

# 8TH DAY CENTER FOR JUSTICE

205 WEST MONROE SUITE 500 CHICAGO IL 60606  
PH: 312.641.5151 FX: 312.641.1250 WWW.8THDAYCENTER.ORG

## LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS- LENT 2009

My name is Beth Connor and I am originally from Tulsa, Oklahoma. I had no prior intentions to leave Oklahoma, but somehow I ended up going to college in the great state of Washington in 2003. This decision opened the door to my conversion to social justice.

My conversion to social justice began at a women and children's shelter in Spokane, Washington where I worked for three years while I also attended college. Prior to working at the shelter, I had the opportunity to go on mission trips and volunteer with various organizations in both high school and college. These experiences were valuable, but working at the shelter challenged and transformed my understanding of the world as it is and as it should be.

Before working at the shelter, my understanding of social justice was very limited. I honestly believed that people suffering from poverty were victims of their own decisions and choices, and out of compassion I should help them. I feel ashamed to even admit to this kind of reasoning. My logic quickly changed after many conversations I had with the women living at the shelter. In particular, one woman, Jean (*name has been changed*), challenged my understanding of poverty in America.



Beth Connor (on the right) and fellow former Jesuit Volunteers at the School of the Americas Watch Weekend in Columbus Georgia.

*(Story continued on the other side)*

## SAVE THE DATE!!! 9/27/2009

### 8TH DAY CENTER FOR JUSTICE

### CELEBRATES 35 YEARS

### *SOWING SEEDS, TRANSFORMING TOMORROW*

## LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS- LENT 2009

In January I traveled to Brazil for peace and justice meetings for the Society of the Divine Word Missionaries, the congregation that I work for at 8<sup>th</sup> Day, and to participate in the World Social Forum. My journey began in Santarem, Para, Brazil, in the heart of the Amazon region. It is also the state that



Sr. Dorothy Stang was murdered four years ago on February 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Sr. Dorothy was known to wear a t-shirt that said, "The death of the forest is the end of our lives," that spoke to the severity of the impact on the people who call the rainforest their home, precisely why she stood with the people of the forest. Part of my time in Santarem was spent with communities that are being significantly impacted by the destruction of the Amazon Rainforest.

*(Story continued on the other side).*

**8TH DAY CENTER FOR  
JUSTICE**



**205 WEST MONROE  
SUITE 500**

**CHICAGO IL  
60606**

**PH: 312.641.5151**

**FX: 312.641.1250**

**WWW.8THDAYCENTER.ORG**

Before moving into shelter-after-shelter, Jean worked at a manufacturing job that paid her a living wage. She lost her job soon after the passage of NAFTA and was unable to find work in which she was qualified. As a result, Jean has been tirelessly working at service industry jobs to support herself and her family. Despite her best efforts, Jean and her family experience barriers to achieving self-sufficiency. What I learned is that Jean, and countless others in America, cannot support a family working full-time for poverty wages. How can we say that America is the land of opportunity when we uphold unjust policies and laws that make it virtually impossible for millions of Americans to live self-sustaining lives?

After listening to Jean's story and similar stories of other women living at the shelter, I decided that I could not live my life the way I was – living for myself and “helping” the poor out of pity for them. I realized that real change occurs when people join together to challenge the structures and systems that perpetuate poverty. After college, I decided to join Jesuit Volunteer Corp (JVC) and work as a community organizer in Hartford, Connecticut.

In JVC, I went through a second conversion. As a JV, I realized that it was not only the structures and systems in America that were unjust - I upheld injustice in my everyday actions. I decided that if I was going to work for justice in the world, I needed to live an authentic lifestyle and be in right relationship with others. This realization has been the most challenging, but also the most rewarding.

Currently, I am working on a master's degree in Social Justice at Loyola University Chicago and working at 8th Day Center for Justice. I am constantly challenged both at work and in the classroom to live an authentic lifestyle. 8th Day is truly unique because staff at 8th Day commit to a work model that is reflective of the way that they envision the world to be. I feel very blessed to be a part of a group that is working to transform the world into a better place. (By Beth Connor)

## LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS- LENT 2009

I learned the nuances of this complex situation: not only are they losing land to agribusiness (particularly for soy and cattle grazing), but they are also losing their cultures and livelihoods, and in some cases facing violence and death threats much like Sr. Dorothy faced.

After my time in Santarem I headed via boat on the Amazon to Belem, Brazil to the World Social Forum (WSF). This time on the boat (45 hours) gave me the opportunity to get a better picture of the powerfulness, beauty and vastness of the Amazon River. At the end of the river is Belem, where the Amazon meets the Atlantic and where the WSF's ninth edition took place. The WSF is a gathering of civil society from around the world; this year the gathering brought together over 100,000 people. The size, diversity and beauty of the people and movements that were represented at the WSF are still unbelievable to me. What the WSF showed me was the extent of the struggles and successes for peace and justice around the world.

My time in Brazil was life transforming. I experienced many wonderful people and sites, and my mind and heart was pushed to the edge. It was physically and emotionally exhausting but at the same time life giving and affirming. One does not need to go to Brazil, India or some far off place, there is plenty right here. For nearly seven years now, I have been here at 8<sup>th</sup> Day Center and have had many formative experiences that have helped me grow and learn. I have come to realize that there is room for transformation in the everyday when we are open and present to our surroundings and one another. The most important result of trips like mine to Brazil is not what we see or what we do while we are there, but what happens when we come back. It is not only the work and the actions that we take, but how our vision and perceptions shift, and the realization of how much we take for granted. (By Stephanie Dernek)



This picture was taken on my two day boat trip from Santarem to Belem, Brazil. Also in the picture are fellow SVD Peace and Justice Workers traveling to the World Social Forum travelers.