide, more than she can know, holding a lantern before me, leading me toward that switch! And now, as I prepare to leave the company of the Fools at the end of December, I know the light she carried so artfully will stay with me. Kay and Carmen and all of you will travel with me in that light. With all you Fools in my heart, I will carry this light forward to what comes next.

Rev. Benson, who is both a UU Minister and a licensed marriage and family therapist, will continue serving the UU Church on the hill and will see counseling clients in the East Bay.



JD reading her poem from *In Plain Sight*

A Special Note to Rev. JD Benson

We Fools are so very grateful that JD has been with us this last year and a half. It is due to her efforts and considerable talents that we now have a street chaplaincy program, which had been but a dream before JD brought it to life. She also brought our most recent poetry book into being. And so much more! It hardly seems enough to simply say, “Thank you!” So we will tie that purple yarn about your wrist to keep you connected to all the Faithful Fools around the world.



Mural by Mona Caron, corner of Golden Gate & Jones, depicting the parking lot by the Fools, commemorating the Black Hawk Jazz Club

The Institute for Street Level Learning

Interns!!! Interns!!!

Interns continue to enliven and enrich the life of the Fools. The general definition of an internship is a temporary position with an emphasis on learning as you go (some folks call it “on-the-job training,” but we know it’s “on-the-spot-learning,” don’t we?). The Institute for Street Level Learning, which is the name for the education arm at Faithful Fools, has interns from our academic partners and from the community.



Kevin

We Have An ACE!!!



Dylan

The University of San Francisco’s McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good appointed an ace of an ACE to help us out this year with service learning. As a site that serves multiple classes each semester, we found we were a bit breathless

until Dylan Moore, a former

Martín-Baró Scholar, came our rescue. She is our Ambassador for Community Engagement (ACE). In her role as a student liaison, she helps students schedule their service learning activities, helps us create meaningful projects and activities, and conducts on-campus reflection to help students make strong, meaningful connections between the service work they do and their academic studies. We are so grateful to have her with us.

Over this last year, we have been fortunate to have Elizabeth Frey, now a graduate of the University of San Francisco, and Kevin Mann, now in his last year at Starr



Elizabeth

King School for the Ministry, as our student interns. And Jackie Hider, whose focus is on learning with us about Buddhism and chaplaincy, and Thomas Atwood, who focuses on accompaniment and community organizing with Fools Mission, continue as our community interns.

Service Learning: Reflection Meets Poetry Meets Students

What better way to learn about Tenderloin poets than to read their work and create an anthology? That’s what the Martín-Baró Scholars (MBS) did last year. They curated the poetry of the first five volumes of *Living in the Land of the Dead* into one extraordinary collection. For the first time (that we know of), Fools’ poetry was the textbook for a college literature class, as the MBS students studied Tenderloin poetry in preparation for creating the new book. Then they interviewed the poets in order to understand the poetry from “the inside out,” as one student put it.

This is service learning at its best: Students study poetry, poets engage students, and poetry takes on a new life in a new volume.



MBS Students with noses of course!

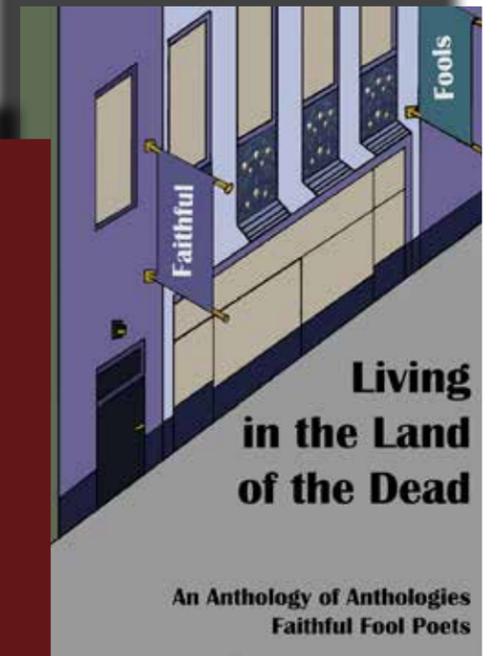
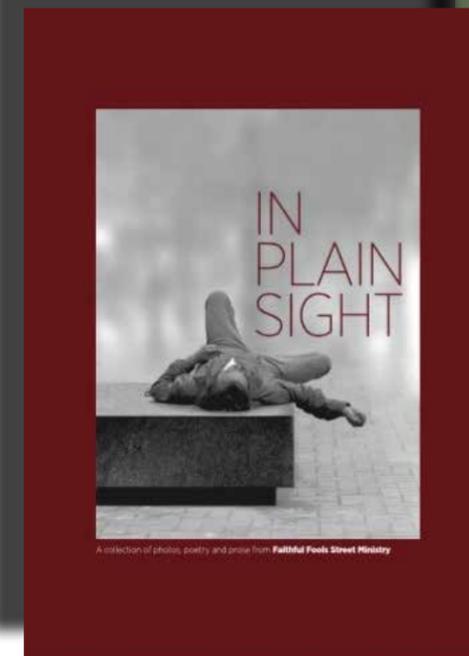
Finally, this project was the subject of a presentation for the National Society for Experiential Education in October. Presenting to a national audience gave us the chance to reflect deeply on how studying and publishing poetry creates ever widening circles of reflection and learning.



