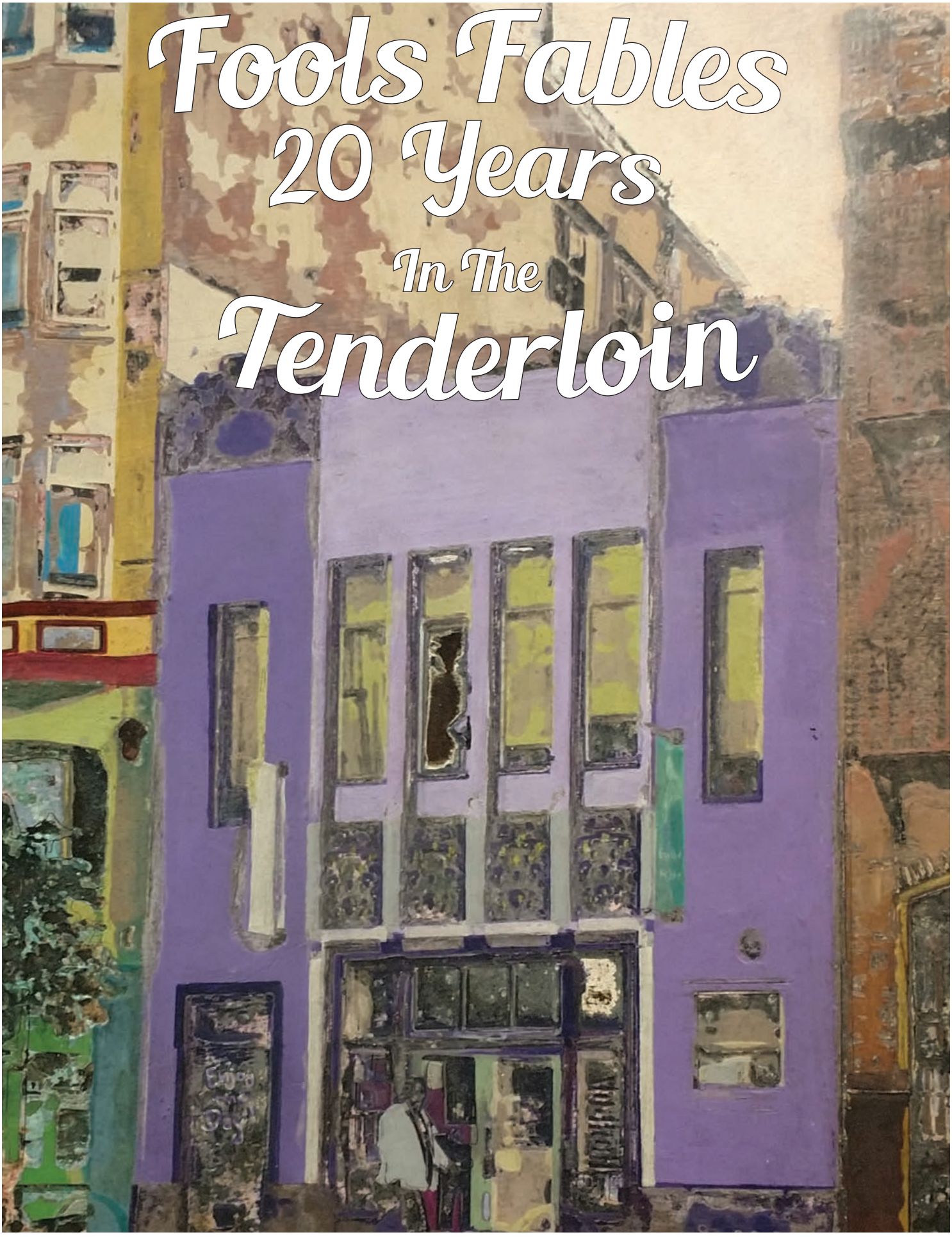
Fools Fables
20 Years
In The
Tenderloin



The Only Place to Start is In the Middle

By Sam Dennison
Fools Fables Editor and Designer

Every now and then someone shows up offering to make a documentary about the Faithful Fools. Indeed, I was that person the first time I came here seven years ago. Playing around with the idea of becoming a videographer, I came for a month to see if I could capture the ephemeral appeal of the Fools through interviews and video of everyday activities. Like many others, before and since, I gathered a great deal of material—more than 30 hours of oral histories and B-roll footage—but in the end, it lay beyond my abilities to shape it into a coherent "story."

You see it's not that the Fools' story is impossible to tell; it's just that it's more like a thick medieval tapestry than a book or a movie. Like a tapestry it takes a long time to fully appreciate the details that transform thin threads into a rich, visceral experience. Each thing we do is entwined with something else, and everything we do depends on the people around us. If we think of this life as a tapestry, we begin to see how the weaving is complex, how if you trace a single thread, you get caught up in the beauty of its path. On the other hand, if we step back to look at how the threads work together, we see a picture emerge as patterns of color dissolve into one another. Each thread exerts its own tender influence, not where it begins and not where it ends, but in its long middle. It is there that an image appears and the story begins to emerge.

So it turns out that if one wants to write a Fools history, the only thing to do is to start in middle, where the threads merge. That's why you will find our earliest stories in the centerfold of this magazine: how Kay and Carmen met; why we do Street Retreats; and how the path for so many of us leads in and out of the Tenderloin, for the center is our beginning.

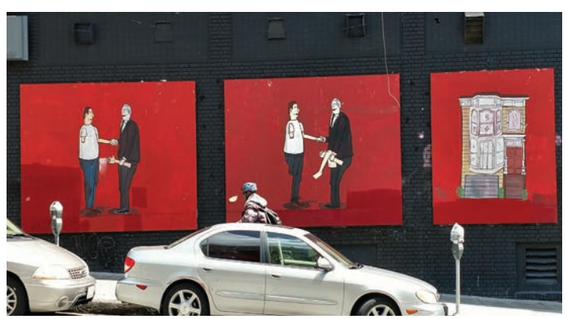
Stories harkening to one another across pages and years is how we make meaning out of our lives. The trick to explaining the life of the Fools (or anyone's life for that matter) is to avoid trying to tell ***the*** story as if there were only one story to tell. And each time the story is told, why not start at a different place? Our lives here at the Fools have many beginnings. Each of us has at least one story that starts with an encounter with a Fool or two, but Faithful Fools, as a whole, also began when Kay and Carmen met, so you see, there are many beginnings. More than anything, however, we are a community of people who welcome other people and in doing so we begin something new.

Our building is central to our story (that's why it is on the cover) because our presence in the Tenderloin is intentional, and our presence in this particular place connects us to the larger world. A Fool by definition is one who crosses a threshold (in medieval times, moving easily from the palace to the streets and back again, often as one who heard and told both sides of a story). Without a doorway and without crossing through it into the wider world, we simply could not be Fools. In that sense, we cannot be confined. Along the way, we have learned how our well–being is bound up with our neighbors, be they living on the streets of San Francisco or in the countryside of Nicaragua.

Storytelling reveals meaning without committing the error of defining it…

Hannah Arendt
Men in Dark Times

So here seven years on, I am the editor and designer of this edition of Fools Fables, trying to capture how it is we have come to this moment in the ways that we have. I am still not sure there is a way to tell it as a coherent story, at least not one that has a single beginning or a middle that comes with an orderly flow of details, and there certainly isn't an end yet. Because there is no end yet, I feel free to hope that this edition of Fools Fables will one day become a Fools' compendium, an unfinished one, to be sure, but as such, in my heart of hearts I see it becoming a living, growing collection of the stories that radiate out from this small, steadfast community of Fools.



Housing for an Arm and a Leg,
Tenderloin street art 2016-17, artist unknown

What Is It About The Faithful Fools?

By Bob Bacon
Faithful Fools Board Chair

The Fools live and teach our common humanity. They understand that there is no us and them, but only us. After all, they started when people who were called to very different religious traditions decided to live their religion together. That's a lesson that's sorely needed in an era when polarization seems to be getting more popular.

The Fools meet people where they are, which is the only place you can meet them if you really want to be part of their journey to somewhere else. But it's not just about meeting marginalized people where they are. The Fools understand that one must also meet people of authority or influence or wealth where they are, too. Only in that way can the Tenderloin, the city, the region, the state, the nation be made to work better for everybody. The Fools help people work together who don't think they have anything significant in common.

The Fools model goodness, not greatness. They model hope and not fear. Goodness is within our control, but greatness is not. Greatness is an impression formed by others, looking at us from the outside. We can't make ourselves great. But we can make ourselves good.

The Fools live and teach a culture of abundance, not a culture of scarcity. There is always room for one more at the table. The Fools use their pennies wisely, and leverage their pennies, so they can do a lot with a comparatively small number of pennies. That makes it more likely that people who have lots of pennies will give some of their pennies to the Fools. The Fools will make the same number of pennies do more and go further than people with lots of pennies would. The Fools pick up the two pennies on the sidewalk because they know they will be called upon to use them, even though they don't know yet about the particular man they might meet in the grocery store who is two cents short.

We Fools have been counseled by some most remarkable people, right from the very beginning. Among them is Bob Bacon our current Board Chair, shown above, at one of our first events at the Fools Court. In our early days, each Board member was "invested" with a Fools vest and Fools hat. Susan Knutson (directly above) is investing Susan Starr, our first Board Chair. Craig Greiger (photo above left) invested Quentin Olwell. Carmen Barsody and Daisy Xie are our two longest serving Board members (below celebrating with Kay Jorgensen, another invested Board Member). All of our Board "investments" have paid off with wise guidance and fidelity.

We Extend
A
Heartfelt Thanks
To
One and All

Finding Fools In the Faithful Feminine

By rAmu Aki

Jizo, Guardian of Children, Travelers, and the Weak (front), Jaguar Goddess (left), and the Guardian (right). Ancestor Celebration/Dia de los Muertos 2017.

The San Francisco Tenderloin is one of the last places in the United States of America to experience the first sunlight of each new day. Silent, the morning sun's light, flowing/flying ever pursuing night along the meridian of Earth's rotation at 1037 mph (1670 kph) over oceans and estuaries, lowlands, forests, plains, foothills and mountains, grain fields, cities, towns, rivers, lakes, flora, fauna and all the huddled souls of humanity stretching from last night into this morning of our lives, spills from the mainland, across the bay up to the peak of Nob Hill where it releases itself like a yellow/golden fount of renewal into a block by block smooth slide down Hyde Street (as well as others) to sweep the Fools Court at 234 Hyde up into its todaying. I have witnessed this process many times and have never failed to be moved by it, knowing that in brief moments this same light wave will flow past Lands End, push beyond the Golden Gate, pursuing night again across the beautiful Pacific.

For nearly 20 years now the Faithful Fools, as an organized non-profit founded and led by Kay Jorgensen and Carmen Barsody, has existed as a force for good in the TL. A light daily relit by the sun's reappearance and the round-the-clock mindful presence in the neighborhood along with its other residents, housed and houseless. I am gratified to have been a part of the Fools for nearly 15 years (the last 2 from the distance of Kentucky).

When I first met the Fools, I was not aware of looking to become part of a group of people cultivating a constantly transformational experience of creativity, presence, service, compassion, respect, sympathy, learning and sharing. Yet that was the radiance which beat like a great heart from the Fools Court, every pulsation nurturing the many who were involved and the many more who were touched through them. This nurturing, radiant pulse reflected, I believe, the particular matriarchal energy of feminine leadership (spiritual, psychological and physical) as exemplified by our founders. An organizational energy and style imbued with the highest ideals toward relationship and actualized in the daily leadership practices – indeed in the day-to-day being of Kay and Carmen, without dogma, force or manipulation: every Fool believes in what that Fool believes and every person a Fool extends themselves to is who they are and what choices they make are their own.

