



# kolbetimes

Faith, Arts & Justice



## Tom Jackson

An Exclusive Kolbe Times Interview with The Big Guy

Photo Courtesy Tomali Pictures Ltd

Tom Jackson has been an actor, singer, producer and activist for over 40 years, well known for his dedication to helping the less fortunate. He was born on the One Arrow Reserve in Saskatchewan to an English father and Cree mother, and was raised largely in Winnipeg. With his distinctive bass baritone voice and accomplished guitar-playing, Tom has recorded 16 albums. His latest release, "Ballads Not Bullets", is in support of the Canadian Red Cross. Tom annually takes to the road with The Huron Carole Benefit Concert Series, this year marking 27 years of cross Canada travel that has raised millions

of dollars for food banks and other charitable organizations.

Tom is also recognizable for his TV role as Billy Twofathers in PBS's *Shining Time Station*, and his guest roles on *Star Trek: The Next Generation* and *Law & Order* – but it's his six years starring in CBC TV's *North of Sixty* that still draws emails and many hugs from longtime fans. A long list of awards include the Queen's Jubilee Medals in 2002 and 2012, Juno and Gemini Humanitarian Awards, and the Governor General's Lifetime Artistic Achievement Award in 2014. He has been

awarded nine honorary university degrees, and was invested as an Officer of the Order of Canada in 2000. Tom served as Chancellor of Trent University from 2009 to 2013.

**Kolbe Times:** You grew up with nurturing parents in a home infused with love that was expressed not only in words but, as you have said a number of times, went beyond words and was defined by action. Can you talk about how that shaped your own character?

**Tom Jackson:** Growing up, my parents were like gods to me. My dad was quiet and strong, a man of peace. Mom was very outgoing, very giving, and sensitive to the world around her. Certain things that my sister and I learned from our parents became indelibly written on our character. One thing was seeing challenges and difficulties in life as stepping-stones.

My family tended to be more pro-active than most. And so, from watching how my parents lived their lives,

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A Romanian student who welcomes Syrian migrants into his home; two Danish friends who sail refugees safely to Sweden; a French woman who lets migrants charge their cellphones in her garage – these are a few of the stories of kindness in response to the chaos of the current unprecedented flow of people into Europe.

Ann Wilson wants us to consider kindness in our own response. She knows that when people of good will decide to take action, it can lead to a powerful synergy that changes the course of history. She knows because she's lived it.

### Who is my neighbour? By Ann Wilson

Wilson is well acquainted with the immigrant experience, as an immigrant to Canada herself. Born in Panama, she has lived and worked in 11 different countries. Wilson was Executive Director of Calgary Catholic Immigration Society from the time of its beginnings in 1981 until 1993. She then served as a Canadian Citizenship Judge for five years, travelling throughout Western Canada in the course of her duties. Now president and owner of Wilson International Network: Immigration Corp., she is also a certified Spiritual Director and the proud mother of five children and 9 grandchildren.

Who is my neighbour?  
By Ann Wilson

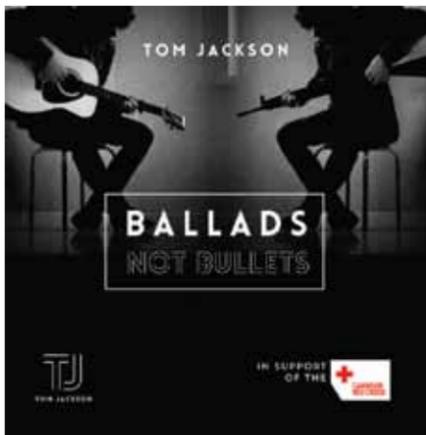
It is during the first few days of September 2015 that the world sees a photo of a small child, about three years old, lying face down on the shores of Turkey. Alan Kurdi drowned along with his mother and brother, due, in part, to fraudulent life jackets sold to people fleeing from horrific living conditions in Syria.

As I have learned in the past 17 years as an Immigration Consultant, especially doing Appeals in the Immigration Appeal Division, every person who applies to live

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Tom Jackson\_Photo Bill Borgwardt



Ballads not Bullets CD

it's helped me to never get stuck thinking about what I have to do tomorrow – I always think, just do it today. Why wait?

**Kolbe Times:** You spent some time in your teenage years and later in your adult life on the streets. What were some of the important things you learned during those times?

**Tom Jackson:** I have to say, when I was living on the streets as a teenager, it was by choice. It wasn't because of financial hardships of my family. I was 14 years old when we moved to Winnipeg, and I was distracted and attracted. I related strongly to all my friends and buddies – and many of them lived on the streets. So I was there, too. But it was a time of learning the ropes in life. One thing I learned is the social and economic reasons behind ghettos, and why they develop. You go places where there are other people like you, where you can give and receive love.

Another interesting thing – when I was living on the street, I was very fortunate to have the teachings of the “university of the pool hall”. I learned about honour; what it means to keep your word, and be part of a community that cares for each other. And all those things I learned have been very applicable as I moved on in my life. In fact, I know some people in the communities I

move in right now that could use a few lessons from that university.

At a certain point in my adult life when I was in my thirties and addicted to drugs, I found myself living in a hole in the ground. It's true. I was literally living in the crawl space under the house of the guy who dealt me drugs, in downtown Toronto. But I was the sole architect of my hole in the ground.

Addiction is like a fish hook, tugging at you forever. But it's not impossible to get out of that hole – and I learned two secrets that got me out of there. One is, you have to stop thinking about yourself. With the distraction of helping someone else who needs hope more than you do, your life will change... but only if you become active. I'm still an addict, but I'm addicted to something different now. It's free, it's a better high, and it lasts forever. We can all get affected by a good cause, but even greater is to cause an effect. The second secret is, when you're at the point when you think you can't get up, look for a star and have the courage to reach for it and grab it.

**Kolbe Times:** Your music and acting talents must bring you great personal joy, but your remarkable, ongoing track record of humanitarian work suggests you see a bigger purpose in all this. Can you talk a little about that?

**Tom Jackson:** I became a singer when I started focusing on singing for others, and not just for myself. If I have the kind of conviction necessary to convey my words and my thoughts, the audience will get it, too – and enjoy it as much as I do. Lately, it's been great. I haven't enjoyed playing and singing this much since I was sixteen years old. There was a period of time when that wasn't the case. But I see now that it is the imperfection in what I do that makes my music-making different. It sounds funny but it's true. It allows me to have faults that you can see, and if you can live with those faults, then I can live with

them. They allow me to allow you to be a human being. And if I can laugh and make you laugh, it's simply a byproduct of all that.

