Humble people, extraordinary changes

Stories in the news suddenly are personal

By Kate Rosemeyer
CVV Year 21 Volunteer

Sitting at the kitchen table listening to Carmen, a mantra began circling through my head: How have we arrived here? How have we come to live so deeply in our fear?

I wept with Carmen as I walked her story. I met her eyes and it didn’t matter that our languages didn’t match, because when you carry that much grief words don’t mean anything anyway. We held each other’s eyes and I tried to tell her I was sorry. I winced with each tragedy and atrocity she told us. I couldn’t put myself in her shoes. I couldn’t begin to understand the relentless suffering she endured in her life.

There came a moment, however, when I understood that Carmen and I shared one tiny, identical piece in both of our hearts—an ineffable love for individuals with disabilities.

She told us of her daughter, Isabelle: her spina bifida, her adoption, her long road of medical procedures and grim diagnoses given by doctors. And I saw the faces of all of those I love at Laradon.

My time spent at Laradon has been short, yet somehow I’ve been lucky enough to feel a lifetime’s worth of love there. I’ve come to understand how invaluable these individuals are, how uniquely and beautifully they teach me the most important things.

So when Carmen explained how Isabelle’s biological family didn’t want her because of her disability, I imagined my friends at Laradon feeling unwanted, and I could taste the sorrow Carmen held. When she finished her story, I felt my heart bending and breaking and molding, and I knew that I was different.

I knew Carmen’s would be the face I would see in every immigration story I heard. I knew I would be able to continue living in ignorance and idleness. And I suddenly felt this intense anger that I was learning a lesson from hearing her story.

How was it just that her life was strewn with unimaginable pain and mine with complete comfort and security? How was it fair that it took hearing her story for me to become invested in the battle of immigration reform?

I didn’t want it. I didn’t want any of it. I didn’t want to be changed at the expense of her agony.

And then Carmen began speaking again.

Her eyes brightened and a smile slowly came to her as she told us of how through everything, through the pain of growing up an orphan, through the separation of her family, through the constant fear of being deported, through the death of her beloved daughter, through it all, she held a single constant: her faith.

I saw her gentleness, her warmth, her graciousness, and it didn’t match up with her story. It didn’t make sense that she should be so good-natured. But Carmen showed me that the heart is stronger than anything. That Love is stronger than fear. And so I smiled, too.

Sitting at the kitchen table listening to Carmen, my mantra evolved: Change it. And for her, I will.

Kate Rosemeyer works at Laradon

The real face of poverty

The SNAPS, they just keep coming!

It’s that time of year again when CVV hosts its annual concert. And this year we will groove to the sounds of the Okee Dokee Brothers!
Questioning: A matter of heart

By Tommy Ryan
CVV Year 21 Volunteer

It’s 11:15 on a Saturday morning. I’m at a coffee shop and Indigo Girls is on the track. I’m in quite a good mood.

I don’t know why. Is it because the song ‘Closer to Fine’ makes me feel just that? Perhaps.

In any case, I presume this mood will be advantageous for following this newsletter’s theme — all will be well.

Ever since high school I’ve been interested in life’s deep questions. What is life? What is existence? What is God?

The questions were almost always about something other, about something external and separate from me; a God out there, an existence somewhere else other than here.

Back then the questions were in the background, something I only thought about sometimes. I was too preoccupied being a teenager to be fully engaged. That’s all changed.

What was once interest has turned to fascination and wonder and my exploration into this experience of being is no longer something I’m dabbling in — I’m absorbed in it, consumed by it.

This change of pace started to take shape about four years ago.

One of the reasons this happened was because I finally listened to and followed the directions of the mystics and saints and sages who inspire me. Within, within! Look within!, they said.

As my journey progressed with hours of meditation under my hat — and following the excellent instruction of my friend and teacher, and the wisdom teaching of others who’ve trekked this mysterious journey before — I shifted my investigation.

Rather than emphasize everything that’s appearing, I emphasized what everything was appearing to. I turned attention back to attention itself. I began inquiring into the essence of my subjective nature.

And this brings me to my quest today. What am I? Where am I? Where is the source of attention?

For me, it is crucial to see that these questions themselves are thought objects, appearing in the moment. Which demands the question ‘Who or what is it that sees, that knows, these questions?’

I am, of course. But what is this I am?

The answer, it is clear, can never be another thought. It is unthinkable.

Released from the futility of trying to grasp the answer in thinking, I rest in being, in feeling and in waiting. And my intellect moves in the quietude, humility and honesty of not knowing.

My heart is the light that now leads the way and my inquiry, as my friend and teacher puts it, is now a feeling inquiry.

I’m trying to feel my way back to the answer.

Maybe one day the living answer will flash before me in an instantaneous, spontaneous, unimaginable sort of way. But maybe not.

I don’t know. Either way, I will continue walking this Path of the Heart. And in doing so, have faith that, in time, all will turn out way better than simply well.