This wasn't about magic or miracles and did not even "make things easier." What I came to understand is that this transparent leadership style facilitated establishment and sustenance of honest and practical human relationship amongst Fools themselves and with everyone who entered into the circle of Fools in a way and to a degree which served alike the individuals and the whole. This process of coming into relationship was sometimes a frustrating challenge demanding real personal commitment to intentional evolution from everyone involved. It was exciting and sometimes scary as points of "no idea what to do next" were not uncommon. But through meeting people where they are, learning to stay present, in the moment with them, and working with tools of accompaniment, arts, education, and advocacy, I've experienced relationships which last down through the years, producing an abundance of comfort, growth and a wealth of shared positive energy. All of this in a way that feels so normal and natural, that one is hardly aware of it until you look around one day and there you are, in relationship. Sort of like being a member of a large, extended family, except that none of the other members will take away your responsibility for yourself and you'll feel how you're being continually attracted toward a higher standard of relating. Nothing binds you to the Fools beyond your desire & commitment to be present.

rAmu Aki calling the Ancestors Solstice Celebration 2011

This feminine Fools energy flow, which nurtures the masculine energetic principle toward balance as well, is represented with the required subtlety in the Faithful Fools Mission Statement on the back of this publication and I invite you to read and consider it. One critical aspect which I associate with a feminine way of relating that you won't find specified in the mission statement is the Fools call to and persistent practice of reflection. It reviews, it evaluates, it remembers, it critiques, it opens doors that lead from experience to a deeper comprehension of self and purpose. Fools do this both individually, around the work of the Fools, and with one another. It tends to be built into every aspect of what Fools do. Of this I say, "Blessed be the ties that bind."

Nothing binds you to the Fools beyond your desire & commitment to be present . . .

Of this I say, "Blessed be the ties that Bind"

Martha Boesing, at the 2017 Altar of our Ancestors, is our playwright laureate and dear friend of co-founder Kay Jorgensen. She is lighting a candle in honor of Meridel Le Sueur (author and socialist activist), mother of Deborah Le Sueur who created the Guardian (sculpture right rear). Deborah crafted the Guardian when her grandchild was diagnosed with cancer. When the Guardian was fired, it shattered in the kiln. Shortly after that, the child died. Her partner gathered the pieces and put the Guardian back together. The Guardian remains with us here at the Fools, a protector of children here and hereafter.

People are going back and forth across the doorsill where the two worlds touch. The door is round and open. Don't go back to sleep.

Rumi

By Mary Ganz

On the 7-Day Street Retreat each year, we often say that we are "walking a question" – something that is on our hearts as we stand in the food line or settle in for the night on a sheet of cardboard.

One day in this year's 7-day, we wanted to try walking each other's questions. We wrote them down, put them into a hat, and passed it around. Each drew one at random.

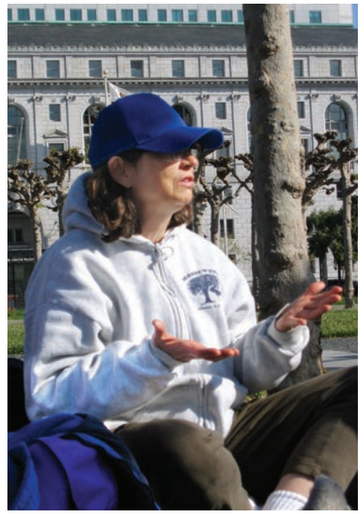
The question I pulled came from an intern who had joined our reflection circle just that day, a college student from the University of San Francisco who had spent a day or two a week with us, for a semester. Here's what she was walking:

"What has this time with the Fools meant to me?"

This was, I figured, my sixth 7-Day Street Retreat; the first one was in 2003. Fourteen years or 14 weeks, what did it matter? This young woman's question is well worth reflecting on.

I'd been walking with Rumi, because Fools often do. My first thought in response to the question was that my time with the Fools has afforded me glimpses of Rumi's doorsill, the place where two worlds touch. The more I walk with the Fools, the more I live into faith that there are doors round and wide enough for the whole country to pass through, openings that we sleepwalk by every day; faith that another way is possible. The more I live in that way, the more I am convicted that my walking this way matters; my walking this way opens the door for myself and others, helps to bring that new way into being. In fact, it is the only thing that will or may or can or would bring a new way into being.

What has my time with the Fools meant to me? Getting and spending, winning and losing, quantifying and measuring – these are powerful forces in the world, but *we don't have to live in separation and fear.* At the age of 68, I know myself to be growing and changing, becoming a person who sees the doorsill, and steps across.



Mary Ganz, Street Retreat Reflection, 2004

Your Footprints are the Only Road

Gwyneth Jones
Live-in Intern 2008-09
7-day Street Retreat

Traveler, your footprints are the only road,
nothing else.

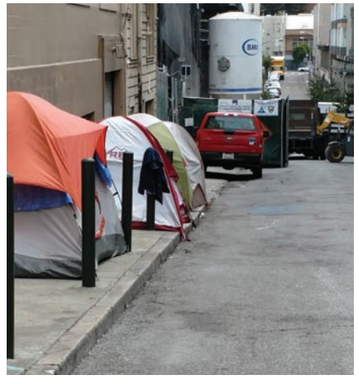
Traveler, there is no road;
you make your own path as you walk.

As you walk, you make your own road,
and when you look back
you see the path
you will never travel again.

Traveler, there is no road;
only a ship's wake on the sea.

Antonio Machado (1875-1939)

(Trans. by Mary G. Berg & Dennis Maloney 2003)



Where there is development,
there are signs of displacement.
As new housing goes up and as rents go up,
more people move to the streets.
San Francisco, July 2017

Market St. circa 1999

Over the years, the meeting of Francis of Assisi with a leper has had significant meaning for me. It was Francis's moment of awakening through which he was transformed. Now he saw the world and smelled its smells in a new way, and so he began to act differently.

When I lived in California, I didn't like going from Berkeley to San Francisco. I didn't like seeing "the homeless." I didn't like the smells; I didn't like people asking me for money or handouts. Then Carmen Barsody invited me to make a Street Retreat. She sent us out with a simple question: "What's going on in your mind and heart as you walk the streets?"

That day and those interactions while sitting with homeless people at lunch, encountering both strong sights and very strong smells, made me realize I had to come back for a second retreat.

The second time I simply held a paper cup, sitting all day next to an ATM machine. It was painful. Mostly I was totally ignored. Some even crossed the street rather than come near me. It was dehumanizing, and I saw how people who are homeless are our modern-day lepers. There were some who did stop, even if they gave no money, and spoke to me, looking me in the eyes. That was so completely different, so necessary to my feeling human.

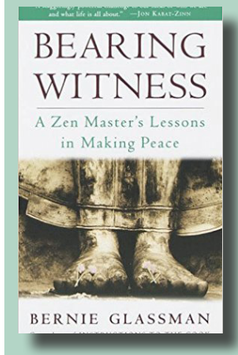
It was like the scales fell from my eyes. Like Francis, I felt that this is where I wanted to spend my time—on the streets with homeless people. My experience was similar to others making Street Retreats: I was at first judgmental and uncomfortable, yet I found I was able to step away from the smells, the dirty clothes, even the mental illness and see the human being. It was the start of my own "Francis moment."

I felt the same Francis and the leper parallel during my trips to Nicaragua. Everything I was used to, relied on, took for granted in my daily life was not available to me. It was a poverty I had never known. "No water today. Maybe tomorrow," the people would say, taking it in stride. I was like a baby. Everything was stripped away. I was not a nurse, not a Franciscan, not an administrator. Just Susan. Just a human being.

These two experiences are very connected for me. When your old heart and mind get stripped away, you get a whole new heart and mind. It affirms what I believe of the Franciscan way of life. When I, like Francis, step out of my clothes and leave them behind, then I can be embraced by people who are experiencing homelessness. It was the same with the people of Nicaragua—all happy to see me…just as I am. Just Susan.

This article first appeared in the Summer 2017 issue of Our Journey, a publication of the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls, Minnesota.

If we think we know, We don't Listen.



Bernie Glassman's ***Bearing Witness*** has been essential reading for people exploring what it is to spend time on the streets in reflection and as a witness. We have often started a Street Retreat with a reading from this book.

I Was At First Judgmental And Uncomfortable

By Susan Knutson

Susan Knutson on a 7-day Street Retreat in 2003

Alex with his family (clockwise) Kirsten, William, and Luna

Sleeping close to the Ground

By Alex Darr

The first night I had my son sleep in a real bed, instead of a crib, he fell out onto the floor with a "thud." By the next night, I had installed a railing on the bed, which kept him from falling out again. If we were living in a traditional home in Japan, this wouldn't have happened. We would all be sleeping on thin futon mattresses, which we would roll out onto the floor each night and put away in the morning. There would be no height to fall from. This has also been true when I've slept out on the streets, either on a few layers of cardboard or a thin, portable pad.

That's something I thought of, while working with the Faithful Fools: to truly be safe, you must be so close to the ground that there is no height to fall from. Which isn't to say that my son would be safer if we slept each night on cardboard on the streets. It is just that sometimes what we think of as safer or more comfortable results in a "thud."

When I first started working for the Faithful Fools in 2004, I tried to live that close to the ground. They offered me a job as Outreach Minister, and said they would pay "what you need." I took that offer to heart, and at first made irregular requests of what would cover rent, or other expenses. Eventually we settled on a more predictable monthly amount. I remember telling someone at the time that I got more pleasure out of knowing that I was living on as little as I could than I would out of being able to buy a six-pack of beer. When I look at my family of four's budget – still very modest by San Francisco standards – I wonder how I have come to change so much.

That, more than anything, is what I have gotten from being with the Fools, in one way or another, for nearly 17 years: an ongoing practice of looking at my own life, in the context of a world of extreme wealth and extreme poverty, as something to learn from, in connection with other people.

I wondered, for four years, why I hadn't found a single penny on any of my many Street Retreats, and then why it was I found my first of many on the 4-Day Street Retreat, and then found them in abundance once I committed to working with the Fools full-time. I still wonder what it means every time I find a penny and pick it up, or when I find one and don't. I continue to think, every time I cash a paycheck or go to the grocery store, about friends, and those I don't know, who live on next to nothing and those who have more than they could ever need.

It may be a foolish thought, that a small change in consciousness could change our world, but I refuse to believe in any other.

What holds me separate?
What keeps me separated?
As I walk the streets, what still connects me?

Street Retreat Mantra

Alex and Kirsten at the Fools Court 2012

Parisa Parsa and her 10-month old son, Kian, on the 2003 4-Day Street Retreat. During the years when Parisa worked with Faithful Fools we shared the value of using dialogue and reflection as a foundation to building a community. That is a passion that still connects us.

We Have All Been Lent To Each Other

By Dorian Dorey

Dorian along with other Faithful Fools prepared the altar for the Ancestor Celebration

Fiercely independent, it was Momma and I against the world and then my husband and me, despite my firm belief that we've all been lent to each other. While that determined independence taught me self-sufficiency, it kept me from allowing others to lend themselves to me. Connection is a human imperative yet we all too often isolate ourselves. Perhaps a smaller circle feels safer, especially with so much out of our control – my health, or lack thereof, leaves me grappling with that even more. The few people that we cling to are our support network and there's nothing more important than to find that safety net. Yet, our cherished friends and family cannot be all things to us. They need room to grow and we have other people who need our help and support—if only we'll open ourselves to the possibilities. True safety comes through community and the Faithful Fools allowed me to experience that.

The support of neighbors and knowing there are people to lend a hand creates a level of safety that you just cannot make for yourself. Just as John Lennon imagined, these Fools are dreamers that not only believe we can live as one but are doing so, beyond ideology or a single defining faith, for it is simply enough to believe—in something, in each other. Their belief in each other and everyone they encounter sends ripples of hope into the world, the kind of hope that sparks change, and I'll be forever grateful to have been caught in an eddy. My health issues are degenerative and disabling. While they are part and parcel of who I am, they can distract me from the very things that fulfill me; the Fools not only brought me into their rippling waters, they brought me back to myself: I missed other people – I missed new ideas and different perspectives.

