

VOICES FOR CREATIVE NONVIOLENCE

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April 2008

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Dear Friends,

We're eager to announce our newest organizing effort: **Witness Against War 2008: a walk from Chicago, IL to St. Paul, MN.** On July 12, we'll begin walking from Chicago, site of the 1968 Democratic convention, and we'll conclude about 45 days later, in St. Paul, MN in time for the Republican convention—drawing the connection that both parties are responsible for the wars waged by the U.S. This effort will include speaking events, workshops on nonviolence, strategy sessions for developing strategic campaigns, and opportunities for nonviolent civil disobedience. We look forward to building a core team of walkers and an enthusiastic show of support.

As this newsletter arrives in your mailboxes, the U.S. military commander in Iraq, General David Petraeus, will be preparing to evaluate conditions in Iraq and the impact of last year's increase in U.S. troop presence. He most likely will testify before Congress during the first week or two of April.

In preparation for General Petraeus's report, we strongly recommend a thoughtful article by Nir Rosen, published in *Rolling Stone* magazine on March 6, 2008.

Rosen reports about what he encountered while embedded amongst U.S. troops sent to Iraq as part of "the surge." The Pentagon said that the mandate given to these 30,000 troops was: to train Iraqi troops, equip the troops with firepower, and observe the Iraqi troops. But Rosen asserts that the U.S. has essentially bribed the opposition, arming the very Sunni militants who only months ago were waging deadly assaults on U.S. forces.

The new militias, created and backed by the U.S., now operate beyond the control of Iraq's central government. At least 80,000 Iraqi men are now employed by the Americans as Iraqi Security Volunteers, (ISV), and often referred to as Awakening Councils. According to one of Rosen's interviews with a young Army intelligence officer,

"The only reason anything works or anybody deals with us is because we give them money." With the ISVs in place, the Americans are now arming both sides in the civil war. Nir Rosen quotes David Kilcullen, the counterinsurgency adviser to General Petraeus, who calls the U.S. support for dozens of new militias "balancing competing armed interest groups."

Nir Rosen's article, "The Myth of the Surge," is available on-line at Rolling Stone, <http://tinyurl.com/3copkj>

Also anticipated in April is a congressional debate about whether to approve an additional \$102 billion in funding for the Iraq - Afghanistan war—with a vote likely to take place in early to mid-April (perhaps shortly after General Petraeus testifies). The bill is being developed behind closed doors, and a public version may not be available until the day of the vote on the bill (as happened last May). Please contact your Representatives and Senators to urge them to vote against any additional funding for the Iraq war. You can reach them via the U.S. Capitol switchboard: (202) 224-3121.

A "Question and Answer" document on this Iraq – Afghanistan war supplemental is available on the Voices website (or by mail, if you call us for a copy).

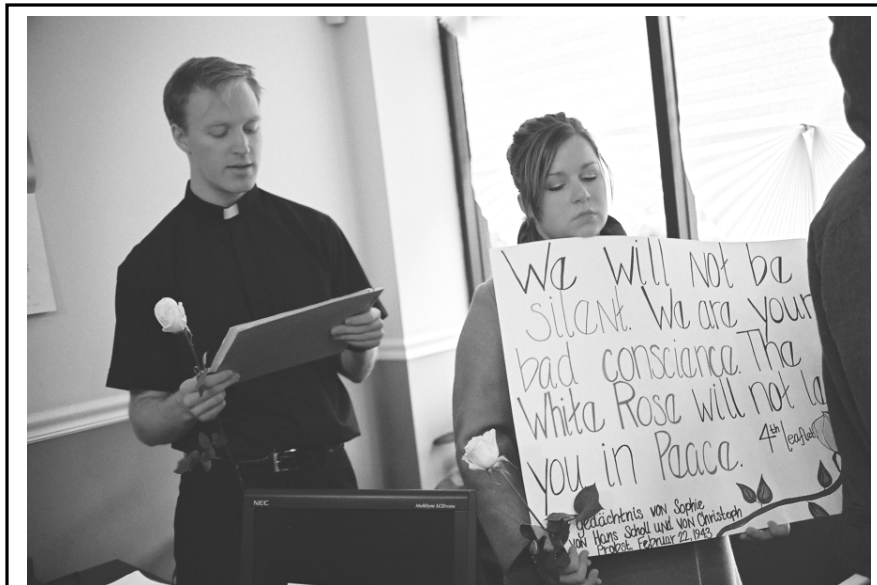
Voices continues to organize the Occupation Project. Most recently, on February 22, an action took place at Representative Rahm Emanuel's office in Chicago to commemorate the 1943 execution of three members of the White Rose resistance movement. They were among 29 people, mostly college students, indicted for White Rose participation. The movement's members distributed flyers calling for resistance to the Nazi regime, its waging of war and its acts of genocide. Please see the "Resources" section of this newsletter for more information.