All the things I've gotten involved with are an extension of that lesson I learned about having the courage to reach for a star. It's a message that I want to keep sharing with people, and I know that someone else up there wrote the script. I also know that what energizes me, what gives me the oxygen I need, is being active and helping people any way I can.

For more information about Tom Jackson and the schedule of the upcoming Huron Carole tour, visit [www.tomjackson.ca](http://www.tomjackson.ca)

Follow him on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/tomjacksononline](http://www.facebook.com/tomjacksononline)

Check out his latest project at [www.balladsnotbullets.com](http://www.balladsnotbullets.com)

Listen to Tom's single "Blue Water" at [www.kolbetimes.com](http://www.kolbetimes.com)



## Kolbe Times Goes All Digital!

Due to rising costs of print production and distribution, this will be our last “print” issue of Kolbe Times. But wait – there's GOOD NEWS! We're moving to a monthly digital format.

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## Who is my neighbour? By Ann Wilson



Citizenship Judge Ann Wilson with Scout Troup, 1997\_Photo Courtesy Ann Wilson

Refugee children at CCIS Daycare, 1987\_Photo Courtesy Ann Wilson

in Canada has a unique story to tell. On the surface their story may seem simple, but a cursory look never reveals the depth and trauma of life experiences. The photo of little Alan Kurdi caused many to reflect deeply on this.

My own life experiences have had their share of trauma. I have been caught in the middle of two revolutions, one in former East Pakistan in 1971, and the second in Ethiopia from 1974 to 1977. Less than a month after our family arrived in Ethiopia, King Haile Selassie was deposed and imprisoned until his death in 1975. On the evening that the East Pakistan revolution began, I remember vividly what it felt like to be separated from my children, trapped in a different area of the city. Along with other foreigners, we had a driver to help us make our way to our children and our homes, but we stopped to pick up bleeding people in a ditch and transport them to a medical clinic. I remember that night, staying up listening to screams, rifle shots and tank fire. We lived in constant fear for the safety of our friends and ourselves. I remember going to the store to get food for my family, not wanting to look at the bodies of the dead lying in the sun.

By 1981 we were safely living in Canada, and I heard about a job opening at a new organization called Calgary Catholic Immigration Society (CCIS). No Canadian seemed to want the job, as the pay was low, but for me it was the opportunity of a lifetime. I was blessed to be able to work alongside Margaret Chisholm, one of the founders of CCIS. She was a remarkable person with a never-ending passion and compassion to assist refugees and immigrants coming to Canada. I would not be here today if it were not for people like Margaret and many others, who supported, respected, assisted and loved me at that time.

Margaret and I and our staff helped to resettle about 1000 refugees a month, though in the early 1980s the numbers were often higher than that. (And that

was just in Calgary, which makes the numbers being currently proposed by our government a joke.) Refugees poured into Calgary from many countries, including Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Poland, Romania, Bosnia, Kosovo, Central America, Iran and Ethiopia, to name a few. By 1993 we had 100 staff working at CCIS, most of them immigrants themselves. We based our programs on needs identified by our own staff members from their experiences as newcomers to Canada, and with input by the people we were serving. We also had excellent volunteers throughout the city, and many refugees upon arrival turned to help others flooding into Calgary. Our spirits and energy were high, fuelled by a love for the work we were doing. We were busy day

and night, helping in areas such as emergency shelter for destitute refugees, health needs, childcare, employment counselling, English classes, providing housing, food, clothing, furniture and household goods. Money came from a federal program for Government Supported Refugees, with matching dollars from the Catholic Diocese of Calgary and other donations. The Alberta government had a great program to support NGOs helping to settle refugees. I remember on weekends driving a little blue pickup truck all around the city, collecting donations and delivering them to the new arrivals. I even learned how to jump-start the truck!

It was music to my ears to receive an email last week from a woman asking how her Book Club could learn about sponsoring a family of Syrian refugees. That's how it starts – people reaching out and taking that first step. I recently read Mike Molloy's comments about his experience as a civil servant in 1979, tasked with the job of bringing 60,000 refugees to Canada after the Vietnam War. Private citizens sponsored more than half of them. To quote Molloy, "It's time to do the right thing again." I couldn't agree more. My Christian faith tells me to ask for God's grace to help me love my neighbour as myself. . . and to understand that, on this small blue planet of ours, we are all neighbours.

# Musings

from the Editor's Desk

Musings from the Editor's Desk  
By Laura Locke  
lauralocke@shaw.ca

We had great fun in our last issue of Kolbe Times exploring "The Power of Words". Then, in one of those "aha!" moments, we decided to delve into "Power Beyond Words" in this issue – and it has turned out to be a stretching, valuable and wonderful decision.

Like many folks in our western society, I am a 'word' person, in love with the dictionary. Reading has had a very formational role in my life from an early age – I almost consider some of my favourite authors as close, personal friends! But I've come to see that it is not so much in the acquiring of facts and information, but rather in the way we live our daily lives – taking emotional risks, travelling outside our comfort zones, wading through the ups and downs of relationships, experiencing both utter despair and utter joy – that growth and transformation happen. I guess that's why the Word became flesh.

God knew we needed to move beyond laws and words.

My husband and I recently heard a re-broadcast of an interview (on the excellent podcast "On Being") with the late Irish Catholic scholar and poet John O'Donahue. O'Donahue urged listeners to take time to discover and enjoy poetry, good fiction, theatre, beautiful or thought-provoking films, dance, music and visual arts. He pointed out that all these awaken our inner senses and remind us that there is a huge interiority in each of us worth exploring. It seems that, as long as humans have been around, we find ourselves turning to art to "express the inexpressible". I think many of us have also discovered that spending time in nature, even a brisk early morning walk in a neighbourhood park, can be an enriching medium to mull over ideas and turn them into new inner connections.

This issue is all about connections, mysteries and hidden truths that lie underneath the literal level of meaning. In our cover

interview with Canadian icon Tom Jackson, he reveals life lessons learned from childhood days on the One Arrow Reserve in Saskatchewan and also living on the streets in Winnipeg as a teenager. Former Canadian Citizenship Judge Ann Wilson shares her past experiences and her thoughts on the refugee crisis in Europe, in her moving essay "Who is my neighbor?" In other articles, we hear about learning kindness...designing spaces as "experience"...activism through making art...seeking the Divine stitch by stitch...loving the difficult...building true community with villagers on the other side of the world...not to mention our usual poetry, book and film reviews. We also reveal the stunning photos of the winners of our "Beyond Words Photo Contest".

Enjoy!