Thankfully, my love of poetry and interest in writing drew me to the Faithful Fools. It started out simple enough, with a poetry reading at the library that led to talking to a couple of the writers which led to being invited to the 2015 Winter Solstice celebration (Thanks, Dr Dreame!). In that iconic purple building on Hyde that I'd so often admired, the feeling of community was instant – those marvelous, disparate Fools exuded a sense of welcoming. For all their differences, these clearly loving people were now accepting me and, two years in, I know I'm home. Beyond the initial invitation to their weekly writing group, WRITE ON!!!, they've embraced my other gifts and reminded me of all I have to give. Being in an interactive community does much more than introduce us to dynamic individuals we've been missing out on, it reintroduces us to the dormant dynamics within ourselves.

I know there is strength in the differences between us.
I know there is comfort where we overlap.

Ani DiFranco

A POEM TO THE FAITHFUL FOOLS

By Ed Bowers

I first met the
Faithful Fools
350 words ago,
I think in 2001,
but I'm not sure.
Fools are never
sure of anything.
I ring the Faithful Fools' Zendo Bell
which echoes a

BIG ZERO.

I am sure of

Nothing

Because

Nothing

Is everywhere,

peeping between the falling shadows of thoughts.
This is a world
where glue traps convince mice that
losing is winning.

Very dangerous
panic attacks
parade through my mind,
each one
carrying a sign
celebrating the many wacky years
since first I met the Fools.

They saved my life by giving it platform and focus and
numbers to put before and
after my zero.
John Coltrane and lots of other artists
saved my life too.
My family saved my life too.
My life is rich in the redundancy
of being saved by
my Life.

To paraphrase Fred Nietzsche,
anyone who didn't succeed at
killing me,
saved my life.
I am alive,
as many are,
because of fools
helping me live.
Years ago I wanted to live in a world where fools help
other fools survive.

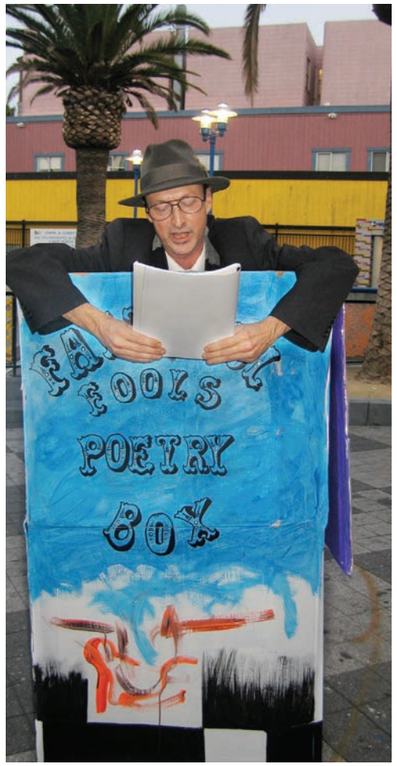
After knowing the Fools and working with them for over 16 years,
350 words later,
I am now living in that world.
Changes that go on around me go basically unnoticed.

I am a zero.

I will end this piece by quoting my ex-wife, Laurie Lane, who told me recently, "My mouth freezes trying to find words to thank the Fools for what they have done for me."

I am happy to be a small part of them, a Zero who rings the bell of their Zendo who is basically nothing but a possibility that might
add up to something if he hangs out with the right type of Fools.

So thank you, Fools. May you live forever.



Ed Bowers.
A Poet in a Poetry Box.

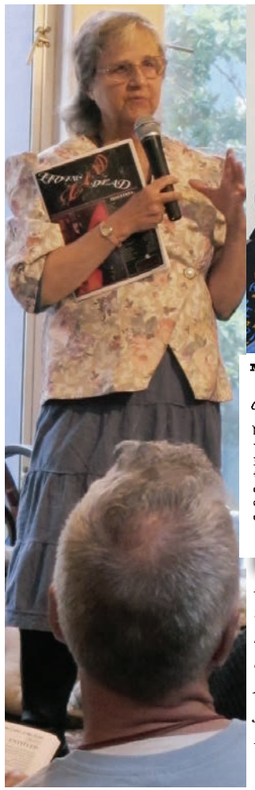
Living in the Land of the DEAD

By Ralph Dranow, Poet

One of the central goals of Faithful Fools is to promote artistic self-expression among Tenderloin residents, especially street people, and so the Fools conceived the idea of publishing an anthology of poetry, prose, and artwork by people living in the Tenderloin. Ed Bowers was the editor of the first anthology in 2003, and he called it Living in the Land of the Dead to reflect the difficult lives of many Tenderloin residents.

Marsha Campbell, rAmu Aki, and I joined Ed as editors of the second volume, and we agreed to solicit submissions from writers and artists living outside the Tenderloin. It was nice being able to invite such excellent poets as Daniel Marlin, Julia Vinograd, and Judy Wells to be included in the anthology. Being part of a team with fellow poets rAmu, Marsha, and Ed was a memorable experience. I fondly recall the stimulating, sometimes heated, discussions we had as we carefully went over each submission. We generally worked well together, and we tried to include something from everyone who sent us writing or artwork.

After we made our decisions, rAmu would lay out the magazine, and then we would proofread it. Sometimes the whole process could be messy, but the end result was always satisfying: five attractive-looking anthologies with a wonderful variety of writing. And finally, there would be an exuberant publication celebration at the Fools Court, with an abundance of tasty food and powerful readings by the anthology writers.

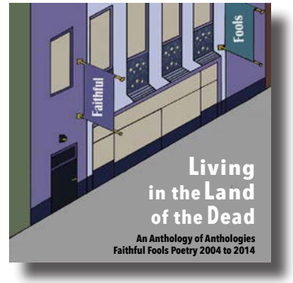


Marsha Campbell

CATARACTS

My eyes grow worn, frightened by molecules
Your eyes are immortal, leather-black
But watch out, beloved,
the rain may get you, oh
crying in the rain
crying out cockles and mussels
come alive, oh,

Marsha Campbell (left) was an editor and contributor to all five volumes. This is one of our favorite pictures of her reading from Vol. 5, just a few years before she passed away. Top above: In 2011, Mary Ganz, JD Benson, Armandine Legare, Gina Carson, Ed Bowers, and Kay Jorgensen listen to the poets reading at the 2011 release of Living in the Land of the Dead, Vol. 5. Marsha Campbell's poem, "Cataracts," as it appears in Vol. 1 of Living in the Land of the Dead.



From the Forward to Living in the Land of the Dead Anthology of Anthologies 2004-2014
By Sam Dennison

Crossroads. This volume of poetry was born very near the corner of Turk and Hyde. You might call that intersection a crossroads. So too the intersections of Golden Gate and Jones, Leavenworth and Ellis, Market and Polk are crossroads. These literal places evoke a visceral sense of crossroads, where people of all kinds pass by one another, going about their business, just doing their lives. The variety of people (and the grandeur of their dreams) at these Tenderloin crossroads are no less than at any oasis on the ancient Silk Road that once connected the spices and exotic goods of the Far East with the awakening culture of Western Europe.

[It is also a] crossroads of people: A place where poets meet one another, where students meet poets, where faculty meet Fools. And a crossroads of life: A place where words meet the page, where truth meets dreams, where the past meets the present. It is an oasis on the long Silk Road of poetry that connects distant corners of the world. Along the way we realize that the travelers we meet are often rough and the experiences are rougher still, yet out of it all comes something remarkable, beautiful in all its complexities.

The Thing About The Fools—

You're Never Not Part Of Them

By Kaye Carlson

Thinking about this article, I wrote down a lot of names hoping to rekindle the memories that go with them. That's where the stories are, with the people who come to the Fools.

For example, I was so moved when John Di Donna passed away. John was a wonderful man with a true Fool's story. Here's this funny, shy guy who wandered in. I didn't know him, but he looked familiar somehow. Then I remembered: I used to watch the Board of Supervisors meetings on TV, and that's where I saw John, taking part in the Public Comments part of the meeting. Here's this determined little man setting the Board straight on issues he felt were important. You know, in many ways he was a spokesman for those who couldn't speak. He was well spoken and always within their time limit. He was there week after week, year after year. You begin to appreciate something like that.

Then one day Kay announced that John was going to do a presentation on Hank Williams. Good Lord, why was she going to have this guy in to do that?!? It didn't seem to make sense -- but we all went, I guess out of faithfulness. John came with his record player and his Hank Williams records (the original '78's). He was nervous at first but as he went on, he relaxed a little. You could tell it meant a lot to him. Over time, Kay had him present several times and we listened; as time passed we not only got to know about Hank Williams, we began to have a much fuller picture of John, and I think that happened for John too.

This leads off to thinking about the amazing assortment of people you meet at the Fools: staff and volunteers as well as people off the streets. Way beyond my usual social gathering! You couldn't help but be moved. The mission statement – "discovering the light, courage, intelligence, strength, and creativity of the people we encounter" – that's what you discover when you're with the Fools at all. That's what Kay and Carmen were about. You knew they believed it, and slowly you believed it too. You learned to listen and pay attention. Like the people who come every week to Bible Study and spent a lively hour discussing what the scripture for the day means for them – week after week – for years, a wonderful mix of folks who live on the street or volunteer or just folks from the community. Plus some folks who just know they can get a doughnut and a good cup of coffee.

The original Bible Study in 2000 (above) with Barbara Graves and Eric Robertson. The group had lost their space and needed a place to meet. The Fools said, "Yes, you can meet here." It has been a Thursday morning staple ever since. In 2013, Armandine Legare, Maria Isabel Berrones, Melissa Fafarman, and Dana Hull continue the tradition.

Kay Jorgensen and Kaye Carlson, 2003

I remember one of those early meetings with Kay, Carmen and Susan Knutson at All Stars Donut Shop at Hyde and Golden Gate. It was clear that they were "regulars," as many of the customers greeted them; they had become known in the neighborhood. Their talk was relaxed, and when it was time to leave, I knew it was a group I wanted to be part of. Soon after I accepted an invitation to a meeting with them and a small group of folks who were interested in what they hoped to do.

John Di Donna and Wayne Tomlinson at a Fools Holiday Party

For some time Kay and Carmen had been spending their time walking the streets of the Tenderloin, talking with those who lived and worked there. They wanted to continue and expand their work, and we became the first Board for the Fools. I think we all sensed that the Fools were going to operate differently from other groups we'd been affiliated with; at least that was true for me. They were fair and they were fearless. They managed on no money to buy a building to house the organization. They were law abiding but didn't operate with the usual rules about who you saw, how often or for how long. It was fascinating to see how an organization like this was formed, not only formed but succeeded. Exciting as it was, I think we realized that you really had to make adjustments in your outlook to move ahead with it. They're still making those adjustments in the heads of everybody they meet.

In This Together

By Margot Campbell-Gross

I first met Kay Jorgensen in 1983 at De Benneville Pines, our Unitarian Universalist camp in the San Bernardino Mountains. Kay remembers we were roommates.

I remember Kay, in a white nightdress, dancing down through the pines to a worship service around the fire. What I saw was freedom, audacity, beauty.

Kay and I were students at Starr King School for the Ministry. In 1986 we were partners in a class called "Celebratory Meals" and I remember preparing with Kay was fun, creative, and joyful.

About ten years later, as I stood on the steps in front of the Unitarian Universalist church in San Francisco greeting people, a familiar voice said "Margot" and there stood Kay. After a ministry in Minnesota, Kay had come down to San Francisco to care for her sister.