Elsewhere in this newsletter is a letter from Cathy Breen. Several Voices members, including Cathy Breen, plan to spend time in Jordan and Syria over

the coming months, living amongst and accompanying Iraqis who have fled war in their country. We also include part of an interview with Walid Waleed, an Iraqi citizen. (The full interview is available on the Voices website. Please let us know if you'd like us to mail you a hard copy.)

Thank you for your continued support.

Scott Blackburn Cathy Breen Ron Durham
Joel Gullede Kathy Kelly Jeff Leys
Gerald Paoli Dan Pearson



Remembering the White Rose – February 22: “We will not be silent. We are your bad conscience. The White Rose will not leave you in peace.”

(photo: Suzanne Sheridan)

WITNESS AGAINST WAR 2008: From Chicago to St. Paul (July 12 – August 31)

Witness Against War 2008 is a walk from Chicago to St. Paul to challenge and to nonviolently resist our country's continuing war in and occupation of Iraq. We are committed to nonviolence throughout the walk.

We will begin on or about July 12 in Chicago, site of the 1968 Democratic convention. The walk will end in St. Paul at the end of August, site of the 2008 Republican convention. The start and end points are chosen to emphasize that ending the Iraq war is a shared responsibility of all political parties. Democrat and Republican parties are both responsible for continuation of the war.

Witness Against War aims to build public pressure to end funding for the Iraq war; to withdraw all U.S. troops; and to provide full funding for the reconstruction of Iraq. VCNV will work with local organizations in both Wisconsin and Minnesota, seeking to strengthen local organizing and to enhance public education. Outreach during the walk will include: public speaking events; workshops on nonviolent direct action; and workshops on developing strategic campaigns.

In Wisconsin, support for grass roots groups is especially important during 2008. The Wisconsin National Guard was alerted in December 2007 that the 32nd Brigade Combat Team may well be called to active duty in Iraq during the summer of 2009. If this occurs, it will be the largest call up of the Wisconsin National Guard since the 1960's.

Witness Against War will include an act of nonviolent civil disobedience at Fort McCoy in Wisconsin. The 32nd Brigade Combat Team (headquartered at Camp Douglas) conducts its training at Fort McCoy, which is also used for pre-deployment training for units being deployed to Iraq (mainly engineering or other support units).

This project also seeks to build legislative pressure to end the Iraq war. VCNV will work with local organizers to design actions that take place at the

offices of Representatives and Senators—both Democrat and Republican—who do not publicly commit to vote against any further funding for the Iraq war.

Witness Against War calls for:

- An end to all economic and military warfare against Iraq.
- The complete and immediate withdrawal of all U.S. military forces from Iraq.
- The complete end to all U.S. military action against Iraq, whether that action be from the air, ground or sea.
- An end to any further funding for U.S. military action in or against Iraq.

- Full funding for the highest quality health care, housing and education for U.S. veterans and their families; the end of stop-loss orders in the military; and the end of stop-move orders.
- Provision of full funding by the U.S. for the reconstruction of Iraq following the damage caused by 18 years of economic and military warfare.

Route of Witness Against War 2008

Witness Against War will roughly parallel I-94 from Chicago to Tomah, Wisconsin, then I-90 from Tomah to LaCrosse. It will enter Minnesota in Winona, then head west to Rochester before turning north to St. Paul (paralleling Hwy 52 north).

We anticipate our journey taking us through Evanston and Waukegan in Illinois. In Wisconsin, we will journey through Racine, Milwaukee, Jefferson, Madison, Baraboo, Tomah and LaCrosse. In Minnesota, the walk will enter Winona, Rochester and St. Paul.

Participation in Witness Against War 2008

Please consider participating in one of the following ways:

Walker – join us for a day, a week, a month or the entire Witness Against War. Please contact Voices if you would like to be a walker or offer vehicle support.