Laura Locke

## How Down's Syndrome Made Me Kind



Abi and Diana Pops



"How Down's Syndrome Made Me Kind"; sterling silver cuff bracelet with gemstone sprinkles



"Equanimity, or The Search for the Safest Place"; fine and sterling silver pendant with sapphire and smoky quartz



"...it feels like peace of mind"; sterling silver pendant with amethyst and diamond

*Diana Pops is an Artist/Jeweller currently living in Winnipeg, Manitoba with her husband, Micah. Through exhibits and her blog, Diana has gained popularity for her unique, story-telling jewelry and creative use of ancient metal smith techniques, drawing commissions from patrons throughout Europe, the U.S. and Canada. She is also a celebrated singer/songwriter who has released two albums, with several of her songs appearing on the records of Juno award-winner Steve Bell.*

How Down's Syndrome Made Me Kind  
By Diana Pops

I've finally put this story to metal and it's time to share it. It's a story about being, a story about kindness, and a story about being kind.

I come from a big family. I'm the second oldest of eight kids. Abi is the youngest.

Abi is 14 and really loves the idea of being in a band. She's decided that she's moving to B.C. when she's 30. She is REALLY big on birthdays and all parties in general. Every present is the best present she's ever gotten. She sings loudly (and very off-key) on the swing set in my parents back yard...every day. She's always looking for a new best friend to add to her collection of best friends. She loves Alvin and the Chipmunks (much to my parents' dismay).

She's a pretty awesome person.

BUT...it has not always been easy.

Abi was born when I was 15. I dove into loving her with all my heart. But the world around us didn't understand how it shook our family. She had a heart defect from birth and kept losing weight, as her little heart took all her energy just to keep beating. I can't count the nights that I crept downstairs at four in the morning to see my mother weeping beside Abi's little stroller in the kitchen. Abi stayed in that stroller for almost two years, to accommodate the IV drip that was keeping her alive.

Pretty much right after her birth I began to lose my hair from the stress. I started wearing a bandana to school to hide the fact that every morning in the shower handfuls of hair were falling out. Not long after Abi was born I was "pulled aside" at my strict private school, and told that I had to take off the bandana, since hats or head coverings weren't allowed. I was too ashamed to tell the male teacher that I was wearing it because I'd lost almost all my hair. I went to the girl's bathroom, removed the bandana and looked at my patchy scalp in the mirror. I started shaking, and promptly peed my pants.

That night I went home, walked past the permanent fixture of my mum and the stroller/IV, went up to my bedroom and cried. I was so angry with that teacher, and at the rule-bound legalism at my school. I felt abandoned by my community. But there was a moment that night when I decided that retaliation or rebellion would be useless. Instead, I decided to believe in kindness. In kindness to the ends of the earth.

Something shifted in me that night. We cannot choose what or who might affect us in a negative way, but we can choose how we respond.

This is how Abi taught me to be kind. By simply being alive, she led me into a situation that was pretty harsh, but which had a take-away lesson that was strong and true. And that lesson is "choose kindness". Choose kindness when it hurts and choose kindness when you are angry and choose kindness when you are full of joy. Let it temper you like the very finest steel. Folded and folded and folded again.

At two years old, Abi had the open-heart surgery she needed and soon got all chubby, bubbly and happy. I have a vivid memory of her 3rd birthday. My mum placed the cake in front of her and she SHRIEKED with joy and dug both hands into the cake, followed by her whole face from chin to forehead. I think maybe that moment was when I knew she would be sticking around.

Until someone with special needs shows up in your life, it's very hard to imagine what it will actually be like. There are lows that crush you, and there are the highest highs.

When Abi comes over and we eat ripple chips and watch movies... that is THE BEST DAY OF HER LIFE!! And so are all the other days when she feels included. When she feels necessary. When she is accepted for both her flaws and for all that she offers. And the lessons she offers are never-ending.

Here's a few: Live with joy. Be here, in the present moment. Show your love. Try, try, and try again. Choose kindness. Don't have me over if you don't have ripple chips and Sprite on hand.

Abi taught me to look deeper when I meet people. She took my sharp edges and rounded them off. She is a gift that keeps on giving.

So, here is the cuff bracelet that encapsulates this story. I made it to look like a birthday cake to celebrate the pure moments of contagious joy that come with having someone with Down's Syndrome in your life. I've titled it "How Down's Syndrome Made Me Kind" to connote the hard and wonderfully poignant lessons that come with the situation of living with someone with special needs. Both sides of the coin make up the experience. I wouldn't trade it for the world.

All jewelry on this page created by Diana Pops.

All photos by Stephanie Pops.

To see more of Diana's handcrafted art jewelry, visit [www.facebook.com/dianapopsjewelry](http://www.facebook.com/dianapopsjewelry).

Diana can be reached at [dianapopsjewelry@gmail.com](mailto:dianapopsjewelry@gmail.com) for commission information and inquiries.

The Joy of Spaces  
By Carmel Gatt

Human beings are three-dimensional creatures. We live in a three dimensional reality. We therefore have developed three-dimensional spaces to accommodate specific activities. Thus we have bedrooms for sleeping, dining rooms for dining, and so on. We group these spaces in a functional manner and connect them with corridors to go from one space to the other. These groupings form buildings. We group buildings together into towns and cities. The areas between buildings form plazas, roadways, parks, etc. How do these spaces affect us? Winston Churchill is quoted as saying, "We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us."

In 1984, Roger Ulrich performed a seminal study where it was concluded that the view through a window can influence recovery from surgery.<sup>1</sup> The study was carried out in a suburban Pennsylvania hospital between 1972 and 1981. Records of patients recovering from cholecystectomy surgery were examined to determine whether assignment to a room with a window view of a natural setting might have a restorative influence. Twenty-three surgical patients assigned to rooms with windows looking out on a natural scene had shorter post-operative hospital stays, received fewer negative evaluative comments in nurses' notes, and took fewer potent analgesics than 23 matched patients in similar rooms with windows facing a brick building wall.

Since that study, numerous other studies have been carried out by the Academy of Neurosciences for Architecture and the American Institute of Architects on the effects that building spaces have on the brain and on healing of the body (*See Healing Spaces: The Science of Place and Well-Being* by Esther M. Sternberg M.D., Belknap Press, 2010).

#### Efficiency

Efficiency is the ability to accomplish something with the least waste of time and effort. This concept now permeates much of our existence in most sectors of society, almost to the point of worship. Are we obliged to be efficient? Part of the reason for this overwhelming desire to be efficient is the development of machinery and technology. Davies Gilbert (1767-1839), President of the Royal Society of London in the late 1820s, called the work done by a steam engine its efficiency. In our present time, we continue to develop more fuel-efficient cars, high efficiency furnaces, energy-efficient buildings, and so on. In so doing, we take our direction from nature. In nature, efficiency is a do or die pursuit. It is for us humans, as well. Climate change is an "in your face" result of inefficiencies, where we have taken more than we need – and now we are paying for it.