Seeking shelter during the Seven-Day Street Retreat

Announcing The Fools Fantabulous, Incredulous Most Amazing, Handy-Dandy Emporium of Gloria Emporia!!!

We know you have been longing for your own Fools’ most fashionable T-shirt. Your hankering for Fools’ poetry is not easily denied; we know that too. So you, your friends, your family can now go to the Fools’ online Emporium and find Fools’ merch (as they say in swanky circles). Go to the Fools website (www.faithfulfools.org), click on the Fools’ Store button and make a suggested donation. Your dollars will support the work of the Fools and your desire to be in Foolish high style fashion or have Fools’ Poetry gracing your coffee table will be fulfilled.



NEW NEWS

The Healing Well



The Healing Well is a wonderful new presence in the Fool's Court and in the Tenderloin Community. In June 2015 Kathy Curran, the Executive Director, and Jordan Bouchard, together with a magnificent group of volunteers and program participants, arrived at our door, and we welcomed them in. They came with a

vision to be "a safe community for healing, renewal and growth."

Since June The Healing Well has been offering classes in Movement, Mindfulness and Contemplative Practices, Substance Abuse Support Groups, Creative Arts, Physical Fitness and Healthy Eating at the Fools' Court and St. Francis Living Room.

They love the community and the wholehearted welcome they have received at Faithful Fools, and we love their programs and kindhearted presence that is offered to all who walk through the door.



Sam and Ray hang in there together

A Street Chaplain!!!!

We are street level learners and street level practitioners, so it makes sense that we would partner with St. Francis Memorial Hospital, The Gubbio Project (a safe place for those without housing to sleep during the day), and the St. Francis Living Room (a senior drop-in center) to provide a street chaplain. Rev. Laurie Lyter Bright has taken up the challenge to fulfill her Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) training hours both on the streets of the Tenderloin and at St. Francis Memorial Hospital.



Laurie



Ray signs rental papers

A New Home . . . 10 Years Later

It was June 1, 2005 that Ray first put in an application to get housing, and it was Aug. 5, 2015 that the room became a reality. For Ray, who spent time in and out of the shelter system, the road was long in part because staying in a shelter long enough to get a room was fraught with the risks that go with being in a shelter: having possessions stolen, rarely being able to sleep, encountering people who threatened physical harm. While the shelter system has much to offer, it wasn't a route inside for Ray.

The room finally came when a chance visit to an SRO (single room occupancy hotel) revealed that Ray's name had come up but the contact info was out of date. That was in May. Then the longest road of all began: getting through the paperwork, the inspections, the delays. Each week began with the promise of "just a few days more," but then ended in disappointment, "Not yet." So each week it got harder and harder to stay with the process, but we did. Ray and Sam together overcame the discouragement, the frustration, and yes, the tears (Sam's and Ray's alike).

Then it happened! The key to a room with lots of light streaming in a huge window. Ray is at home now . . . more than 10 years later. Ray wasn't alone in this because the Fools are a presence here in the neighborhood, willing to go through the process together. We are grateful to all the people whose contributions make this presence possible.

Goings On Over the last year



Charles Blackwell and Bisola Maringay perform Charles' poem for the launch party of *In Plain Sight*

Celebrating Birthdays
Our dear friend Richard Kamler celebrated his 80th at the Fools with family, fools and friends.



And more birthday celebrations!!! Above Kasey Asberry celebrates her birthday with her mom at the Demonstration Gardens. Left: Peter and Lotus sing songs to celebrate Mary Ganz's and Carmen Barsody's birthdays.