Kay joined the church and soon we were discussing her becoming our Affiliated Community Minister for Social Justice. Her call was to walk with those who lived in, and slept on, the streets of the Tenderloin. She dreamed of a ministry of presence, she would fund it with pennies she found on the streets and sidewalks—and based on our friendship, I trusted her vision.

Kay needed a place from which to go out into the streets, so we found a room at the church. Daily she would walk down into the Tenderloin, talking to people, listening, building relationships. Kay and I met weekly for a working lunch when she would tell me of her ministry, and how she was engaging members of the congregation.

One day she told me of meeting a Franciscan by the name of Carmen Barsody, and that they were creating a street ministry called Faithful Fools. Kay flourished in this ministry with Carmen, and they achieved many things including buying a building which became the Fools Court, a place of refuge, a place of beauty, a place of social justice and teaching, a place of meditation and prayer.

Kay continued to be very involved with the UU church, with the Social Justice committee, so the congregation felt it was part of this ministry in the Tenderloin too.

One of the accomplishments of this time was the creation of a free after-school program for children in the neighborhood, Up On Top, which has grown and flourishes today.

About fifteen years ago Kay was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. For many years this did not prevent her from accompanying those who needed her, being a source of inspiration to many as she deepened and widened her ministry of loving presence.

Kay lived with Carmen and Sam at the Fools Court in the Tenderloin. She loved the richness of community activities there, she loved the engagement of profound reflection, she loved the political work of justice, and she loved the quiet prayerfulness in which this ministry was held.

But the Parkinson's progressed, and Kay moved to the East Bay for the care she now needed.

Over the years I have visited Kay frequently, and have witnessed her struggles as the disease took over more of her possibilities. I have witnessed some of the dark and lonely places in which she sometimes found herself. But I have also been amazed by her capacity for appreciation: of sunshine on glossy leaves, of a bird singing, or listening to a poem by Rilke.

When I was with Kay last week, I asked how she'd been. Kay looked up at me; "I am well, very well," she said and smiled—almost a conspiratorial smile—we were in this secret together.

Kay and Margot on Hyde Street

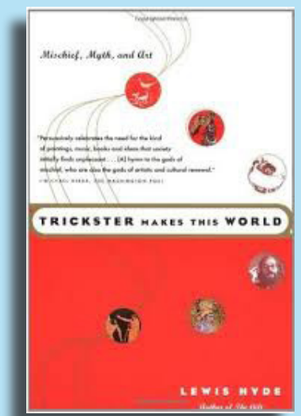
Clowns, Fools, and Tricksters

Oscard, the clown of Founding Fool Kay Jorgensen, trained at the Commedia Dell'Arte in Northern California. There, Oscard learned that the gentle art of falling down and getting up is one complete act.

When Carmen Met Oscard for the Very First Time

It was within the first weeks of 1998. Kay and I had made a plan to meet in the U.N. Plaza. When I arrived it was not Kay that I met, for she had summoned her clown, Oscard, to meet me. Oh my, I thought. Life is one big theatre so we best get to work. Right there in the United Nations Plaza, Oscard and I found a connection that tugs at my heart strings yet today.

The introduction to ***Trickster Makes this World*** by Lewis Hyde brings the role of the fool and the clown into sharp focus, for both can be tricksters (if only for a moment or two, here and there). Lewis Hyde writes, ***"In short, the trickster is a boundary-crosser. Every group has its edge, its sense of in and out, and trickster is always there, at the gates of the city and the gates of life, making sure there is commerce. He also attends the internal boundaries by which groups articulate their social life. We consistently distinguish – right and wrong, sacred and profane, clean and dirty, male and female, young and old, living and dead – and in every case trickster will cross the line and confuse the distinction. The best way to describe trickster is to say simply that the boundary is where he will be found—sometimes drawing the line, sometimes crossing it, sometimes erasing or moving it, but always there, the god of the threshold in all its forms."***



It's a Big Life Charlie Brown!!

By Carmen Barsody

I lie on the floor with my face in a pillow. Memories of people, of conversations and programs, one-liners we laughed at or guided our lives by come forth one by one and in bursts. I get up on my knees to type a few words or phrases as I try to catch them, and then lay down again. I am still, and I wonder what to say about our faithful and foolish life as we approach 20 years.

Kay used to say, "If we had made a five year or ten year plan we would never have what we have because what has come to be was not in our imagination." We did not know that poets and playwrights, meditators and artists, clowns and thinkers would walk through the door and enlarge our life and our minds. Some of us had homes and others didn't, and here we all were meeting one another draped in the fullness and awkwardness of our humanity. So many times at the end of the day or standing before a difficult situation one or the other of us would blurt out, IT'S A BIG LIFE, CHARLIE BROWN!!

True to the Trickster, the Fool, Kay and I felt most alive at the edges of society and considered it our call to stir things up, to challenge destructive actions and ways of thinking, and to laugh aloud at silliness. We were both committed to our own religious institutions and felt a great responsibility to clarify and strengthen their engagement in the world. We felt a deep obligation to help keep our personal and institutional words and deeds grounded and relevant in time and place. Kay's clown Oscard, and other clowns that showed up for work were magnificent at this job, truthtellers *par excellence*.

When I returned to the United States after living 7 years in Nicaragua, I noticed people gravitating to meditation cushions, adoration chapels, yoga studios and retreat centers. It called my attention because I was aware how churches were tactically used in Nicaragua to weaken the community building efforts that took hold during the early revolutionary years. Instead of working together for the basic rights and needs of one's neighborhood or village, like food and potable water, health and education, and basic human rights, people were being called into church buildings to sing and pray and put their focus on their personal salvation or individual survival.

It's not that we ourselves weren't sustained by our faith and practices for well-being, it's that we longed for them to be intimately connected to our communal work for a more just world. We longed for the well-being of all, where all may have life and have it to the full. We too valued meditation and times of retreat. It's not either/or, it's both/and. It was out of our working at this personal and social edge that the Street Retreats came to be considered our "opening act" as Faithful Fools. We both had a conviction that from the get-go we needed to take our religious beliefs and social values, as well as our assumptions, and place our feet on the streets and practice them and calibrate them in real time.

As I continue to lie still with my face in the pillow, what I feel most is gratitude. What I overwhelmingly value about our mission is that it invites us into a life-long practice of action and reflection, of action and reflection, and more action and reflection, alone and together. That is how I learn to be a better person, not a perfect person. That is how we become a community of people working together for personal and social change. Reza Leah Landman, my spiritual teacher and the one to whom I will be forever grateful for bringing Kay and me into the awareness of one another, would say that our inner and outer work was about learning to be human. It's about accepting our own humanness and the humanness of others, and the work is full time and life long.

And now we turn towards another 20 years and another 20 years after that. Whether or not Faithful Fools as an organization, (or, as Susan Knutson would say a living organism) exists, the mission lives on. I know that Kay joins me in being genuinely grateful for every moment and every person and clown who has been a part of these years, and for all who are here at this moment in time. Never have we walked this mission alone. And now as I get up from lying on the floor with my face in the pillow filled with infinite memories, I hear Keith Walker's love-infused voice say loud and clear what he said so many times after ringing the bell at the end of meditation, "Who loves ya baby?!"

The Penny Story

It was a Sunny day in Berkeley and Kay Jorgensen was in seminary. This particular day, she was walking down Shattuck Avenue to get herself some lunch when suddenly she felt something hit her upper arm. She stopped, turned, and saw a man standing at the bottom of the BART station steps. He waved and pointed, yelling up to her, "They're down there!" She looked down and, indeed, there were two pennies at her feet. She reached down to pick them up and thought, "Well, now…that ***is*** strange." She put them in her pocket and went on her way.

When Kay got to the Blue & Gold Grocery, she picked out a sandwich, and went back to the refrigerator section of the store to get something to drink. Just then a man walked up to her and said, "You wouldn't happen to have two pennies, would you?" He gestured to the drink in his hand, "If I only had just two more cents, I could get myself this drink." Kay realized, of course, that she did have two pennies. She pulled out those two pennies from her pocket, the ones that had showed up just moments before, right there at the top of the BART station stairs, and she handed them to the man. He bought his drink and left.

Watercolor of UUSF
Yielbonzie Johnson, 1996

Years later, during the early days of founding the Fools, Kay reflected on that moment of finding two pennies and moments later having them when she was asked for "just two more cents." And she understood that she had what was needed before it was asked of her. And all of us, too—we understand that we have what we need before it is asked of us.

How Did Faithful Fools Get Started?

In 1997, Kay's friend, Reza Leah Landman also happened to be Carmen's spiritual teacher. Kay lovingly described Reza as a Jewish, Sufi, Mystic Therapist. She also was a teller of Teaching Tales.

Reza said,
"Kay, I really think you need to meet Carmen."
&
Reza said,
"Carmen, I really think you need to meet Kay."

Before there was the Fools Court, Carmen and Kay called All Stars Donut Shop at the corner of Golden Gate and Hyde their "downtown office."

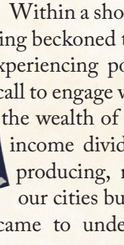
Kay's response to Reza Leah's invitation to meet Carmen was hesitation. She didn't really want to meet one more "nice" person with a romantic vision of working with homeless people. The romance usually didn't last. The harsh reality of the streets would sink in, and the injustice of it all became overwhelming and they'd leave. It had happened to Kay before and it was not how she wanted to use her time and energy.

But it was generally an unwise thing to ignore one of Reza Leah's recommendations. Her advice was most often exactly what you needed and usually came right when you most needed it.

So Kay called Carmen, and they met over a cup of coffee at B.B's Café on Franklin Street. Within a couple of hours, they both knew something unique was about to begin.

Carmen lived for 7 years in Nicaragua. She and her Franciscan community lived in the barrio, listening and responding together. They worked with women to overcome family violence, found ways to help bring better nutrition to children and pregnant mothers, practiced the art of natural medicine together with people in the community, and worked and waited for water and electricity to come to a part of the city that had not been planned but was settled by people who just needed a place to live.

She noticed over the years how people from the north would come with great sympathy for impoverished people in Latin America, but had little relationship to the growing poverty and homelessness in the U.S. In 1997 she took a sabbatical in the Bay Area to work with her spiritual teacher, Reza Leah Landman.



Within a short while she realized she was being beckoned to work directly with people experiencing poverty in the U.S. It was a call to engage with the disconnect between the wealth of the U.S. and the deepening income divide and homelessness it was producing, not only on the streets of our cities but in Nicaragua too. Carmen soon came to understand that her sabbatical would become a permanent move to the Bay Area. The only question for her was "What's next?"

By design they walked each day from the UU Church to the Tenderloin and back again, opening a pathway between the two places—a path going both ways…

There is by intention also a path between Nica and the Tenderloin

Street Retreats: How did they Start?

As Kay and Carmen were walking the streets one morning they asked themselves, "What compels us to care that people are living on the streets?" After reflecting on this question, they recognized that they were compelled by their own individual relationships with people living in poverty, living without adequate housing and food, so they invited others to join them on the streets, engaging the Tenderloin as a place of reflection.

After that, Street Retreats simply became a way to invite others to walk together into the streets. They imagined a growing group of people who would move beyond fear, assumptions and judgments and begin to care in a way that they too would be compelled to respond to individual needs and work together for social change.

The 1st Street Retreat was on June 16, 1998

If we had made a five year or ten year plan we would never have what we have now, Because what has come to be was not in our imagination

About the Building And the Pennies

The purple building before it was purple, it was offices for TNDC and a copy shop.