In its broadest sense, to be efficient simply means to take the shortest path and the cheapest means toward the attainment of the desired goals. This applies to spaces as well. Spaces are being designed for maximum function, and least cost. As a result, many spaces and buildings are being designed as objects with no reference to what they are really for: the support of human activities. Many of our spaces between soulless buildings are much better suited for the motorcar than human interaction. Are we obliged to be efficient? Yes... but not all the time.

#### Design of spaces as experience

Building design has become a design of objects. The building itself has become the end, since it is much easier to control efficiency that way. However, there would



The Spanish Steps, Rome

be no art, music or architecture without humans to appreciate them. Design of buildings and spaces should therefore start and end with human beings. Although this sounds obvious, our built environment suggests otherwise. Human beings are made of body and spirit. In an effort to be efficient, spaces are designed to satisfy the body's needs (light, heat, shelter) and forget to satisfy the soul.

By designing experiences rather than objects, we can start to recapture the beauty of the built environment. By experiences, I mean environments that engage the spirit and not just the senses. One of the best examples of this is the set of stairs called the Spanish Steps in Rome. The stairs are built on a steep slope to connect the Church of the Trinità Dei Monti at the top to Piazza di Spagna at the bottom. The most efficient way today would be the engineering solution: a straight line between these two points, wide enough perhaps for five people abreast. But baroque architects Alessandro Specchi and Francesco De Sanctis created "an experience", not just an efficient way to go down – which is probably why people are so attracted to this space. Using these stairs, one is reminded of a dance. A few steps forward, stop at a landing, turn, start down the next flight of steps or ramp, and then the sequence repeats itself.

As one travels down these stairs, the view is continually changing. When there is a pause in motion at every landing, one gets a different view of Rome. This engages the person to enjoy the descent even more. Add to this the agreeable sound of the gurgling water fountain at the bottom, and the soul is nourished. Compare this to roads in modern cities, many of which were laid out on a grid to suit surveying instruments and engineering practices.

We need to recapture the art of designing joyful experiences in our spaces – experiences that engage both the body and the spirit.

*Born in Malta, Carmel Gatt is an award-winning architect and the Principal of Carmel Gatt Architect Ltd. He has a special interest in the connection between spirituality and architecture.*

Contact Carmel at [gattc@shaw.ca](mailto:gattc@shaw.ca)

1. Science. 1984 Apr 27; 224 (4647):420-1.



Carmel Gatt



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## Film Review: **The Drop Box**

Film Review: The Drop Box  
By Bill Locke

Release Date: March 3, 2015

A young, unwed mother gently lays her newborn baby, wrapped in blankets, in a cupboard-like box attached to a house in Seoul, South Korea. It is an ordinary house, a cold night, 2 a.m. She walks away into the night as a bell alerts Pastor Lee, who lives inside. He stays up most nights, waiting for the bell, and the first thing he does after taking the baby into his arms is to kneel and pray. What is he doing, manning this box every night, waiting for abandoned babies? Is he crazy? The authorities say he is encouraging young women in Seoul to abandon their illegitimate children and bypass the government adoption system.

But Pastor Lee is undeterred. He and his tiny wife take the babies to the hospital or an adoption agency, but they have also adopted a number of the babies themselves. At the time this documentary was filmed, they had 14 children in their home.

One of his adopted children, a 10 year old with fingers missing from birth, speaks into the camera:

"Before the baby box rings, it's sort of like heaven here. The children are all living together just having fun. But when the baby box rings, it changes from a place

where angels are walking around. The atmosphere of the house just changes. At that very moment, it becomes a war. A war in heaven."

What is Pastor Lee trying to accomplish? What effect is he having on his own family? What does he hope to change in society?

*The Drop Box* is a feature length documentary distributed by Focus on the Family. It chronicles the work of Jong-rak Lee, pastor of Jusarang (God's Love) Community Church, who overcomes multiple obstacles to take in orphans that no one else wants.

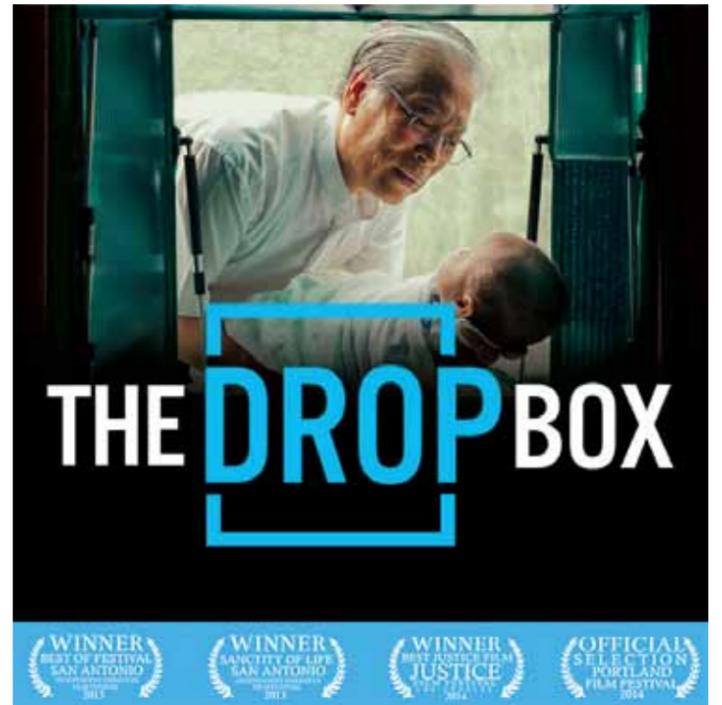
They are usually unnamed, sometimes born prematurely, their umbilical cords still attached to their tiny, blood-drenched bodies. Some have Down's Syndrome, others physical disfigurements. None are unloved. Pastor Lee, his wife, their parishioners and other volunteers pour out their lives with joy upon these little ones – including Eun-man, who was born severely disabled and deformed, and is the biological son of Pastor Lee and his wife.

The film is painful to watch at times. Pastor Lee and his volunteers struggle along, with apparently little plan but to open their hearts to the needy. Somewhat mysteriously, they remain full of joy. The children, including the most disabled, sometimes unable to talk, walk, see or

hear, instill a joy that is unseen in most families. The film is almost unbearably inspiring at times.

So rarely does a "Christian" film speak so powerfully, especially about the value of human life and our responsibility as a society to those who cannot care for themselves. This one speaks without using the language we associate with church. It speaks through radical lives, from the mouths of babes, and the images of the forgotten. When it does use Christian language, it speaks to the heart. Pastor Lee:

"Many parents ask, God, why did you give me such child? He is weak; he is different. Disabled children - God sent them to Earth for a purpose. They teach us. They are the educators of our society. They give us joy; they give us compassion. Now I have a purpose, to care for them."



