

## Don's Walking Witness

Hello, my name is Jason Hindman and I just saw Don yesterday, about 10 miles west of Polo, Missouri. The first time I saw Don, he was sleeping in the shade of a rather large, round hay bale. I saw his huge pack, and decided he must be a homeless man, carrying everything he owned on his back. I didn't stop the first time I saw him, because I was taking my friend to pick up her car, but as she thanked me for the ride with a ten dollar bill, I headed to the nearest gas station.

With the ten dollar thanks, I bought several drinks (a liter of water, a bottle of V8, some strange energy drink which the bottle was composed of metal and I thought it would keep beverages colder with a little bit of ice added which would be nice for a long hot walk, and a 22 ounce of Budweiser) and some snacks including 4 granola bars and 2 packages of crackers. Heading back towards where I had seen Don, I felt a feeling of elation that I was truly going to help someone in need, and looked forward to

cheering him up.

I returned to where I had seen Don sleeping, only to find he was gone. Feeling a bit in despair, I decided to do a little search for the man since I had wished so much to help him. About a half mile down the road I spotted a very large pack, and the man beneath it. I stopped and got out of my vehicle, offering him a ride, and he simply responded "Thanks, but I'm walking." This surprised me quite a bit, since the pack seemed huge, and it was about 85 degrees. He then explained that he was walking across America, and gave me one of his cards. I offered him the drinks I had bought, which he kindly refused, shook my hand, and headed on down his way. I thought to myself that how blessed this man must be to have the faith that drives him on without even the wanting of a few indulgences for his body. I wish him good luck in his travels, and may his God give him strength and endurance to complete his journey.

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## Parking Lot Realities...

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She was the chair of New Castle Presbytery's committee on ministry, and she had called to introduce herself as we planned to move to Maryland, and into the bounds of her Presbytery. Meeting Ground was just a concept, and a new one at that. It had already aroused a lot of suspicion and criticism, so much so that I had just come to expect it.

"Betty Crocker," I thought, "Is this her real name, or did I hear wrong?" I imagined a person on the other end of the phone dressed in a white apron and stirring up a cake as she was talking to me. I was braced for her questions, and the inevitable mistrust, but I wasn't sure how I would take it from a person named Betty Crocker.

Hanging up the phone I was surprised that after a brief conversation I was made to feel welcome. Our chat had been one of warm hospitality, and it felt good. Perhaps there was doubt, but it

was not expressed that way.

My next conversation with Betty took place two months later. It was a spring evening in 1981, on a parking lot of Calvary Presbyterian Church in Wilmington, Delaware. We were speaking about the Church, but Betty gradually turned the conversation to the vision of Meeting Ground. It was still a concept on paper, but she spoke as if it were a real thing, and she began to build towers around it. It was as if she could see it, and she let me know what it might look like once it got started. We spoke of people who are hurting, persons experiencing homelessness, and others who would gather as a community one day and seek to discover that which is heaven to find. I can still recall the bright optimism of her eyes, the look of hope, and a faith which was expressing more substance than mine could muster.

Thus it was that Betty became one of our original partners-in-min-



Cynthia Wood is our new Program Coordinator at Clairvaux Farm. She fills the position formerly held by Bob Gordon, who died suddenly on July 4. Welcome, Cynthia!

### the poor will be with you always

by Shelby Dove

*do not turn away*

*i am here to stay*

*can you truly ignore*

*what is at your front door*

*do you think i am less because of my poverty mess*

*think it not true im not different than you*

*the LORD created me*

*to test your compassion ability*

*not by dollars quarters and dimes*

*but by tears love and time*

*do not turn away*

*i am here to stay*

istry. Through the next twenty-three years she has been an unceasing help and encouragement. She thought of ways to get local churches engaged in personal and fulfilling projects – collecting soap, filling boxes with clothing and canned goods, rounding up funds – and then she worked to make those involvements solid. Even in her final years at Cokesbury Village retirement community, she did all she could to support the efforts of folks everywhere who were working to end homelessness. When I learned of Betty's death, I felt the loss of a friend whose gift had been irreplaceable. The question for all is and remains: How can we do our work without an unconditional faith? Belief, not in programs, but in persons.

Days before her passing, I spoke with Betty at her 90th birthday party. She seemed weary, but happy to see friends. As I spoke with her, for the last time as it happened, I saw the gleam of opti-

mism which had meant so much to me. Age and fatigue could not suppress that spirit.

Betty taught us, always gently but firmly, of the need to believe in people, no matter the circumstances. I know she was skeptical, and her keen mind was certainly thinking critically – yet, with perfect ease, she converted her doubt into faith when she knew the potential was there.

In years since, I have made myself return to that safe port when I felt adrift. The person on the other side of the table, newly arrived from the street, looking so hopeless and destitute is, in reality, the possibility of a remarkable friendship. Far from being the end of the line, a chance meeting may be the door which opens to a world of wonder. Perhaps at that table, street corner, restaurant or supermarket, even on a deserted parking lot – such dreams as we have may get their bearings and become keepers.