Support Vehicle: Consider driving your vehicle as a support vehicle for a portion of the walk (to bring food, water and relief to walkers during the hot summer days).

If you live along the walk route, please consider assisting us with housing; speaking events; vehicle support and food when the walk is in your area.

Affinity Group Participation – We especially encourage the formation of affinity groups to participate in Witness Against War. An affinity group could be you and a group of friends—or an organization to which you belong—and would help arrange a support vehicle, food and water for the group.

Please contact us to become involved:
Email: witnessagainstawar@vcnv.org
Phone: 773-878-3815

Life in Iraq: Excerpts from an Interview with Walid Waleed by John Malkin

Walid Waleed is 38 years old and was born in the Alkhaalij quarter of Baghdad. He now lives in the country side in a village in south-east Baghdad. He was married in 1997 and now has two boys and three girls; Ows 10, Mohammad 8, Nowras 6, Nibras 4 and less than one year old Ziena. Before the violence, they lived as one big family, with about twenty-two people, but now they live in individual temporary houses. Walid studies journalism at Baghdad University and got practical experience as a guide for foreign journalists for many years. He has done interviews for magazines, newspapers and TV and helped Japanese producers make a documentary film about children during the US/UN economic sanctions. He recently produced an autobiographical documentary about the US invasion and occupation of Iraq.

John Malkin interviewed Walid in January 2008. John is a writer, musician and author of “Sounds of Freedom”, a collection of interviews with musicians concerning spirituality and social change. He is a regular contributor to Good Times Weekly of Santa Cruz, California.

JM: What was life like in Iraq before the 2003 invasion by the U.S. military?

It was a hard life because the immoral economic sanctions destroyed people’s lives. The embargo was imposed for more than 13 years (1991-2003) and caused the death of many people because of the lack of medicine. Added to that was the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein. But if we compare that with our current life we can say we lived in paradise then because there was some security and our basic needs for life were available like gasoline, kerosene, cooking gas, electricity, clean water, educational institutions like schools and universities. Also, there was no discrimination between the Sunna and Shi’a people and our life wasn’t targeted like it is now.

JM: What are your living conditions now? Do you have access to water, electricity, healthcare, medicine, food?

Nowadays I’m working as a farmer just to stay alive. I am Sunna and Sunna people cannot get jobs in governmental offices because any person who wants

to have a job needs to bring a recommendation letter from the political or religious parties in power and, as you know, the Shi'a parties dominate the government offices. Also, the only two jobs available are either to be a soldier or policeman. One week ago my cousin asked me to be recruited into the Iraq police as an officer but I refused because my age does not fit with this job.

Clean water: It's one of our big sufferings because Cholera has spread across the country and many people have died. We buy tablets from the pharmacy to kill the bacteria in the water but many poor people have no money to buy this medicine. Recently I heard that American forces are trying to provide Iraqi citizens with water purification machines but we haven't receive any.

Electricity: We are spend our nights with candles and a kerosene lamp.

Health Care: We have very big problem in my country - the Ministry of Health is controlled by the Alsader, a Shi'a group, and most Sunna people are afraid to go to the hospitals. When my wife was pregnant I couldn't bring her to the hospital. I brought her to an old woman who helped her to deliver her baby. She was lucky because she delivered her baby naturally.

One of my cousins was injured by an American bullet while he was waiting to get gasoline for his car. The people at the site of the shooting brought him to Alkindy Hospital and when he arrived there he pretended to be a Shi'a man and they did an operation to remove the bullet from his pancreas. He saw many Sunna patients being kidnapped from the hospital. After he spent four days there he decided to leave the hospital because the hospital staff started to gather information about his house and his origin. He continued his treatment in our village and at that time we asked our friend who is a doctor to treat him.

Food: It's not easy to go to the market. In my village we decided to send our wives to the market because it's a big risk if Sunna men go there. But I shopped



Witness Against Torture: January 11. Nine people arrested in the federal courthouse after delivering a "Citizens Indictment" of the U.S. for engaging in torture. 80 people were arrested at the Supreme Court in Washington, D.C. Info on the national campaign: www.witnesstorture.org

for fruits, vegetables and some other goods by myself especially during the last month of my wife's pregnancy.