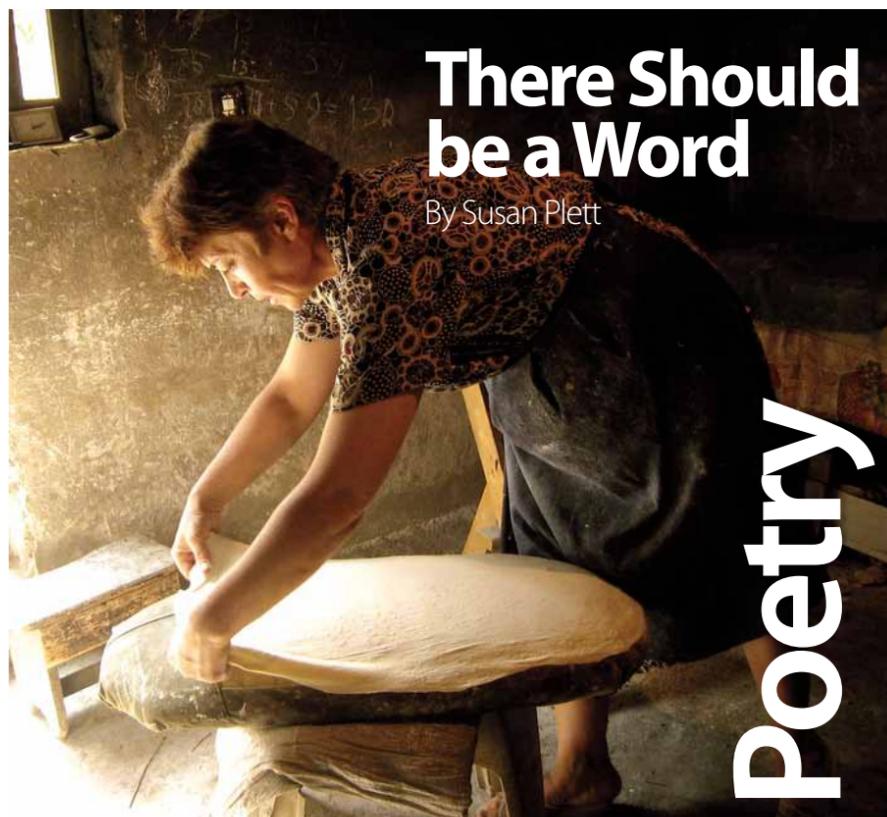
The Drop Box DVD Cover

*Bill Locke is a recovering documentary filmmaker, and currently President of Capacity Builders Inc., a consulting company serving community organizations.*

*The Drop Box can be seen on Netflix Canada. You can also rent it on iTunes or purchase it from Amazon. To watch a trailer, visit [www.kolbetimes.com](http://www.kolbetimes.com)*



Bill Locke



## There Should be a Word

By Susan Plett

for the way she stirs  
pours, measures  
the angle of her arm  
shadow of her hand  
at the stove

for the bend of her body  
as she moves  
steeped in sureness  
to retrieve something fragrant  
hearty, from the oven

if there was a word for that  
I could paint her as clearly  
as God sees her

whatever it is  
I want a place  
at her kitchen table

*Susan Plett lives in Calgary, Alberta and writes both poetry and prose. She recently added "mature student" to her job description. This poem was written for Margaret Plett, who was the finest mother-in-law a person could ever ask for.*

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# 7 artful Activism

building bridges through creativity



Artful Activism: building bridges through creativity  
By Laura Locke

For many of us, summer camp brings memories of new friends and out-of-the-ordinary experiences. Lesley Machon recently participated in a summer camp that brought her all that and much, much more.

Machon is a Junior High Humanities teacher at Calgary Jewish Academy. During the summer of 2014, she volunteered at a Children's International Summer Village (CISV). CISV was founded in 1950 and is a global organization dedicated to inspiring peace, through building inter-cultural friendships. It now has over 80 national associations around the world. Machon spent four weeks at a camp in Norway with other volunteers and 56 children from 12 different countries, living and learning together.

"It was amazing," says Machon, "and I wanted to bring some of the learning techniques and ideas from that experience back here. We have so many cultures living here in Calgary, but we don't interact nearly enough."

Machon began to dream about students from different schools and cultures working together on a project that would foster an understanding of social justice.

She started thinking about ways they could work separately and also together, and one day came up with the idea of using art as the medium.

At the time, Machon was a teacher at Almadina Language Charter Academy in Calgary, which is largely comprised of Muslim students. With the blessing of the school's administration, she put together a package of lesson plans about valuing diversity, promoting equality, and expressing your ideals through art. Machon then started contacting Humanities teachers in other schools.

Students from four schools became involved in the project, including Almadina Academy. The others were:

- The Calgary Board of Education's Langevin Science School
- Mother Earth's Children's Charter School, a First Nations school near Stony Plain, Alberta
- Christ the Redeemer Catholic School Division's Notre Dame Collegiate in High River, Alberta

"It wasn't easy at first," says Machon, "but once the project got started, they were all so excited! I discovered that there is a great willingness between cultures and different traditions to learn from each other. It's just a matter of reaching out to them and getting the ball rolling."

Machon's project grew. Holocaust survivors from Calgary's Jewish Community heard about the project and wanted to share their stories. Then bar and bat mitzvah students and their Rabbi from Temple B'nai Tikvah came on board. While volunteering at the Calgary Drop In Centre, Machon got to know a homeless artist who had emigrated from China. He contributed a painting to the project about the Chinese immigrant experience, which shows Prime Minister Stephen Harper offering a full apology to Chinese Canadians for the Head Tax. The artist also stressed how art can help people cope with mental health issues.

All the paintings from the project, and the stories behind them, were on display at Calgary's Glenbow Museum throughout the spring and summer of 2015. Machon also put together a travelling assembly, which brought together a Rabbi, a Blackfoot First Nations chief, an LGBTQ activist and a Muslim U.N. worker from Africa. They talked to students at the participating schools about their experiences, and how art can be a means to bring people together and nurture healing of past historical wrongs. As well, Alberta Health Services joined the project through its "Wellness Empowerment" program. Two counselors visited each school and engaged students in discussions about the importance of art as a tool for improving mental health and

bringing about healthy conversations between different groups of people.

Students and teachers were thrilled with how the project turned out. As one student put it, "This project allowed me to show the beauty of my culture through art, and to discover the beauty of other cultures."

Machon is already brainstorming about new projects and ideas. She believes strongly in fostering respect and compassion among students at a young age.