Carmen Barsody, rAmu Aki, and Sam Dennison receive a Community Partner Award on behalf of Faithful Fools from University of San Francisco McCarthy Center for Public Service and Common Good.



Play, Mary Ganz, play!



Below: Fools join in on Four Corner Friday (a monthly street celebration of the neighborhood) by writing on the sidewalk.



Oscard's Garden Party, June 2015
Oscard invited a few hundred favorite friends, including Peace and Alfonso, over to the Demonstration Gardens to celebrate Fathers Day, the Summer Solstice, and the Tenderloin. People ate, made a map of TL Hopes & Dreams, and played, played, played. A good time was had by all. Thanks to Judi Iranyi for such fine photos.



Conversation at the Fools' Court: Above Kay and Jesse Johnson enjoy a moment in the great room. Below Kathy Curran and Carmen in the kitchen.



Action. Reflection. Action. Reflection.

It's an ebb and flow of attention, like the open and close of bird wings. Human beings are enormously creative, making new things, making new meaning, making new life constantly. Yet we are as capable of destructive creativity as we are of life-giving creativity. This is the hope and tragedy of human life, is it not? The consequences of our actions are not always evident, nor are they predictable.

When I was very young, my brother and I took on the task of removing a very heavy iron vise from the workbench in the garage. My part in the task was simple enough: unscrew the last bolt until the vise came loose. I did it diligently and then suddenly, the vise fell and it landed on my brother's foot. He let out a howl of pain that still echoes in my ears. I remember thinking, over and over and over again, "I didn't mean to! I didn't mean to hurt him! I didn't mean to!" But you know and I know that my intention had no part in the outcome. Of course, I didn't mean to hurt my brother, but it happened anyway. No, it was not the intention that characterized this experience in my life, but how I came to understand the relationship between my intentions and my actions. There was a kind of thoughtlessness that went into that project, both on my brother's part and on mine. We just did it, humming away, laughing and playing, we merrily loosened nuts and bolts, pretending that we knew what we were doing. I remember how I just twisted away at that bolt until it let loose, not thinking at all about what would happen next.

That is a childhood instance of going through the motions, casually and thoughtlessly. The adult version of this comes with deeper risks. Whether we see our work as building community or building a business, there are risks. If we take the outcome for granted because we believe our intentions are good (or at least good enough), we miss the one thing that allows us to take responsibility and that is reflection.

It's not always easy to know what to do in these days of housing shortages and impending El Niño, knowing thousands of people will likely be facing severe winter storms with little more than a plastic

poncho to protect them. When is it best to be confrontational? When do we cajole? When to be silent witnesses? When to be insistent? How to keep going despite despair? Our intentions are shaped by anger and frustration, also by good will and camaraderie. But the impact of our actions can not be understood only by the light of our intentions. Rather we must ask ourselves the harder questions

Responsibility can only develop when a person reflects—not on himself but on what he's doing.

Hannah Arendt

about the impact of our actions: Did we achieve what we'd hoped for? Was there harm along the way? Has there been progress? Is our circle larger or smaller? What have we learned?

It's reflection, be it with others or in a moment of solitude, that gives meaning to our actions. It's not who we are that ultimately makes the world, but what we do. If our actions are to make a better world, we must reflect and act and reflect and act, in a constant ebb and flow of attention, like the opening and closing of bird wings.

Sam Dennison

A Home in Need



Is a Home Indeed

The Fools' Court, our home and the center of our activities, required much tender loving care this last year. The rains came and the roof leaked, so we resealed it; our purple facade began to fade, so we had it painted; pipes needed replacement and so did a couple of toilets.

Built in 1932, the home of the Fools is concrete and very, very solid, but still in need of attention. As our programs grow and more people come to find a place to create community and to reflect, we are constantly reminded how fortunate we are to have this place to share with so many people.

This last year, our emerging and emergency needs were met by a grant from the city of San Francisco and by donations from our friends near and far. We appreciate all that you do to support the work of the Fools.



Fools In Action: We Seek to Meet People Where They Are Through Art & Advocacy

MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - "We as young people are committed to learning and growing so that we can be activists in our community," says Arlen Casco. She lives, works, and learns in the barrio, Ciudadela Nicaragua, where Bufones Fieles (Faithful Fools) and where Franciscan Associates of Managua have a home and a presence. Arlen tells us that she, Tyler Butterfield (a visiting volunteer), and Karina Duran have taken their talents to the children. There in the barrio, these three decided to connect directly with the children to learn about poetry, dance, and all manner of creative pursuit.