AT the height of the dot.com boom of the 1990s, Carmen and Kay knew they wanted to create a home for themselves and Faithful Fools in the Tenderloin. While on a Street Retreat one Saturday, they said to one another, "Should we give intention to a place today?" They walked out of **All Stars Donuts** (their "downtown office") and stood on the corner. They put a finger in the air and asked which way they should go. They went left. At each corner they did the same until they found themselves in front of 234 Hyde Street, **United Copy Shop**. Ramesh Patel, the owner was inside. They knocked on the door and when he answered, they asked Ramesh, "Are you still wanting to sell the building?" (They had been there 9 months earlier with Eric Robertson seeking a space for the Tenderloin Reflection and Education Center.) When Ramesh said, "Yes," Kay and Carmen knew that ***this*** was the right moment and the right place. They called some friends and Fools together a few days later, and they sat in the space and asked one another, "What it would mean for the Fools to have a space?" They then invited people to walk the question from room to room. It was then that Joanne Klinnert called down the hall, urging us all to come and look. There in a back room pennies were scattered all around and a bottle of Champagne was sitting amongst them.

Quentin Olwell said in a voice full of certainty, "It isn't ***What if*** any longer. This is the place. Now the question is *how* do we move toward it?"

It's the Nature of a Fool To Not Be Taken Seriously

By Joanne Klinnert

A little less than 20 years ago, I walked through a street level door at 234 Hyde St. in San Francisco and proceeded to walk down the hallway to the right. At the end of the hallway I came into a room where a small mountain of pennies filled much of the floor. I shouted, "Here they are--the pennies!"

And thus it began what is now a 20 year presence in San Francisco's Tenderloin District "founded" by Kay Jorgensen, a Unitarian Universalist minister and Carmen Barsody, a Franciscan. They were introduced to each other by a mutual friend and have walked the streets of the neighborhood ever since.

Carmen and Kay recognized that they were Fools, i.e., someone that sees a different reality and walks a different path than the people by whom they are surrounded. So they began to sit in coffee shops and chat with other customers. There was no agenda other than being part of the human stream that occupied the streets and doorways, that found coffee and acceptance.

Joanne Klinnert & Seamus having a good laugh

Coffee shops are a temporary refuge. They are not a home. So now: "A place to live??" said the 2 pioneers. Kay had already had the experience of finding 2 pennies on the street as she headed to get lunch, and they soon were needed by a man who wanted to buy a soda and was short just 2 cents! The two began to follow as they were led, knowing pennies would show up.

But humans have organizational systems. It was 1999 and I was part of the Leadership of a Franciscan community of which Carmen was also a member and Kay was soon to become an Associate. This new ministry looked to the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls for recognition and financial support. Acknowledging and funding a new ministry half a continent away took some discernment on the part of the community in Little Falls.

In meetings it was said, "It won't work" to which I answered "It will."

"How do you know?" they asked.

"I know," I said. (I have been to the mountain of pennies!)

This knowing has sustained for 20 years. From the daily wandering the streets to inviting people to be wandering together to having a place (Fools Court), acceptance of one another and sharing life has characterized the first 20 years of Faithful Foolishness.

Joanne Klinnert chasing a piñata Managua, Nicaragua

Wow! That's a Lot of Pennies

By Anton Jungherr

My earliest connection with the Faithful Fools was in 1999 when I was working as the bookkeeper at the San Francisco Unitarian Universalist Society. I was wandering around the building to see what was going on when I came upon Rev. Kay Jorgensen. She was in a meeting talking about getting a sprinkler system installed. I thought, WOW, these Unitarian–Universalist ministers do everything!

A few months later my bookkeeping contract ended. I thought maybe the Faithful Fools could use a Business Manager. I talked to Kay. She said they had no money. Then she told me the "penny story" and that she and Carmen had just put a $500 down payment on the 234 Hyde Street building, for a purchase price of $650,000, which included a Copy Shop.

I thought to myself, "Wow, that will take a lot of pennies."

I said, "I will work as your Business Manager for $1 per year." She said, "We can pay you that."

She then told me to go get the rest of the pennies we needed to buy the Hyde Street building.

The rest is history. We solicited short-term loans for the down payment, tried to learn how to operate a copy shop, and subsequently refinanced the 9% mortgage to several mortgages at 1% - 2%.

Today the 234 Hyde Street Building has a value of $2,000,000 with two mortgages totaling $47,000.

Anton Jungherr with Daisy Xie. Anton retired from the Fools Board of Directors after 18 years serving as a mentor to us all. Daisy Xie has faithfully served on our Board for 14 years. She is our accountant and keeps us on track .

Rameesh Patel (left) agreed to sell the building and the copy shop for $650,000. A week later he was offered $100,000 more. He shook his head and said, "Money tempts, but my conscience is clear."

As They Say, It's All in a Name, And the Name Says It All – The Faithful Fools

By Diane Sherman

I met Carmen and Kay when they were just coming together 20 years ago, to form the Faithful Fools and to begin their ministry in the Tenderloin. Every time I sat with either of them, I felt inspired to listen more deeply to what is true, and how to be of service.

One of the most amazing memories I have of the inception of the Fools was….

With few dollars in their pockets, they set out to buy a building in the Tenderloin in San Francisco. A feat that seemed daunting to my mind. But they embodied the term Faithful – staying true to their vision – when many would have abandoned the mission.

Before becoming the Fools Court, 234 Hyde was a live/work space and a copy shop. Next door was the old 222 Club.

Diane Sherman

During those first few years, the Fools grew slowly and steadily, trusting that whatever they needed would be provided. Kay and Carmen's constant and steady commitment inspired me in more ways than they will ever know. Their steadfast ways within the Fools supported me to keep walking my own path as an artist and teacher and to focus on what it means to grow a heart of compassion.

I continue to ponder the name – the Faithful Fools – and it still inspires me to keep choosing faith, love and art as ways to make this world a better one.

The world is indeed a better place with the light of the Faithful Fools guiding a corner of it towards wholeness and compassion. Thank you, graceful souls, for all you do and for who you are.

A Feather Duster Benediction

By Jesse James Johnson

Living in the Tenderloin I am blessed with many strange and wondrous neighbors. Chief among them are the Fools on Hyde Street.

Although we've both been in the neighborhood for about 20 years, I've had my pursuits and they've had theirs and so we've taken our time getting acquainted.

For a long time I knew nothing about them. There were rumors in the air but nothing distinct. They ran a copy shop that I stepped into a couple of times. I would occasionally notice people emerging from some mysterious back room always smiling and looking beatific. I thought they were a cult of ex-hippy types living in a commune.

Later I thought they might even be mystics with a couple of genuine saints in the mix.

People complain about how crowded the intersection at Turk and Hyde has become. I don't remember it ever not being crowded and think it's probably much less so today. It was on one of those days when the streets were jammed with traffic and the sidewalks dense with all sorts of people I that saw Kay Jorgensen for the first time. She was in a wheelchair being pushed by a tall, regal person who for some reason I knew was rAmu. He was dressed in velvet, silk and satin like a Grand Vizier of the old Ottoman Empire or maybe Jimmy Hendrix. She was wearing a floppy felt hat, a red clown's nose and was waving a feather duster as she smiled and nodded greetings.

The crowd (and this was a pretty tough crowd) parted in near silence to let her pass. Some spoke her name in greeting. Others stepped forward extending their hands to be brushed as if in benediction. At Turk St. they took a left toward Leavenworth but as the crowd closed behind them I could still hear rAmu's deep voiced chanting above the sounds of traffic.

I thought what I had seen was rAmu pushing a saint through the streets like the religious processions common in Mexico. It was years later that I understood what it really was I was seeing. Kay once called me a great poet and then she explained that the Fool was herald to poets and would walk before them sweeping the streets as they passed by, reciting their words.

It was Marsha Campbell who first invited me to 234 Hyde.

Kay explained that the Fool was herald to poets and would walk before them sweeping the streets as they passed by, reciting their words.

I ran into Marsha one afternoon. She was putting together an anthology of poems for Faithful Fools. She invited me to a writing group there. I met her co-editors Ed Bowers and rAmu. I started attending the writing group on a more regular basis, but still didn't quite understand who the Fools were. I thought they were a bunch of poets with an absurdist bent who all lived in the building. I think I imagined it as an endless corridor of rooms magically extending into space. Back then they would set up a box and then stand in it while reading poetry to people passing by. I thought I would die of embarrassment if my friends saw me do this. The Fools were gracious when I declined to do so.

The Fools helped me return to the world. I had for some years been wandering in the wilderness of the drug underground. I was

uncertain about what kind of reception I would receive upon my return. I was invited to read at a reception for ***Living in the Land of the Dead***. The meeting room upstairs was packed. It had been awhile since I had read in public, and I was still summoning up the nerve to do so when Ed Bowers called me up. Too nervous to go to the front, I read from where I was standing. I sat down to more than just polite applause from the crowd. Kay embraced me and praised my poem before I ducked out. It was months before I returned.

When I did so it was because my family was visiting. One of my family's main concerns is my spiritual well–being. It's important to them that I attend church. After all these years they don't even care what church it is - any church will do.

Something was happening at the Fools. My family was here. I told them that Faithful Fools was a church. I don't remember what was being celebrated; it was sometime around the winter holidays. There was of course no ceremony but I implied to my family that there had been and we had missed it. But there was a reception. We went. I pretending that I was like a regular member of the "congregation." Thankfully, Carmen was gracious enough to treat me as if I was. She greeted my sister and niece warmly. They were charmed. Kay then came up and praised my poetry. I cringed out of earshot as she listened to my sister. She must have understood something because she handed them a brochure and invited them to a Bible study. To this day my sister will ask if I'm still attending church and send her best wishes.

Dancer by Charles Blackwell

The Purple Building on the Cover

The image of our purple building–the home of Faithful Fools–on the front cover was created by Tenderloin artist Tan Eakapong Sirinumas.

The image was made over many months using layers of clay, acrylic, and a laser to etch the surface.

Tan painstakingly applied layer after layer of clay followed by coats of paint. Only one color at a time could be applied and each had to dry before the next could be added.

Then Tan used a laser cutter to etch the surface, giving the image texture. Then another layer of color and more etching … and another until the final image appeared. The photos to the right show the slow and almost magical process of the purple building coming to life.

Tan has rendered his vision of many buildings of the Tenderloin and other landmarks of San Francisco.

We are so honored that he turned his careful eye to our building. In his hands and through his eye, we see our building anew and with love.

The process of making the painting and Sam Dennison's sheer joy when Tan presented it to us

Beauty All Around

Edward Tyler, Kaye Carlson, Andrea Jorgensen, Mark Ruybal, Nana Parks prepare a meal together

Andrea Jorgensen, a magnificent artist, made white and barren walls and gray cement steps in the Fools Court come alive with color. Andrea is not only an artist but also a chef and a manager and administrator and graphic designer and above all a faithful friend. Andrea first came through the purple door to manage the copy shop we had acquired with the building, but it wasn't long before her creativity, skills, and pure hard work became essential to the overall life of Faithful Fools. Many an Oscard's Feast, catering event and celebration, as well as websites, newsletters and brochures became marvels to behold under her artistic touch. Now Andrea uses her talent and energy in disaster management and safety for the City of San Francisco.

The Purple Door

Over the years I walked past
fearful, hesitant, judging
but always invited to
see, hear, relate, let go of fear.

The Purple Doors opened
and I walked through to
engage in creativity, acceptance,
intelligent talk,
to laugh, cry, hope
with anyone else who
walked through

The Purple Doors
now open to any street or town,
for now Sally and I sit in the park
and eat apple pie.

By Ade Kroll

The Purple Building on the Inside

By Keith Walker

I remember the attention paid to artists and creative people of all sorts. I remember being very impressed by how being an artist was honored and everyone sort of became artists just by breathing the atmosphere of the purple building. Writers started coming. We had poetry readings for a long time and we put together the first anthology. It was all a part of the piece where people would come to the Fools with an idea and were backed by Carmen and Kay. Ideas were honored. When someone wanted to read a poem or play a piano, they could do it here because it was in the atmosphere to do so.