"I think it really does start with students," says Machon. "I want to give them opportunities to get to know people of different backgrounds first-hand. We're so bombarded by the media in ways that make us fear and mistrust that which is different. But this project allowed us all to see, through our discussions and sharing our art, that at the core we are all the same."

Visit [www.kolbetimes.com](http://www.kolbetimes.com) to see the paintings in detail, and to read the stories behind each one.

All photos by Jasmin Ngu

## Featured Artist Thomas Roach



"Fragments from the Sacred Grove" detail; Thomas Roach

Featured Artist: Thomas Roach, Stitched Textiles

Thomas Roach taught himself to sew at age six because he couldn't draw. Many years later he is still stitching, dyeing and using cloth as a medium to explore spiritual themes and community stories.

Currently he is working primarily with natural fibres and dyes, using simple stitched resists and deconstructed screen-printing techniques. He seeks to evoke the liminal spaces between this world and that of the Divine.

"I love to hand-stitch rows and rows of simple running stitches," says Roach. "An act of meditation in itself, each stitch becomes part of the larger prayer that is my work and my life."

Roach shares his experience of cloth through teaching, workshops and community art projects. He co-lead a community art project that created 26

indigo-dyed quilts permanently installed in the parish hall of Christ Church Anglican Cathedral, Vancouver. Roach also designs church vestments and consults with parishes about use of liturgical space. Commissions include Christ Church Cathedral, the Primate's World Relief and Development Fund, St. Paul's Cathedral in Regina, and St Stephen's, Calgary.

Roach is often asked about his creative process.

"Capturing spiritual elements or experiences in art is difficult at best," says Roach. "I have learned to begin somewhere, and somehow an image emerges stitch by stitch."

Roach holds a diploma in textile arts with distinction from Capilano College, and was featured in the exhibition "Boys with Needles" at the Textile Museum of Canada. Some of his recent works using natural dyes, printing and stitching were exhibited from Newfoundland to the Sunshine Coast during the summer of 2015.

This past August, Roach was in Calgary leading an interactive retreat weekend at the FCJ Christian Life Centre, entitled "Indigo and Thread: Spirituality in Your Hands."

*To see more of Thomas Roach's beautiful creations, find out about upcoming events, or to inquire about commissions or workshops, visit [www.thomasroach.ca](http://www.thomasroach.ca)*



Thomas Roach with his work "Interstellar Space" \_Photo Bayne Stanley

## Publication Information

Kolbe Times is a Christian media ministry that currently offers print and online content focused on faith, the arts and social justice initiatives. Published by Merry Dancer Media, it is a meeting place for artists, writers and social innovators to share their ideas. Our goal is to celebrate beauty and compassion, with a vision of spiritual renewal and unity in the Body of Christ.

St. Maximilian Kolbe (1894-1941) is the patron saint of journalists. His faith, courage and use of media to communicate God's love are the inspiration that shapes Kolbe Times.

**We will be moving to a fully digital, monthly format in January 2016. Sign up now to receive our Kolbe Times e-Magazine once a month in your email inbox... for free! Go to [www.kolbetimes.com](http://www.kolbetimes.com) to sign up – it's as easy as filling in your name and email address.**

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Villagers in Thurakapalem

The VIKAS India Housing Project:  
Linking Hands and Hearts  
By Bill Locke

It all started with an unassuming question over dinner.

A few years ago, as parishioners at St. Joseph's Catholic Church in Calgary, my wife and I enjoyed getting to know one of our Associate Priests, Fr. Joseph Nagothu. He had recently arrived in Canada from India. After serving for a year in our parish, he was transferred to St. Bonaventure Catholic Church, but before he left we took him out for dinner to one of our favourite local Indian restaurants. As we chatted over tea at the end of our meal, we asked him a question we had never asked before: What was it really like to live in India, in the small village where he grew up? His description of everyday life in his home village of Thurakapalem was more than an eye-opener.



Fr. Joseph Nagothu\_Photo Ray Factura

Fr. Joseph described, with surprising nonchalance, how multi-generational families lived in small, cramped huts made of mud. Thatched straw roofs needed constant repairs because of damage from monsoon rains and strong winds. Wild dogs, poisonous snakes and rats invaded the huts with frequent regularity. The lack of a safe source of clean water produced a myriad of health problems for the villagers. We also found out that most of the villagers, like Fr. Joseph's family, were faith-filled Catholics. With rapt attention, we sat and listened and asked questions, until the waiters signaled that it was time to close the restaurant.



A couple outside their home in Therakapalem

Fr. Joseph's stories stayed in our hearts and minds, even after he was transferred to St. Bonaventure. A seed had been planted, and it wasn't long before a small band of like-minded people from St. Joseph and St. Bonaventure parishes joined together to respond to the need for better housing in Thurakapalem.

In 2012, the housing initiative was approved by Bishop Henry, with the support of our Diocesan Mission Council. We decided to raise \$25,000 for a pilot project, building a safe and secure home for a needy family in the village identified by Fr. Joseph. The project was named the VIKAS India Housing Project. Vikas is the Sanskrit word for development or expansion, and it was with expanding spirits that we began reaching out to generous Calgarians.

After a wonderful awareness-raising evening at St. Bonaventure Church, which included Indian food, Indian music and a presentation by Fr. Joseph, we reached our goal and the pilot project was begun. Villagers helped the family to build a strong new home with concrete and iron walls, fresh water, electricity and sanitation. After construction was completed, we were privileged to take part in a Skype call with the family (who had to travel to a nearby town to access the internet), with Fr. Joseph translating their overwhelmed, heartfelt thanks. A few months later, Fr. Joseph travelled to his home village, and presided at a dedication



12 families in village to receive new homes

Mass in the family's new home. It was an incredible experience from start to finish.



Construction of foundation, Pilot Project

The pilot project was only the beginning. Fr. Joseph was transferred again within the Calgary Diocese, this time to serve at St. Rita's Church in Rockyford and St. Mary's in Beiseker. With members of St. Rita's, we were ready to build on our success in the pilot project and launch a bigger initiative. Our goal was to raise \$150,000 and build new homes for twelve families in the village. The Thurakapalem village community selected the families based on need. Thanks largely to the efforts of hard-working members at St. Rita's parish, a Gala Fundraiser with Silent Auction was held, which included a performance of Indian dancing. It was definitely an evening to remember.

Earlier this month, we were thrilled to share the news that, thanks to the support of many donors, foundations and other bighearted folks, we have reached a milestone: \$100,000 has been raised. This means we will soon begin disbursing funds to initiate the first phase of construction. Exciting news, indeed!

Under the supervision of the village Project Manager, the villagers will demolish the huts, mark off their properties, purchase materials, and lay foundations for 12 new homes. The money will be used to purchase materials and pay the engineer, supervisors and labourers, who greatly appreciate the employment opportunity.