Arlen lives at the Casa Misionera Franciscana, which is a half block down the street from the La Corte (Fool's Court) and St. Francis of Assisi School. The Casa was built by the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls when they lived there in the 1990s. Arlen and other Faithful Fools host activities and visitors in the Casa Misionera Franciscana, much like Carmen and Sam and other Faithful Fools do in San Francisco. Tyler came to the barrio via Carmen and the Healing Well, which now resides at the Fools in SF, and Karina spent a year as a Franciscan Volunteer with the Sisters of Little Falls, much as Bianca Huerta is spending a volunteer year with the Fools in SF as a Mercy Volunteer.

These creative ventures just go to show that we, Fools & Bufones alike, reach out to our neighbors with the talents and skills we have at hand. It's been said that "Need grows talent," but we might say, "When we seek to meet the need, our talents appear . . . just as pennies appear on the street."



Tyler and Arlen



Karina and the children dance, dance, dance

TENDERLOIN, SAN FRANCISCO - "We have to make a difference," said Jesse James Johnson, poet and activist. That's how it all began. Jesse Johnson looked Sam Dennison right in the eye and said, "We need a place to meet. Can we meet at the Fools?" And Sam, supported by many others, said, "Yes." So began a movement to bring more Tenderloin voters to the ballot box.

Tenderloin Votes is a small but growing group of residents, Fools, and volunteers who are determined to register voters on the streets, especially those who think they aren't eligible. People without homes and people with criminal convictions often think they aren't allowed to vote. But under California law they are, and Tenderloin Votes activists are determined to let them know their rights.

To that end, activists like Kim Mosteiro, James Pounders, and Kat Callaway met, organized, and mobilized from the Fools Court. They walked the streets registering voters, they tabled at community events educating everyone possible, and they marched to City Hall together to show everyone how to get their voices heard loud and clear. By election day, more than 180 new voters were registered.

Of greater importance is the growing number of voter activists who are continuing to register their neighbors and grow a community of citizens. If any one knows Street Level organizing, it's the Fools and Tenderloin Votes.



Jesse and Tenderloin Votes



Kat Callaway creates Get Out the Vote signs

REFLECTION: CONSTANT CONVERSION

A treasured T-shirt in my dresser drawer shows a newly hatched chick. The text is “Born Again Unitarian.” Getting that shirt reminded me of a casual encounter with an indigent woman on Broadway in L.A.: “Are you saved?” she called out. Feeling a good mood, I replied “Yes!” And I thought to myself, “Yes, saved over and over and over—from ignorance, fear, loneliness, cynicism, apathy, despair... But how?”

Coming to know Carmen Barsody, I had a chance to learn about the Franciscan world-view, and I was blessed with a new pair of words: constant conversion. That word, conversion, rubs people the wrong way who have left mainstream Christianity. It recalls for them the requirement to subscribe to a creed once and for all, in order to belong.



St. Francis of Assisi Dancing on Water, Santa Fe, NM

Because of my long-term association with Faithful Fools and the readings co-founder Kay Jorgensen introduced to us, I learned to rely on the reflection process, “Act, Reflect, Learn (new paradigm) and Repeat.” So when I bumped into the Franciscan practice the Sisters call “constant conversion” my AHA was Oh Yeah! My old friend the born-again, and again, and again...Unitarian! There it is: Unitarian, Franciscan and Foolish. We humans reflect, we recognize ourselves, we acknowledge this new knowledge with others, and we are renewed.

Melissa Fafarman,
Faithful Fool, Unitarian
Universalist, Franciscan Associate

The INNER & OUTER WORK

“You are in your own way!” Reza would often say to me during one of my sessions with her. The way I was seeing something, whether a current or past experience, or the way I was thinking about something was inhibiting my ability to move forward. Sometimes it was fear, sometimes simply a laziness to do the inner or outer work required to take action.

Reza Leah Landman is the one who introduced me to Kay Jorgensen. Kay and Reza worked together for many years assisting people in their process of healing and becoming more whole and alive, doing what some call the “inner work.” In our meeting each other, Kay and I recognized we shared a belief and insistence that inner work and outer work, personal and social transformation must go hand-in-hand.