The Fools honored your contribution. It went both ways…we were learning from Carmen and Kay and they were learning from us.

Every person who walked through the door brought contributions regardless of status. You were honored and encouraged. That's big when you're a lone wolf artist type like me, the ability to just be yourself. And then in turn you were able to put something back into the Fools, work and attitude both. That was the longest I had ever belonged to anything in my life. My whole life I had been an outsider.

Every 2nd Saturday, Popcorn and a Movie

Brian Darr around 2001

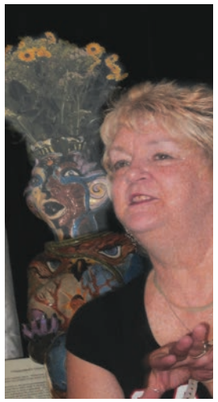
Without fail, every 2nd Saturday for the last 14 years, Brian Darr (left) has hosted the Fools Movie Night. He is not your ordinary projectionist, simply showing up to turn on the projector and lower the screen. He has a delightful and elegant cinematic knowledge.

Each month he selects a film to pair with a short. But it does not end there! No, Brian leads a thoughtful discussion after the film that brings out the subtleties and beauty of both the film and the audience.

Sanctuary

By George Wynn

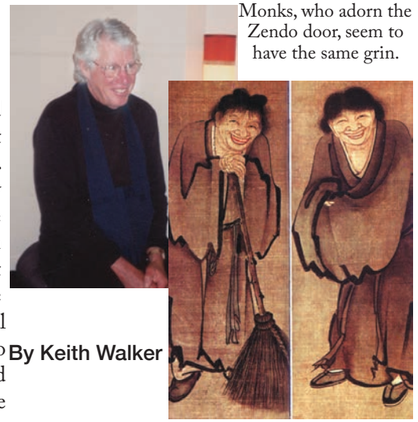
At Faithful Fools
The solo ceiling
Fan is as still
As the practitioners
In the meditation
Room below
It's a climb up to the
Hall which serves
As the neighborhood
Living Room with
The simple comforts
Of tea and coffee
And a smile and hug
From the minister
Of the Land of
Ten Thousand Lakes
For everyone and
An extra hug for
Folks wearing out the soles
Of their feet on mean streets.



Kathleen (Kat) Krieger arrived at Faithful Fools in the early 2000s and spent 3 years with us as she discovered herself, her voice, and her creativity. She served on our Board and for awhile she held performances of "The Leopard Society." A courageous spirit she was. She died in November, but she will always be with us.

Street Level Zendo

By Keith Walker



Keith and the Zen Monks, who adorn the Zendo door, seem to have the same grin.

I came in August of 2001. I had just heard of the Fools that summer so I made a Street Retreat. I was late and got there when they were almost ready to leave for the streets. The BART train had broken down and I had to take a bus. It was torture. I thought it must be something good, something special if it took that much energy just to get there. Since I was late, I missed the opening circle so going onto the streets was more of a spontaneous kind of thing. There was a guy there who was going to write an article and he asked me, "Are you afraid?"

That's how I got started. I came back within a week or so, and Kay and Carmen and I talked a long time. I had been working very close to here so I just stopped working and became a Fool. In the early stages, I did a lot of work around the building and then began walking with people. It was really good for me to share people's lives and the stuff they had to go through.

After about four or five months I began thinking I needed to get some meditation in. I have a Zen habit. I was getting so involved and I really needed some Zendo time, so I asked Kay and Carmen if there would be a corner where I could put my cushion. You have to be a little careful when you ask for something when you are around the Fools because you are going to get more than you need. Before I knew it, I had a room downstairs off the entryway and people to come and sit with me. Kay and Carmen joined me so we added cushions. Then more people came so we added even more cushions and opened up the door to the adjoining office so everyone would have a place to sit.

Questions

By Hy Carrel

In early 2014, Alex Darr and Sam Dennison began inviting me to the Fools. I sensed a wisdom at Fools Court that came from spaces in which mistakes were welcome. My growth can be measured more by the questions with which I struggled rather than by answers.

2014

Has my perspective been shaped and my empathy been impaired by unconscious privilege?

2015

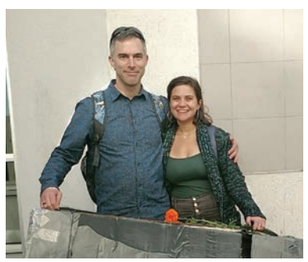
Can I listen to someone's complaints without trying to solve their problems?

2016

Can I trust in a person's capacity to heal themselves?

2017

Are there times when my only appropriate action is to silently witness?



Hy Carrel, a Fool with questions, and Nicole Fusco, Mercy Volunteer, joining a Coalition on Homelessness Dia de los Muertos

I am grateful for the companionship of Fools as I walk with these questions and discover for myself that my answer is yes.

Come As You Are . . . In Whatever Guise

By Martha Boesing

So here I was about 15 years ago having moved from my home community and theater world of Minneapolis, wandering around, when I decided to see my old friend, fellow theater artist and housemate Kay Jorgensen and see what she was up to. I found her in her new purple homestead in the heart of the Tenderloin, in a place she and Carmen had named the Faithful Fools. What a treat! Because art was such an important part of the Fools' work, she insisted that I come work at the Fools Court… "Write us a play, or lead some workshops," she said. So I said ok, and after going on a retreat with the Fools myself, I set out to write a play about that experience. When I was looking for a container, Kay said: base it on the Oxherding poems of Zen Buddhism — a teaching I have long loved. So I did. And out came THE WITNESS, which I wrote in collaboration with Anna Brown Griswold, who performed the piece until she had to leave and was replaced by Rebecca Noon. We joyfully went about presenting this play about a young woman who is transformed by walking the streets with the Fools. We toured up and down the West Coast in the Fools' van. We went on to the Midwest and New England, kicking up our heels and having a wonderful time.

Meanwhile back at the ranch I was helping to create theater events for the Fools' annual celebration of Oscard's Feast, and teaching improv and playwriting (which I continue to do to this day). And I wrote another one-woman play for the Fools about growing old on the streets as a homeless person, called SONG OF THE MAGPIE. I still perform and tour this play for the Fools, mostly around the Bay Area.

To this day, even as the Fools grow and change, and I, too, find it more difficult as I age to get from my Oakland home to the Court for meetings and gatherings, I continue to respect, admire and deeply love the Fools — for their courage, their tenacity of vision, their playfulness, and perhaps most of all for their open door policy. As rAmu Aki once said: "Anyone is welcome to the circle - it's a Come-As-You-Are Party." And the home of the Fools is indeed a place for any and all of us to be accepted in whatever guise we are wearing on a given day.

Here is a short piece from SONG OF THE MAGPIE, spoken by the old woman, Sophie, who has made a home living on the streets. She talks about the hardships and the pain, but also about the advantages of living there.

Sophie:

Some folks say living in the streets is a way to get ready for the apocalypse. Might be right. We might be the only ones who survive. Us and the cockroaches.

We're nomads…we're the remnants of the old nomad cultures, who used to wander around the earth with their camels and their goats…It's not easy to be a nomad these days. You wander around the cities, looking for food…anything to ease the pain.

But there is this: living out here in the open, you slow down. You do. You slow down. You pay attention… to how things are, to how things are shifting all the time. And then sometimes when there's absolutely nothing left for you to hold onto, the veil between the visible world and the invisible world gets thinner and the heart breaks open….It's said that the heart has to be broken like the husk of an almond, for the sweet nutty fruit to come out…

The Path To & From Nicaragua

In October 1998, Kay and Carmen traveled together to Nicaragua. Carmen introduced Kay to the people and places that she had come to love during her years living and working there. Before long there was a Fools Court in the barrio and more Fools in the countryside. Over the years, many Fools have spent time there, sometimes for a week, sometimes for several months. Likewise Fools from Nicaragua have come to San Francisco, ensuring that the path between the two Fools Courts remains open, running both north and south.

In 1998 after hurricane Mitch, the roads were washed out so the only way to get to villages in the countryside was by horseback

Soy Bufona Fiel

By Mercedes González Martínez

This is my story as ***una bufona fiel***, aFaithful Fool in Managua, Nicaragua. I am Mercedes. I am the mother of three wonderful children, Fatima, 33, Luis, 31, and Karina, 27. I take geat pride in being a single mother and in my family.

I think I am and always will be a Faithful Fool because of my thoughts, attitudes and my way of living life. In 1993 I met a person who showed me a path and a way of walking that brings together family and community. She taught me that there is no boundary that prohibits us from having a relationship of sister and brother with others. That Fool is Carmen Barsody.

Mercedes Gonzales and Norma Taylor visiting the Fools Court in San Francisco

With Faithful Fools I have had the opportunity to meet many people in my community, in my country and many others in North America, among them Kay Jorgensen, Damien Weldon, Alex Darr, and all who have come to share with our community. I give thanks to God for bringing us together.

The greatest lessons with Faithful Fools has been to share my life with my community, to share my time, my home, my achievements, and my many difficulties. My walk through life is made easier in community. I support my friends and they support me.

To this day I continue to weave this web of friendship—brotherhood and sisterhood—and learning together. I am grateful to be a Faithful Fool, a woman free to think and with a joy-filled attitude toward life.

Somos Bufones Tambien

By Heidi Meza & Max Jerez

Twenty four years ago when we arrived in our new community, a small settlement in Managua, Nicaragua, we always thought that we were here for some reason or trusted that God knew why we were here. From the moment of our arrival, we were fortunate to have the Franciscan Sisters of Little Falls as neighbors. At that time we became part of some community groups the Sisters coordinated such as a women's reflection group and a group of "Men Against Violence." It was out of these groups that our motivation and interest to work for the common good of our community grew. Since that time that we have not only been observers, but also participants in the transformation of our small community through various initiatives and projects.

As teachers we have valued the role of education in the development process of our community. That is what led us to coordinate a musical education program as well as support pre-school and primary education. In 1999 we founded a small school named San Francisco de Asís that currently serves more than 200 children each year. For 18 years it has been the only school in our neighborhood and surrounding communities that has given girls and boys an access to education.

Heidi Meza at her desk in Colégio San Francisco de Asís in the barrio

Heidi (center) with her son and husband—both named Max—at El Corte de Bufones (Fools Court) in Managua, Nicaragua

When we met the Faithful Fools we very much identified with their work and the values expressed in their mission statement. Being a part of Faithful Fools has given us an opportunity to share our motivations, work and community experiences with a global community that seeks to make positive changes in the social contexts in which each one lives and works.

Finally, the value and scope of the support we have received from the Faithful Fools community is undeniable. It has been very important in terms of experiences and resources to sustain our day-to-day work. For this reason we are grateful for a community with which we can continue to share our achievements and difficulties, but above all to work hand in hand for the fulfillment of our commitment to our fellow human beings.

Discovering My Clown

By Meg Whitaker-Greene

In the beginning, I was a member of the founding Fools' Board which we called "Fools of the Round Table." This delighted me. I have never before been in meetings of a Board where laughter was woven into the agenda!

Kay had a clown, Carmen had a clown, Alex had a clown. But I had never imagined that I, too, had a clown.

A Fool who might get the ear of the King! A twist on telling Truth to Power!

Early on we made a Fools trip to Nicaragua. We stayed with "mamas" and "papas" in homes that welcomed us. We were told by Carmen to be careful what we packed as we might have more in our suitcase than our family would have in its house. People waited to eat until a fork and spoon was free and washed. We learned to know one another on a living–together basis despite linguistics.

On our first trip, we walked the question "What is poor?" Relationships in the barrio had a depth of caring that seemed to be wealth.

We traveled to the mountains of San Diego where people farmed. I would dance or draw in the dirt to communicate when a translator was not present. My Spanish was pitiful.