Once this first phase has been accomplished, with photos and phone reports from the Project Manager, we will release further funding for the construction of the structures. Fr. Joseph will be visiting the village in January 2016 to check on the progress.

We still have \$50,000 to go to reach our final goal of \$150,000. The final phase will provide for the finishing of the 12 homes, including doors, windows, flooring and other details. We march on together, with hearts thankful to God for blessing this project. For members of three Calgary Diocese parishes who have joined together with villagers in India to better their community, it's been a life-expanding journey of hope, learning and love.

*Interested in joining us on this journey? For more information or to make a donation, contact Bill Locke at [billlocke@shaw.ca](mailto:billlocke@shaw.ca) or call 403-874-1814. Tax receipts will be issued by the Diocesan Mission Council.*

Jews, Crucifixions, and Loving the Difficult  
By Amanda Achtman

Recently I attended an event in Toronto themed, "Young Rabbis Speak: Where are your Jewish Boundaries?" The event involved a panel of four rabbis from different denominations addressing such ethical controversies as the use of technology on the Sabbath, same-sex attraction, and interfaith marriage. The event was promoted as an opportunity to explore questions such as "Who is in and who is out?" and "How do we relate to contemporary hot button issues?"

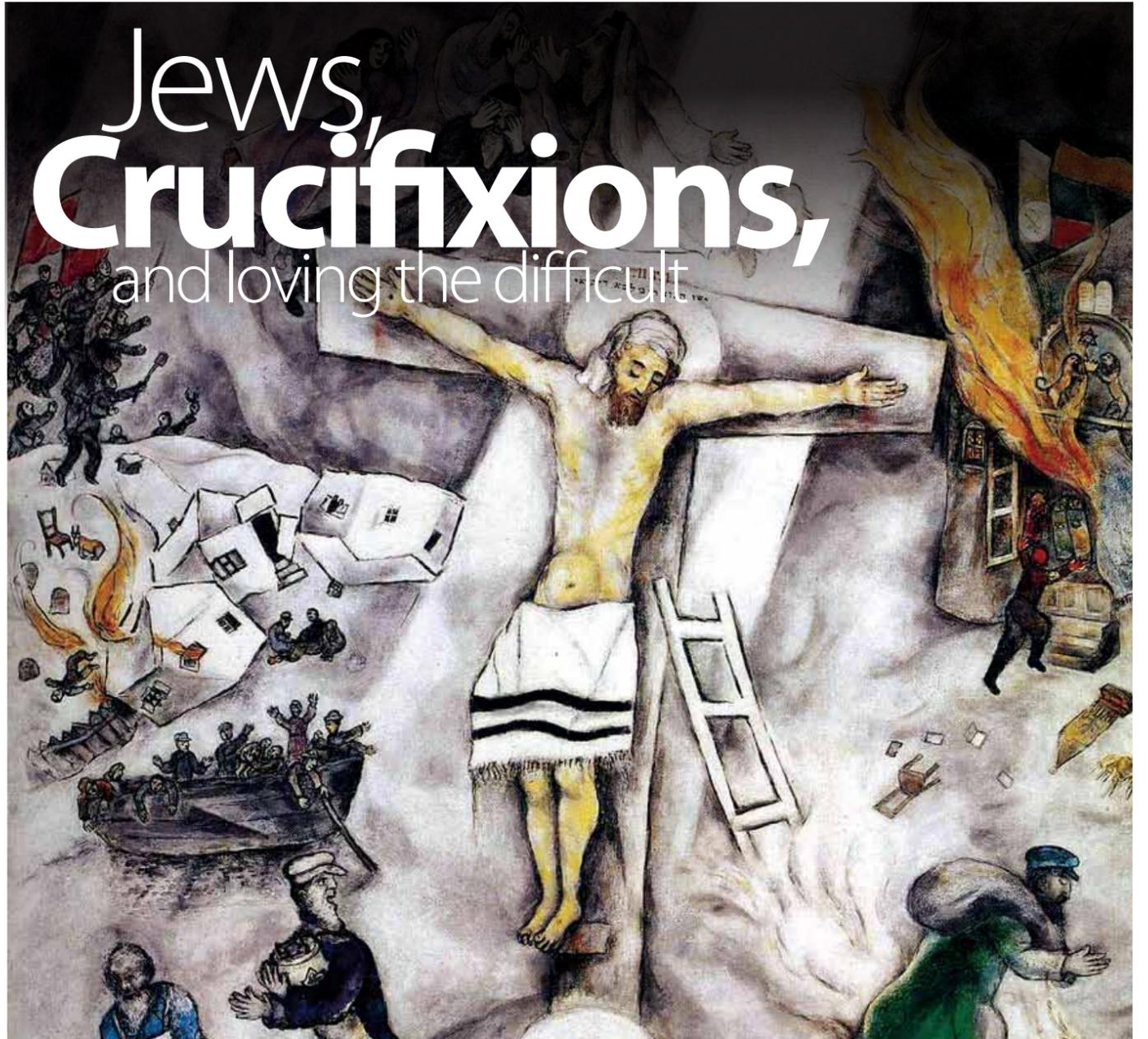
This event then led me to the Jewish literature section of a bookstore where one particular book attracted my attention, Chaim Potok's novel, *My Name is Asher Lev* (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1972). Asher comes from a Hasidic family. His father does important work for the Rebbe. Young Asher is supposedly devoted to studying the Torah. He measures time during his childhood "by the holidays and festivals, by the events in the lives of the people around me. Rosh Hashonoh, Yom Kippur, Succos, Simchas Torah, Hannukah, Purim..." But Asher is different from his family because his prodigious artistic talent often involves exploring a tradition foreign to and, in many cases, perceived as opposed to his Jewish faith. Asher experiences the tension between religious piety and artistic imagination. As he grows up, he continues to practice Jewish deeds and yet he also learns to sketch nudes and crucifixions, which is against the Torah and is dividing his family. His secular Jewish art teacher and mentor, Jacob Khan, insists that Asher must understand what a crucifixion is in art if he would like to become a great artist. "The crucifixion must be available to you as a form," insists Khan.