A foundational thought in our creating the street retreats was an invitation into a reflective relationship between ourselves and the places we often separate from or actively avoid. When we walk into the streets of our cities and the barrios of Nicaragua, it is an opportunity to see anew and to see beyond what we think we know.

Kay once wrote, “To retreat into the streets calls us to bring ourselves to be present in a place that is unfamiliar and in which we bear witness to our inner response. We raise the reflective mirror to recognize where we are anxious or afraid, where we hold judgment or create mythologies about what we see and feel.”

Reflection is essential in the life of Faithful Fools. It is imperative to listen and learn from one another. Reflection strengthens our actions. Action-reflection-action is the way of the Fool as we seek to courageously engage in personal and social change. Reflection and action are inseparable.

Carmen Barsody



A PRESENCE THAT DISTURBS

My most recent street retreat included a magnificent conversation at St. Anthony’s. She was an elderly woman with thin, gray hair who smiled through broken teeth. She told me, with a shy pride, “I just made a You-Tube channel.” I almost danced at that remark, which was about the last thing I’d have expected to come out of her mouth.

And then, back on the street, some big guy in a suit was slamming a woman onto the back of his car, twisting her arm up behind her. It looked like a cop move, but then again, he was dressed in a business suit.

I stepped into the street and said, “Excuse me, sir, are you a police officer?” “Yes,” he said, and he ordered me, “Step back up onto the curb.”

“Could I see your identification please?” I asked. “You step back up on the curb or I’ll have two of you in handcuffs!” he roared. I considered; stepped back onto the curb. I pulled out my cellphone and began taking video of the encounter, which, amazingly, began to calm. He let the woman go with a reprimand; she apparently had slapped his car because he’d cut the corner too close to two little dogs she had on a leash in the crosswalk. They both went on their ways. And so did I, but it stayed with me. Should I have backed down when I did? Would standing my ground, perhaps drawing his attention from the other woman, have helped? Or would it have escalated the violence?



And what about the larger problem? – that a white guy in a suit, showing no police identification whatsoever, can handle a woman on the street like that, and walk away with the woman apologizing to him?

Twenty years ago, Kay began walking the streets in a way that invited connection. When I walked with her as an intern at the Faithful Fools, I marveled at this way of walking, wondered if I could bring it into my ministry, wherever that would be. The Fools define “ministry” as a way of being in the world that mirrors the presence of God. People understand different things by that word “God.” So sometimes we say “mirror the presence of Love” or “reflect kindness to anyone we meet.”



Later that night I pulled out a poem I’d first read in high school English Lit class – an old chestnut by Wordsworth, “Tintern Abbey.” My eyes fastened on the words, “a presence that disturbs.” I began to think of how it is we Faithful Fools are in the streets; how the streets are in us.

In me, the streets are a presence that disturbs, disturbs me with joy and sorrow, with a call to action and a wondering what my action should be. Every day, I learn a little more about how it is that I can show up fully, be a presence on the streets -- a presence that connects, a presence that disturbs.

Mary Ganz

A Garden of Health



MANAGUA, NICARAGUA - Children of St. Francis of Assisi School, a part of the Fools’ community in the Barrio, have a school garden. They have planted plantains, tomatoes, watermelon, squash, cilantro, oregano, basil, spinach and more. It is their favorite

Wednesday class. They have learned to use plastic bottles to implement a drip irrigation system. Their mothers have also begun to collaborate with the children in the garden.



Selfies

Narcissus

Captivated by his face
on the water
Lost in his gaze upon himself
Remains until death
self-gazing.

Dorian Grey

while his image
in his painting aged
his projected popular face never faded.
Yes, when he gazed on
his aging image
He recognized his inner self(ie)?
of fear, loneliness, sadness, dread.

Fools

Seek to discover our reflection
Not on waters or in paintings,
Not in cameras,
But on the streets
Where others reflect,
Revealing back to us
our inner selves
our common humanity

Ade Kroll, OSF



Kate Sulzer and Kay Jorgensen

Kay Jorgensen, co-founder of Faithful Fools, has taken her Fools Way across the bay. In March, she moved to Chaparral House, a non-profit, highly rated elder care home. Kay keeps a red nose handy and a ready smile available for the caregivers, residents, and administrators. It won't surprise you to know that she frequently visits the Fools for programs, parties, and reflection.