Tommy Ryan works at St. Francis Center

All will be well: A statement of faith

By Gianna Carleo
CVV Year 21 Volunteer

Few things in nature compare to the company of a winding river.

There is a special posture of presence, an invitation to prayer, when one enters a river space.

It is the paradox of rushing and calm — a simultaneous acceptance of great mystery paired with rooted contemplation.

Every now and then, winter rivers freeze over but still have frigid waters rushing underneath the surface, creating a unique sound of frozen knocking.

Spring waters take many different forms and, as summer comes, water raises the rivers higher, finds its way to the roots of our plants, is harsh at times and breathes coolness into the dry Colorado heat.

It is a lovely experience to witness the movement and change of water. Through these changes I find perpetual invitations to prayer in communion with all beings of transformation.

On Oct. 14, 2015, another gentleness became a part of my prayer and has continued to transform me since. It left a heavy brand on my heart.

Four simple words: All will be well.

It was the night of Kaela’s accident.

We had gathered for women’s night and quickly moved to hopeful prayer, then panic, as we rushed to the hospital after word of her accident.

Lynne remained calm as she took my car keys, knowing I should not drive us. She handed me her cell phone and said to find the playlist, Tune Your Heart.

Gianna Carleo, right, in the gardens with Judi, a participant at Earth Links.
Seeing the real face of poverty

By Alex Schelble
CVV Year 21 Volunteer

If you had asked me what the face of poverty looks like last August, images of people broken and hungry would have come to mind.

I would have thought of my community members who work at St. Francis Center and DenUM, a day shelter and food pantry, and their daily interactions with those experiencing homelessness. My service site, Laradon, would not have immediately conjured up images of poverty.

Laradon is comprised of an alternative school and adult day programming, serving people with developmental disabilities. I remember the volunteer who was placed here last year telling me this population experiences “a different kind of poverty.”

I nodded, believing I understood. I knew this population was looked down upon, and often financially poor. During training, we learned that having a developmental disability made one 55 percent more likely than the general population to be abused.

This abuse took different forms — emotional, physical, sexual and financially. It was hard to hear but I took a little solace in not yet knowing any personal accounts.

One day early in the year, I was assisting with adult transportation. Joanna, a client, walked out to be picked up by her bus driver. She lives independently, has a job in the community and is verbal. The driver walked right by her, not even acknowledging her presence and asked me who she was.

I wondered how it must feel to be seen as incapable of answering your own name, unable to speak for yourself. I notice moments like this almost every day, and it’s through these experiences that I’ve come to better understand this different kind of poverty. It is a poverty of people who are ignored, overlooked, and reduced to their labeled diagnosis —

> from previous page

“Play the song, All Will Be Well,” she said. Her voice filled the car, allowing me to find oxygen through my gasps. All will be well became my prayer as we made our way to the hospital. Tears rolled down my cheeks—water-staining streams of what would soon be unexpected transformation for all of us. An autumn rain came the day after Kaela died.

As Karl wrote in a poem:

Even the skies were crying today —
they poured the sadness a human cannot withstand ...
the sun will return to rain your light upon us ...
to blank us with your warmth”

That water and rain overcame each of us that day and all the days after. It transformed us to know deep wells of our very selves and each other.

We sat together a lot in that time — holding each other, crying, or trying not to cry, or praying and not knowing how. I tried to cling to all will be well, but it was difficult.

But somehow, through some prayer, we bend and move like the strong, weaving, melting, breaking waters and the sun warms us and all will be well.

The last eight months have been filled with beautiful prayers of the communion of transformation — a communion of CVV staff, alumni, supporters and the incredible volunteers of Year 21.

It is my community at EarthLinks; my friends in Denver becoming friends with the CVV community; it is dance, stress, sadness and all the undeniable facets of self that together hold us.

It is the water forms we take on and the prayers we pray. New people and experiences will soon transform us once again. Some of us may move far from Pearl Street, others might stay close. Still, I pray that all will be well. Regardless of the paths we take, may we be united in a prayer of breath — unending gratitude to the unimaginable God whose creativity of peace brought us to communion with one another. And the sun warms us. And all will be well.

Gianna Carleo works at EarthLinks

see Schelble next page >
Learning to see godliness in a big, strange, loud city

“You are wrong if you think joy emanates only or principally from human relationships. God has placed it all around us. It is in everything and anything we might experience. We just have to have the courage to turn against our habitual lifestyle and engage in unconventional living.”

— Chris McCandless

By Jess Van Orden
CVV Year 21 Volunteer

I have become a creature of habit.

In the past years of my life I have become comfortable seeing God in a very particular way. I felt God in the cool fall breeze rolling across the green pastures of Kentucky. I saw His love in the smile, and loving hug from a community member after an especially tough day.

I knew prayer in the strained muscles, and cool sheen of sweat during an adventurous trek through the wilderness with friends.

I learned these forms of prayer from friends in my past. I knew prayer as a community structure, and preferred it that way. Funny thing is God is not content with the small daily slices of your life you set aside for Him.