After three days, we met at the bus stop for the return trip to Managua. As the gathered community waited with us, I asked for a "bano." (My Spanish was so bad that I couldn't pronounce or even imagine an ñ to save my life!)

Entonces speaks truth to power . . . via cellphone

One woman pointed to the outhouse in her back yard. I went into the latrine. Inside in the darkness, I realized that I had a clown nose in my pocket! When I came out, I had on the clown nose and a plastic bag over my hair with a feather sticking out. I launched into my terrible Spanish saying, "Qui est mi Espagnole?" I looked in Francisco's hat, Maria's shoe, Dolores's sleeve, Mario's wooden toy box. I looked and looked. My Espagnole was no where to be found! People were doubled over with laughter. Kay embraced me with joy as she announced, "You have found your clown!" I was ecstatic. The name of my clown is "Entonces" which means "and so on" in Spanish because I first heard this word as "Antoine Says." I wondered out loud, "Who is this Antoine who is always saying things?"

The Faithful Fools encourage people to find their insights and talents. Joy in the serendipity of humor keeps spirits up in the midst of what looks like poverty, yet can foster riches: Knowing one another is the wealth!

Felicity and Peace, among the first clowns to show up for work at the Fools, just happen to be best of friends with each other and with Melissa Fafarman and Andrea Dolin

The emergence of Queen Slow Duck. Kay Jorgensen was present with Susan Petro to welcome her.

Uncle Bob (left), a clown friend of Denis Paul with Daisy, the clown kin of Gwyneth Jones

Simple And Profound

By Judy Carle

Every once in a while you meet people who really live, breathe, and make decisions out of their deeply held values. Most have spent a lifetime walking into, being tested, and growing into those values. In these past 20 years, I have seen the Faithful Fools in this light. Simple beginnings have evolved into an organization faithful and foolish enough to establish deep roots in being present to those on the margins who cross their path. Carmen tells me that when I first met Kay and herself and they shared their hopes and dreams "to discover on the streets our common humanity," I responded with amazement, "It's so simple, it's profound." Through careful listening and centering, the Fools have developed a ministry of presence through a life of constant conversion and on-going learning.

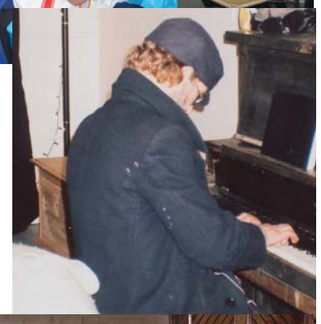
Because they respond from a deep place of "being," their "doing" is evolutionary, responsive, present, grounded, relevant, reflective, courageous, and yes… profound. They have accompanied people through life's struggles, and with those who have had distant or no family, even in their final passing. I recently learned that their meditation room now holds 7 small boxes of ashes of persons with whom they have "walked through the valley of death." With great reverence and appreciation, they designate a sacred and honored place and recognize each person's incredible worth.

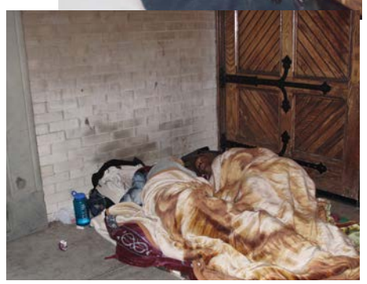
In any interaction I have with the Fools—whether it be with Carmen, Kay, Sam, Mary, the Fools board, a Street Retreat, or in a casual conversation, I witness their consistently respectful way of meeting people where they are. In their creative approach to the arts, education, advocacy, and accompaniment, they have established not only an Institute for Street Level Learning but a center of welcome thereby easing the barriers that separate people into "us" and "them." I continue to admire their foothold in the celebration which joins the divine and the human.

Person by Person

There are so many stories and so many people who have come through these purple doors. In the pictures below, there's Maria Brenny talking with Pagan George as Jay listens in. And Edward Tyler who knew the Fools early on. He's serving soup to Alex who had a strong connection to Jay. There's the story of the piano that Carl brought in out of the rain because he couldn't bear to see it get ruined. It's been enjoyed by many including Stone. He too has been with the Fools for a long time—here he is as a young man, a decade and a half ago. Stone and Kay met at the Unitarian Universalist Church, where Jay and T often slept at the doorsill. More than once the two of them made 7-day Street Retreatants feel welcome.

We are all connected. One person leads to the next.
Each relationship, each person, is part of who we are.





Golden Aura of the Heart

By Robert-Harry Rovin

I have offered the creative writing program "WRITE ON!!!" at the Fools since 2011. Through cultivating an atmosphere of acceptance it has provided a green house for those who need a place to write their truth and be appreciated for whatever degree of truth their potential creativity has sprouted.

The Fools have so deeply absorbed the teaching of the Christ—unconditional love for all and unlimited forgiveness—that they effortlessly walk the talk to provide a nurturing environment for all.

These truths of unconditional love and unlimited forgiveness have so deeply affected the Fools that their hearts and minds emanate the essential quality of merging gold. It is this quality of merging gold which melts the appearance of separation and allows the experience of oneness of all. It is this experience of oneness that provides an uplift from a new foundation of unlimited acceptance and forgiveness of all.

Here's What I Believe

By Julia Older Fankuchen

Here's what I believe: Somewhere along the way, our wanting to know the world must build so that we yearn for experience more than ease and for truth more than comfort. Our hope for growth and depth must compel us to venture into new landscapes and forbidding places even if we are frightened and the path is unclear.

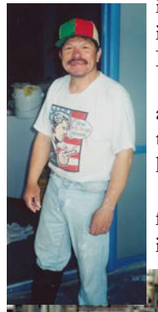
Happily, as I was wrestling with these ideas, I met Kay Jorgensen and Carmen Barsody and the Faithful Fools.

One day I went out into the streets with them for just 6 hours and I can tell you that it felt MUCH longer. I felt tired almost immediately, and quite uncertain. By mid morning, I had found a little park with a gathering of folks sitting around who seemed to make their home on the streets. I sat down on a bench just outside the group.

After awhile, a man came over to join me. "What are you doing here?" he asked in a pleasant way. I was surprised that I had not just blended in. How could it be so obvious that I was not from there before I said anything? I was embarrassed but I told the truth. "I'm here to learn about homelessness." I felt absurd in that moment. What could I know about what it is to be destitute and without a home in less than one day? The man looked at me and smiled. He said, "You will learn something."

He was right. I learned something.

Another year, I walked out from the Fools Court and turned down an unfamiliar street. Very soon I passed a man, a tall African-American street person, which is an important part of the story as it occurred for me. As I passed him, I said, "Hi." He said "Hello" and then he spun around and said, "Are you from the South?" "Yes," I said, "North Carolina." He replied, wagging his finger at me, "The best barbecue in the world is Chatham's in Raleigh." "It is not!!" I yelped. "The best barbecue in the world is Bullock's in Durham." And we both laughed. It is always good to meet someone from home.



"Would you mind if I touched you?" he asked. "No," I said, somewhat surprised, without taking too much time to think. With that he kissed the top of my head and said, "Bless you."

And, that is how my day on the streets began. I fell in love. Or maybe, I remembered, again, that love is everywhere.

Nieves Moreno

What would we do without him? Nieves has been part of the Fools from almost the beginning. Over the years, he has become an "all around Fool." He does a little bit of everything all of the time, but best of all he is with us almost everyday with his smile and his love. Here he is taking gift bags to people he knows on the street, and above you see a younger Nieves helping paint the Hat Factory.

By rAmu Aki

upon the streets we find expressions of profanity,
obsession, aggression, suffering, addiction,
abandonment, neglect, rage, pain,
incomprehension, loss, fear,
loneliness, mistake,
delusion - images to reflect every
social and personal disconnect as
well as every positive
potentiality

for the street is our commons
our every woman/every man
place to be
and whatever the state of heart
or mind or soul
we pass and pass it along through the village streets

full of sufferings and joys
virtues and vices of all that we are
all that any of us has to bring
all that we may hope to be

in the streets we find one
another and opportunities to
celebrate, heal & create community
in face of our common
humanity

Damien Weldon

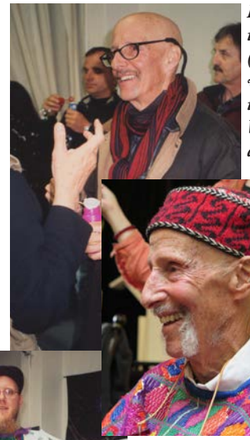
What a Birthday Party!!!! Damien Weldon (right) celebrated his 50th Birthday at the Fools in 2014. Sam Dennison was on hand to help blow out the many, many, many candles. Each candle a wish for Peace and Joy for all.

Enrolled in Street Level Learning

In the very beginning, Faithful Fools was incorporated as a charitable and educational institution. Over the years, many a Faithful Fool came to the Tenderloin through some form of educational enterprise. There have been internships and practica; classes—"Artist as Citizen" and "Women, Poverty, and Catholic Social Thought" to name just two; community interns like Thomas Atwood and chaplain interns like Jackie Hider; live-in interns who stayed for a few months or a few years. All of us are here to learn, to be sure, and here are some who have practiced learning with great intention.

Jackie Hider (Buddhist Chaplain) and William Hove-Darr at Año Nuevo State Park watching elephant seals.

Unitarian Universalist Interns gathering 2011. Toulouse, Denis Paul, Karen Day, Mary Ganz, Kathy Harrington with Carmen and Kay.



Richard Kamler, who taught "Artist as Citizen," (University of San Francisco) was the first professor to use the Fools Court as a classroom. We honor his influence as an artist-activist and mourn his passing on November 1, 2017. His definition of art is "Making things." Well, not only did he make art, but his art makes a difference. We will always value what he taught us.

Kay and Josh Mann (live-in intern 2010-11) play "Whose Nose Is This?" 7-Day Street Retreat 2011

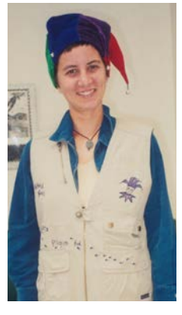
Katie Loncke, live-in intern. 7-Day Street Retreat 2009

Thom Longino (left), a ministerial intern and steadfast Fool--In 2003, 7-Day Street Retreatants were given cloth by friends, Fools, and family to carry as talismen and intentions. Tom, an accomplished textile artist, made his into a "Street Alb."

Come, come, whoever you are,
Wanderer, worshipper,
Lover of leaving,
Ours is no caravan of despair.
Come, yet again, come.

Barbara Meyers with her weaving based on the Unitarian Universalist Hymn & Rumi Poem "Come, Come, whoever you are." If you come by the Fools, you will find it welcoming you in the stairwell.

Laura Friedman Imayoshi, Intern 2002. On a Street Retreat, she began to say to herself, "What holds me separate? What keeps me separated? As I walk the streets, what still connects me?" These questions have since been our Street Retreat mantra, words we can say to bring us back to the experience of the streets.



How "The Institute for Street Level Learning" Got Its Name

In May 2004, The Starr King School for the Ministry awarded Kay Jorgensen an honary *Sacre Theologiae Doctor*. The award specifically mentioned these as her qualifications:

Friend of the homeless
Compassionate ally and advocate of society's most marginalized
Witness to the creative arts as ministry for all ages
Educator of the importance of spiritual practice
Steward of street level experiential learning

We named the educational work we do "The Institute for Street Level Learning" in order to continue the work of stewarding experiential learning.

A Fools Mission

By Thomas Atwood

Thomas Atwood (with the red nose), a community intern, celebrates the incorporation of Fools Mission with Mirna Flores, Eitan Fenson, Gene Thiers, David Vallerga, Kaye Bonney, Macrina Mota, and Silvia Ramirez (left to right).