Ed Bowers and Bernadette White talking with Micah Frazier about harm reduction and resilience, Nov. 2014

Go It Alone?

It's Just Too Hard

In San Francisco, we exist in an urban culture full of technological miracles that often make a person feel as though he were inside of a science fiction novel; but inside this Metropolis the old wise sayings are still there to remind us that little has really changed. No one can survive on this planet alone. Going it alone all the time is too hard and that is just a fact. The ego probably doesn't like that idea, but I think it's true.

Carmen of the Faithful Fools recently accompanied me to the I.R.S at the Federal Building. This was a wonderful thing for her to do because I have a major phobia about dealing with bureaucratic institutions that want to ruin my life. I know that I should accept them and see the good in them, but I don't; so when dealing with these creatures a wave of relief comes over me if just one other person can be on my side. All that person has to do, if they want, is watch me squirm. The grounding provided by someone who is on my side being there will do the rest. Just by being a witness to what another person is going through can add a validity to that experience that it wouldn't have had before.

But most of all accompaniment will help reduce the isolation most of us feel when dealing with human powers larger than ourselves and beyond our control.

So thank you, Carmen. Without you accompanying me, I probably would not have gone, and that would have been a mistake. Thank you! Even getting through the metal detector was easier with you there.

Ed Bowers

I Came to Be a Witness, Instead I was Seen Quite Clearly

I choose my clothing carefully for the day: t-shirt, hoodie, and basketball shorts borrowed from my boyfriend. I wear glasses and no makeup. I'd volunteered to be one of the attending Fools for the Starr King School for the Ministry student visit. I know one of the day's activities will be walking the streets of the Tenderloin. So I dress to deflect attention. I dress to deflect my own self-consciousness. A young woman walking alone on the street draws the eye as surely as gamblers watch the roulette ball cross its wheel. It doesn't even matter whether that's true; I believe it, and that belief makes me walk quickly and keep my guard up. But I don't want that removal during this day. I've come to the streets to witness, and for me, that involves shedding the vulnerability of being witnessed myself.

We're sent out on our walk saying: "What holds us separate? What keeps us separated? As we walk the streets, what still connects us?" We're told to come back in an hour.

You can cover a lot of ground in that time, even on foot, but I only make it half a block. I stop at the corner of Hyde and Turk to watch a tiny terrier dressed in a red princess outfit. He's attracting a lot of laughter and attention.

I fall into conversation a woman there. Her name is J. She's an Asian woman, maybe fifty, sitting on the cushioned seat of her unfolded walker. We're at a busy corner, a bus stop, but she doesn't seem to be in a hurry to get anywhere. Neither am I, for a change. We talk for nearly an hour. Mostly, she talks and I listen. She has a friend who travels a lot, who'd brought her back a souvenir from the Great Wall of China. She hopes to go some day herself. Also, she's kind. She has a new pack of cigarettes for a friend who's too broke to buy his own. Pragmatic too – it's an off-brand,

cheaper than her own beloved Camels.

It feels good to listen in this unrushed way. There's a technique in therapy called "reflective listening." It involves listening attentively, then offering your own thoughts back to check your understanding and to encourage the other person to open further. I try to channel this, to use my listening as a compassionately held mirror for J. Yet over the course of our conversation, there are things she says that poke holes in this idea of myself as benignly passive. She asks me what I'm doing on the street. It's a sincere question and not unkind,



but it shatters the notion that my dressing down makes me pass as anything besides who I am. And at the end of our conversation, she tells me she likes me. "People come in here with ideas on how to help and push people around getting them to fit. You're not like that." I leave feeling humbled by J's regard.

Here's the thing: to witness means to submit yourself to being witnessed. I think some part of us understands this in a very deep and fundamental way. They call it Ubuntu in South Africa. Hindis call it Ahimsa. Newton called it the third law of physics: For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Every act of engagement is simultaneously an act of vulnerability. "All that you touch you change; all that you change, changes you." It's terrifying, and yet there's an irrevocable integrity to it; anything less would be unjust. I'm grateful to J for the reminder.



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Faithful Fools Mission Statement

*We are a ministry of presence
That acknowledges each human's incredible worth.
Aware of our judgments, we seek to meet people
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The arts, education, advocacy, and
Accompaniment.
We participate in shattering myths
About those living in poverty,
Seeing the light, courage, intelligence, strength,
And creativity of people we encounter.
We discover on the streets our common humanity
Through which celebration, community, and
healing occur.*