I have learned this past eight months that God wants everything Jess has to offer. He also wants me to know more of the person I am bringing before Him. This past year has been a transformation of my soul. This year has taken the idealized self I have known myself to be, ripped her apart, and revealed the woman God sees.

I have never been comfortable with a one-on-one relationship with God.

I believed God’s joy belonged in a scene with laughter between friends more than quiet contemplation.

I could easily see God in conversations between passing dishes at dinner with the ones I love, rather than questioning why I have the strong convictions I have.

“Where two or more of you are gathered, there I shall be.”

This year God has put before me the challenge of myself. I have great and wise people to live with this year who ask me questions I have never even thought of.

I started to have prayer time with God during my walks to work. One particular conversation defined why I found the city to be so suffocating. Through many walks and talks God pointed out that I connect to Him more easily as an artist.

I love all the curvy, tangled woods, saturated skies and treacherous spikes and slopes of mountains.

My mind sees what I had always been trying to create, and is in awe of the Original Master.

Being able to make this concrete connection with Him, I am able to see the art that is human-built cities: the linear grid of the streets, the soaring skyscrapers and the twisted form that we could contort buildings into.

I slowly began to see that the city was just people expressing a whole new art form that God had created them for.

That sounds easy to say now, but that process was God working continually with me for months to show me the way I see His beauty differently from others.

God patiently worked with me on my walks to work, always drawing me to search out more time for just us.

He has met me where I am, and stretched me so that we can even meditate together.

He does. We now have Saturday yoga, Sunday morning services, praise hours and sometimes — if I can calm my mind — we even meditate together.

I am so blessed God challenged me to take time out for us. It is a transformation to meet Him alone. I am now better able to see in me what God sees in me.

I am now able to love the whole of myself.

Alex Schelble works at Laradon.
Reflections on a year of growth, community

It was a year to remember

By Colleen Calamari
CVV Year 21 Volunteer

The future may be scary at this point of the year for the CVV Year 21 Volunteers. By springtime in CVV, we’ve grown comfortable, secure in our daily routines.

Now, it’s time to consider what we’ll be doing next year.

This time of discernment may bring anxiety: What job should I apply for? Should I go to grad school? Should I stay in Denver? Should I continue working for a nonprofit?

We’ve begun to flourish in our CVV lives in Denver.

I enjoy having a well balanced life working as a nurse at Stout Street Health Center. I look forward to coming home each day to see my community.

I love telling them about my day at the clinic — such as when I updated them on a successful IV insertion.

I share in the joys and trials of their day as well.

We have the opportunity to be in companionship with each other as we journey through experiences at work-sites with different populations. Yet, we are all connected by the desire to serve, love of social justice and the bond we have developed.

Each volunteer comes from a different part of the country with diverse experiences.

Our individual talents shine in the community, while we accept each other’s weaknesses.

These talents and shortcomings complement each other, which leads to a great amount of learning within community.

I have benefitted from my fellow volunteers’ encouragement during challenging hikes that extend me out of my comfort zone.

Countless intentional conversations with fellow volunteers have affirmed and, at times, challenged my beliefs in the best possible way.

Numerous acts of kindness from my community have shown again and again the generosity between us.

All of these experiences, plus so many more, build the bond among all 20 of the CVV Year 21 Volunteers this year.

It is going to be exceedingly difficult not to see all of them every day anymore.

Yet, as we are moving forward to find the next adventure in our lives, there has been an incredible amount of support among all of us regarding the future.

As we go through the exciting and anxious feelings that come with finding a new path, I know that the CVV community will be there for each other with encouragement and guidance, like we have been all year.

We have built the foundation for friendship that will last far beyond this time.

I have treasured the opportunity to grow with these 20 generous young adults this year. I look forward to seeing the incredible things that each of them will do after CVV — all of which are sure to make the world a better place.

Coleen Calamari works at Stout Street Health Clinic.

▲ Colleen Calamari with a patient at the Stout Street Health Clinic.

SAVE THE DATE!
THURSDAY JUNE 16, 2016 • 7PM
CAN’T ATTEND? DONATE: www.covivo.org

Concert to Benefit
COLORADO
VINCENTIAN VOLUNTEERS

HEART & SOUL

WITH PERFORMANCES BY DANCERS FROM
High Country Conservatory of Music and Dance

The Okee Dokee Brothers
**Planned Giving**
CVV invites you to consider a legacy gift of bequests, securities, qualified retirement plans and life insurance.

We invite you to take a look at www.covivo.org/ways-to-give.

Thank you!

---

**March Madness at CVV**
The following universities participated in service trips coordinated by CVV this year … De Paul U., Creighton U., St. John’s U New York, St. Edwards and Villanova.

**Needed**
CVV needs a used DVD, VHS or DVD/VHS player.

---

**¡Muchas Gracias!**
We owe you so much that I do not know how to express my gratitude for it all.

St. Louise de Marillac