This beautiful, sorrowful, and anguish-filled paragraph expresses the crux of the drama:

"I painted swiftly in a strange nervous frenzy of energy. For all the pain you suffered, my mama. For all the torment of your past and future years, mama. For all the anguish this picture of pain will cause you. For the unspeakable mystery that brings good fathers and sons into the world and lets a mother watch them tear at each other's throats. For the Master of the Universe, whose suffering world I do not comprehend. For dreams of horror, for nights of waiting, for memories of death, for the love I have for you, for all the things I should remember but have forgotten, for all these I created this painting - an observant Jew working on a crucifixion because there was no aesthetic mold in his own religious tradition into which he could pour a painting of ultimate anguish and torment." (pg. 313)

Asher Lev is a fictional character but he has a historical counterpart, artist Marc Chagall. This summer, I finished reading Potok's novel just before visiting the Art Institute of Chicago. I was delighted to discover so many works of Chagall there. And to my surprise, I came upon Chagall's profound painting called *White Crucifixion*. I was in awe of this painting in which Jesus is on the cross in the midst of the Holocaust - the ashen colours, floating bodies, tumbling and flaming houses, a mother shielding her child, Jewish men fleeing and scrambling as they carry Torah scrolls, the inscription on the cross written in Hebrew.

Most amazing was that I was beholding artwork by Asher Lev's nonfiction alter ego. Marc Chagall was also a Jew raised in a Hasidic environment. Looking at Chagall's painting, I returned imaginatively to the memory of Asher's parents' response to seeing, unveiled to their total shock and surprise, Asher's two Brooklyn Crucifixion paintings at a New York art show. What must his parents have thought? What would it be like for them, confronted by such a painting at once idolatrous and yet, there, before them, in a real and meaningful way? As Asher said, he painted it because there was "no aesthetic mold in his own



White Crucifixion by Marc Chagall; Art Institute of Chicago

religious tradition" to depict the anguish Asher's art brought to his relationship with his parents, most especially with his father.

Many Jews find Potok's novels obnoxious. Pope Francis has reportedly said that Chagall's *White Crucifixion* is his favourite painting. What are we to make of this? Some would say that artists and philosophers should not be such troublemakers. It can certainly be a lonely and isolating life. And yet, besides their great works of art, there is something that makes characters such as Asher Lev and Marc Chagall true heroes: they practice courage by responding to the call to express their art even when doing so is at odds with convention, and misunderstood by others. As Asher says, "Some art is difficult because life is difficult." Chagall certainly affirms the difficulty of life and yet he also says, "In the arts, as in life, everything is possible provided it is based on love." What makes the lives of great artists true works of art is their ability to hold together love and difficulty, and a thousand other paradoxes.

*Amanda Achtman is a graduate student in the John Paul II Philosophical Studies program at the Catholic University of Lublin in Poland. She is a recipient of the Acton Institute's Calihan Academic Fellowship.*



Amanda Achtman

## Autumn by Rainer Maria Rilke

(translation by Robert Bly)

***The leaves are falling, falling as if from far up,  
as if orchards were dying high in space.  
Each leaf falls as if it were motioning "no."***

***And tonight the heavy earth is falling  
away from all other stars in the loneliness.***

***We're all falling. This hand here is falling.  
And look at the other one. It's in them all.***

***And yet there is Someone, with hands  
infinitely calm, holding up all this falling.***

# Poetry

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926)

# 11 Book Review

Book Review  
By Laura Locke

*Dialogues with Silence: Prayers and Drawings of Thomas Merton*  
Edited by Jonathan Montaldo  
Harper Collins, 2004

*The Gift of Being Yourself*  
By David G. Benner  
InterVarsity Press, 2004

I recently came into possession of two books that have been delightful and inspirational.

*Dialogues with Silence: Prayers and Drawings of Thomas Merton* was a gift from my husband. We are both longtime Merton fans, and are always excited to find something new written by or about him. This book is my first exposure to Merton's rarely seen, stark line drawings – mostly of his fellow monks, as well as other spiritual subjects such as Mary and Christ. The drawings provide a new glimpse into Merton's artful playfulness, and also his pleasure in seeing God in those around him. The accompanying prayers beautifully reflect Merton's yearning for a closer connection with the Father.

Editor Jonathan Montaldo is director of the Thomas Merton Centre at Bellarmine University in Louisville, Kentucky. He has done a stellar job of gathering together these prayers and drawings from Merton's poetry, journals, letters and books.

Here is one of Merton's many stirring prayers found in the book:

Cradle me, Holy Spirit, in your dark silver cloud  
And protect me against the heat of my own speech,

My own judgments, and my own vision.  
Ward off the sickness of consolation and desire,  
Of fear and grief that spring from desire.  
I will give you my will  
For you to cleanse and rinse of all this clay.

Whether you are a long-time Merton fan or would like an introduction, *Dialogues with Silence* is a small treasure, to be savoured slowly.

*The Gift of Being Yourself: The Sacred Call to Self Discovery* is a book that was chosen by a group of wonderful women in my life. For years, we have been getting together once a week for Bible study, book discussions and prayer. Reading this book together helped us to deepen our relationship with ourselves, with each other, and with God. It sparked many intimate and lively discussions about the false selves we hide behind, and how we can discover – and grow to love – our true identities as children of God. I found that as we thoughtfully took our time reading and discussing each chapter, it was as if we were unwrapping a gift – the gift of self-acceptance.

Benner writes with plenty of engaging stories... and a healthy dose of refreshing honesty. He encourages us to be equally honest, suggesting that it's easy to lie to ourselves when we speak of our relationship with God. "So often our cliché-ridden God-talk is seriously out of touch with our actual experience." Benner does more than just give a discourse on his ideas; he also suggests we put some of it into practice. Each chapter ends with a challenge, such as taking time to ask God to reveal to us "what makes us feel most vulnerable, and most like running for cover." The results of these exercises provided much fodder for discussion in my women's group.



David Benner is a well-known author, psychologist and professor of Psychology and Spirituality at Richmond Graduate University in Atlanta, Georgia. He has written or edited over 30 books. In *The Gift of Being Yourself*, he skillfully leads readers on a path for growth – growth in knowledge of God, and growth in being lovingly candid about one's own nature. It's a very helpful book for anyone interested in pursuing true, lasting transformation from within.

Laura Locke is editor of Kolbe Times.

# and the winner is...



Grand prize photo\_by Jasmin Ngu



Love, Forever\_runner up photo by Annamarie Bollman



KT Photo contest\_Winner jasmin Ngu with her prize

In our last issue of Kolbe Times, we put out a photo challenge – to come up with a photo that best expresses this issue's theme: "Power Beyond Words". Thanks to all who entered!

Grand prize winner was Jasmin Ngu, with her exquisite close-up of a flower. Congratulations, Jasmin!

Runner up was Annamarie Bollman, with her whimsical photo of a heart-shaped puddle that she titled "Love, Forever".

**Jasmin Ngu receiving her grand prize, a gift certificate for one night at the award-winning High Country Inn in Banff, Alberta. (We were so impressed with Jasmin's photography skills that we hired her to take photos for one of the stories in this issue. Check out Jasmin's photography accompanying "Artful Activism", on page 7!)**

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