I've often heard Carmen Barsody say that "Things Take Time." When we started Fools Mission on the San Francisco Peninsula, we sensed that things would be different for our nascent sister organization. We have little here to compare with the Tenderloin neighborhood. Poverty and homelessness are more invisible to the drive-by eye. A Silicon Valley professional might encounter someone who struggles with poverty in the guise of a financial transaction with a service worker, employee, or panhandler—but only rarely as someone to socialize with.

Nevertheless, Fools Mission has a lot in common with the Faithful Fools, beginning with the identity of the fool. We uphold the freedom to speak truth to power, and the power of art to shift attitudes and culture. Both organizations see accompaniment as a path to discernment and a sense of shared destiny. Both tap into the healing energies of community, where everyone engages in the work as equal partners who seek understanding, meaning, and empowerment together. Sharing circles weave together to create an egalitarian space for storytelling, honest reflection, and healing.

This is a short list of things I think I've learned from the Faithful Fools and it might be more delusional than historical, but of course, any misunderstandings are as much their responsibility as they are mine:

- **Ministry is relational.** For people of privilege accustomed to mass movements, online petitions, and advocacy campaigns, a community of Fools offers an opportunity to live, listen, and learn from human beings who are abstractions to most—the outcasts, the misfits, the wretched refuse. Instead of casting ourselves as providers who already know what to do, we accompany, celebrate, and listen to the "resplendent cracks through which the light shines."
- **Small is beautiful.** As Rosemary Bray McNatt says, "If we cannot bring justice into the small circle of our own individual lives, we cannot hope to bring justice to the world. And if we do not bring justice to the world, none of us is safe and none of us will survive." Direct accompaniment and widening circles of compassion will overcome assumptions, judgments, and prejudice in due course.
- **Humor isn't optional.** A clown nose or foolscap can be a healthy reminder that we're all basically the same underneath all our pretensions to unworthiness or superiority. Laughter opens windows of perception, centers us in the moment, and heals all wounds. We learn a lot from oppressed people about how to expand our emotional range—to laugh when it's happy, and cry when it's sad. Revel in the irony! Things are rarely what they appear to be.
- **Embrace a life of service.** We won't create social justice just by sitting at our computers, but sometimes the administrivia is important, too: the newsletter mailings, the thank you notes, setting the table. Sometimes showing up as a privileged member of society and being sufficiently polite is enough to get the job done. Think of it as spiritual practice—the consciousness you raise might be your own.
- **Trust the relationships.** Successful human relationships are not about fixing others— they're about being open to being transformed by the relationship yourself. If you feel judgment welling up inside, use regular reflection in community as a mirror of your own brokenness. Spread the word about how your work and play are making a difference, and watch how hearts break open and generosity wells up on its own. Networks of healthy human relationships are a resilient form of wealth, and you can accomplish a lot with the simple faith that you'll have what you need before it's asked of you.

Thanks to the influence of the Faithful Fools and five years of building trust together as Fools Mission, we sense the emergence of a collective living organism that's so much wiser and stronger than any individual. Our arts and accompaniment programs have become an oasis in the "business as usual" world of providers and clients: souls are feeling their worth; human beings are connecting with social services; and justice is being done. May we populate the landscape with more "fools with a mission" willing to live as though we belong to each other.

News From The Healing WELL

After two years in the purple building, growing their programs and becoming strong, The Healing WELL moved to 476 Eddy (just around the corner from us). Their purpose–built space is beautiful. Come by for a visit.

Kit Soloway, Anne Marie Eunice, Cheryl Shanks, Emily Janda, and Merle Furlong are ready to welcome you.

The Day the Fools Caught My Attention

By Jane Stallman

There are many things about the Faithful Fools that caught my attention. I co-led a multi-month community development process for Tenderloin Health for residents who were formerly incarcerated, marginally housed or homeless, and at risk or having Hep C, HIV/AIDS, and/or substance abuse. At the time I questioned to what degree our participatory planning methods would serve this population. After all we were going to have participants who were in harm reduction programs, had little sleep, perhaps couldn't read. Would our methods be appropriate?

Within the first two hours of our program, I saw how having an authentic voice in shaping a collective future was empowering and energizing. If someone couldn't read, another participant helped them. If someone fell asleep, it was OK. They needed to sleep.

What I first saw in the Faithful Fools was that being treated as a worthy human being is powerful and not typical of many programs that just provided services.

I also helped to introduce Sister Sheila Flynn and the women of Kopanang in South Africa to the Faithful Fools. I was inspired by how Sheila was embraced, and the work of the women was honored and celebrated, even to the extent of commissioning a work of art. With great enthusiasm Sr. Ade Kroll, OSF shared with Sr. Sheila the books by Brian Swimme on the Universe Story. And, oh my what a story was told in 35 brilliantly designed, embroidered and beaded panels telling the evolutionary story of the universe. Not only did it provide inspiration for those seeing it in the Bay Area and throughout the U.S., it also gave inspiration to the women who created it and was exhibited in a museum in Johannesburg, South Africa.

What I so value is that Faithful Fools look inward and look outward to transform lives.

The **Hat Factory** owes its name to **Kirsten Hove** (above). In the early days, she made hats and held open sewing sessions in that room. Then too Kirsten designed and organized the making of decor for Oscard's Feasts. When she needed a hand, she took the work out on the street and asked passersby for help. When Kirsten eventually started her own hat shop, we called that big downstairs room the Hat Factory as a reminder of Kirsten… an art space imbued with her creative energy and welcoming spirit.

Oscard's First Feast 2000

Edward Tyler greets Oscard (above).

Christie May (above) tells her story to Oscard's great delight, with Nicolette Toussaint. Oscard's Feast became an annual event to celebrate the connections among Fools wherever they come from and whoever they are.

Ade Kroll and the Universe Story Panels, 2002

Shepard Koninars (left) enjoys a moment with Robert-Harry Rovin at the Fools, as they do most Thursday afternoons just before WRITE ON!!! Robert-Harry began this writer's workshop in 2010, and it has been a Thursday afternoon staple ever since.

Fool's Request

By Sheppard B. Kominars

Fool, you have sprinted through my consciousness since our first encounter at Lear's side on that curtained stage we walked upon to perform the enactment of the ritual of filial ingratitude and violence that was waiting for me in the wings of the coming years. I have walked with you and talked with you both awake and sleeping as your jester's cap and bells tinkled and tintinabulated in my ears listening to the truth and lies of friends and strangers who peopled the journey dancing along with my performances – without applause. I have embraced you as an intimate friend embraces an aged lover because I see you now more clearly in the faded mirror where I find my own unique reflection. The play has reached Act Five, "Pray you, undo this button,"* then let us leave this stage.

* King Lear, Act V, Scene III, line 310

Still A Fool

By Karen Day

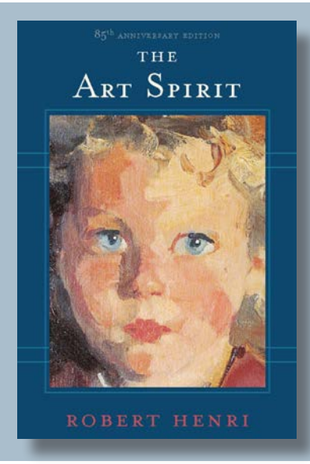
I'm sitting behind an unbroken window in my air-conditioned room after hurricane Irma, feeling lucky. But going through the storm makes me ask yet again, "What am I doing here?" Nineteen years ago when I started seminary I was asking similar questions, feeling uncertain of my place. A class called, "***At the Crossroads***" (of parish and community) beckoned to me, and Faithful Fools – Kay Jorgensen and Carmen Barsody – invited me into "not knowing" and into being present in that fertile meeting place. A Street Retreat was a total relief. I didn't need to have answers or be a leader or act ministerial. I could just be – walk, witness, reflect – pick up pennies and enter into the present.

Ever since then when I am unsure or overwhelmed, I return to foolish wisdom learned at the Street Retreat. First, slowing down, listening within and sensing the strand of connection that holds me to you. Then finding the crossroads one step at a time, feet on the ground, aware of my judgments, preconceptions and entanglements, yet free to be present, to bring presence. Discovering the abundant gifts: pennies, sandwiches, conversations, bathrooms, available in the moment they are needed. And discovering, if only for a moment, how to do without. Returning to a safe haven with the comfort of soup and acceptance of my experience. Returning to the task, the life, of being a Fool.

Karen Day (our very first intern) and her husband McCabe Coolidge recieving a ball of purple yarn.

Turk & Hyde Park then

Fools have always been great readers. A number of books have had deep influence on us over the years. For example, in the early days, rather than consult traditional organizational development texts, Kay and Carmen read *The Art Spirit* by Robert Henri. They viewed the early days of Faithful Fools as a creative act and so looked to the advice of an artist in order to keep the principles of creativity in the forefront of their work.



Since that class I have pastored a church that became a crossroad of interfaith and community engagement. And I have returned to the Fools to be renewed and reminded that, "Life erupts at every intersection," as Kay once said. I have started an organization (without really intending to) of neighbors growing and sharing food. It's named **Plenty!** to remind us of the abundance generated when gifts are shared. Now I am in St. Petersburg, FL, a community minister walking, witnessing, reflecting once again. Wondering where I am being led. Not knowing. Returning always to the Fools to be reminded, " … take your time, go slowly. Listen deep inside yourself. Simple things are holy."

You changed me, I am grateful
and, on my best days,
I am still a fool.

The Turk & Hyde Mini-Park is just across the street from the Fools. This tiny 650 sq foot park (as it was then and as it is now) is one of the few outdoor public spaces in the Tenderloin. The San Francisco Recreation and Parks Department has plans for renovating it. Many residents, including Kasey Asberry of the Demonstration Gardens, are intensely involved with finding ways to make it available to everyone. Kasey's work is the faithful advocacy for open green space. Perhaps her tireless work will give truth to the ad—WANT AND YOU SHALL RECEIVE—which long ago was painted on the wall above the park.

Faithful Fools Mission Statement

We are called to a ministry of presence that acknowledges each human's incredible worth.

Aware of our judgments, we seek to meet people where they are through 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 the people we encounter.

We Discover On The Streets Our Common Humanity
through which celebration, community, and healing occur.

The Tale of The Fisher King

This ancient myth was retold in the 1991 Film **The Fisher King**. *Starring Robin Williams, this movie became a Fools favorite with its many moments of wisdom and insight. This telling of* **The Fisher King** *focuses on the relationship of the characters.*
We often ask ourselves,
"Who am I today? The king, the fool, or the fire?"

The tale begins with the king as a boy having to spend the night alone in the forest to prove his courage so he can become king. While he was spending the night alone, he was visited by a sacred vision. In the fire appeared the Holy Grail, a symbol of God's divine grace. A voice said to the boy, "You shall be keeper of the Grail so it may heal the hearts of all people." But the boy was blinded by greater visions of a life filled with power, glory, and beauty. In this state of radical amazement, he felt for a brief moment not like a boy, but invincible, like God. So he reached into the fire to take the Grail. And the Grail vanished leaving him with his hand in the fire to be terribly wounded.

As this boy grew older, his wound grew deeper until one day his life lost all reason. He had no faith in any human, not even himself. He couldn't love or feel loved. He was sick with experience. He began to die.

One day a fool wandered into the castle and found the king alone. And being a fool, he was simple minded. He didn't see a king; he only saw a man alone and in pain. He asked the king, "What ails you friend?" The king replied, "I'm thirsty. I need some water to cool my throat." So the fool took a cup from beside his bed and filled it with water and handed it to the king. As the king began to drink. he realized his wound was healed. He looked at his hands and there was the Holy Grail—that which he sought all of his life.

He turned to the fool and said with amazement, "How could you find that which my brightest and bravest could not?" The fool replied, "I don't know. I only knew that you were thirsty."

The Guest House

Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.

The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.