During economic sanctions, the United Nations took money from Iraq oil sales and bought food for the Iraq people and this food was distributed by Iraqi Ministry of Trade. This operation was called "oil-food agreement." Fortunately this agreement is valid right now but there are big rumors nowadays that the government

trying to cancel this food rationing.

JM: Do your children go to school now? Is it safe to travel to school, to the market, to visit friends?

I changed my kids school from New Baghdad to the school in our village. Primary schools have no problems but in the intermediate, high school, and colleges most teachers and doctors were killed by terrorists and now those institutions have a lack of staff. My youngest brother is in high school and they don't have enough teachers. Also, my brother couldn't go to the final examination last year because the Ministry of Education decide to have the examination in a Shi'a majority area. He refused to go and at that time we were angry with him but after two Sunna students were kidnapped from inside the examination hall we excused him.

This is little funny story; when the final examination in Shi'a area began, the Al Mehdi army came to the school and ordered the teachers to solve all the questions for the students and when the examination results were distributed it was incredible! All the student got marks between 95-100% .

Visiting Friends: It's also one of our biggest problems, especially when a relative has a death ceremony or wedding party. We cannot go to there house if it's far away. Personally, I lost most of my friends in the sectarian war - more than twenty friends were killed without reason.

JM: How do you get around the city? Buses, taxis, cars?

I stopped using my car because of traffic jams due to the main roads and bridges being blocked by American and Iraqi forces. Now I use the bus and wherever the bus stops, I start walking.

JM: The Lancet Journal in England estimated that 500,000 children died as a result of the United States/United Nations economic sanctions against Iraq. What was that time like for you and your family?

The economic sanctions started just after Iraqi forces were defeated from Kuwait in 1991 and continued until 2003, when the United States invaded our country by reason of weapon of mass destruction. I was student of Engineering at college when the embargo was imposed and it was so hard live. Let me give you an example to imagine how hard it was;

We ate rice only once each ten days. We were three brothers working day and night to buy bread and eggplant because at that time only eggplant was available in the market. If you talk to any Iraqi person who lived and suffered from the economic sanctions and ask him, "Do you remember the year of eggplant," he will remember it very well. Three brothers were working, my other two brothers and three sisters were students and there was my father and mother. The style of eating in our poor society is for us to sit all together and eat from one big pan, as you will see it in attached pictures. I don't remember even one time that I ate until I was full - the adults decided to eat only very little and we'd pretend we were eating in order to give the children and old people a chance to eat enough. At that time I wasn't married and was just graduated from engineering college but there were no jobs, so I worked as a driver of a minibus, building donkey worker, ice seller, electrician, and as an interpreter for an NGO twice a year.

I once worked as interpreter for Pakistani journalist in 1999 and he bought bananas from the market and gave me one piece of banana. I kept it in my car and when he asked, "Why you don't eat it?" I said, "I want to share this piece with my family because we haven't eaten a banana since four years." So you can imagine how hard life was. I think we'd need a text book to keep all our suffering. By the way my sister got cancer during that period as well.

JM: Have your family or friends been hurt or killed by US soldiers?

On 9th March 2003 my cousin was injured. She was a farmer taking care of her cow and an American soldier shot her because they didn't have the knowledge to see the fashion of women in an Arabic country. She was wearing an Arabic dishdasha that is black in color and the soldier shoot here because at that time Saddam's Fedayeen fighters wore black. But there is big difference between a woman's dishdasha and man's pants.

In June 2007 my cousin was shot after an American patrol was hit by a roadside bomb. He survived.

On October 10, 2007 another cousin was shot and arrested by American forces and now he is in jail. Since that time his family couldn't meet with him. We got information that he had been shot in his back and the effect of the bullet on his spine might cause him to be paralyzed. He is 34 years old. The reason he was walking to visit his friend was that he'd been invited to have dinner at his friend's house during Ramadan month after sunset and there was an American unit waiting to ambush the Iraqi resistance. They failed in this ambush.

On November 4 people from my village were shot by soldiers in an American helicopter by mistake and this is the only accident that has been compensated. Many relatives have been killed by American forces, but as I told you I would need to write a long list of there names.

Another accident I need to mention is my oldest brother. He was arrested by Iraqi forces while he was working as a taxi driver. The Iraqi forces wanted to kill him but fortunately their prison has been visited by American forces. He was released because an American officer took pictures of the prisoners and did investigations with the prisoners directly, so not all doing of American forces are negative.

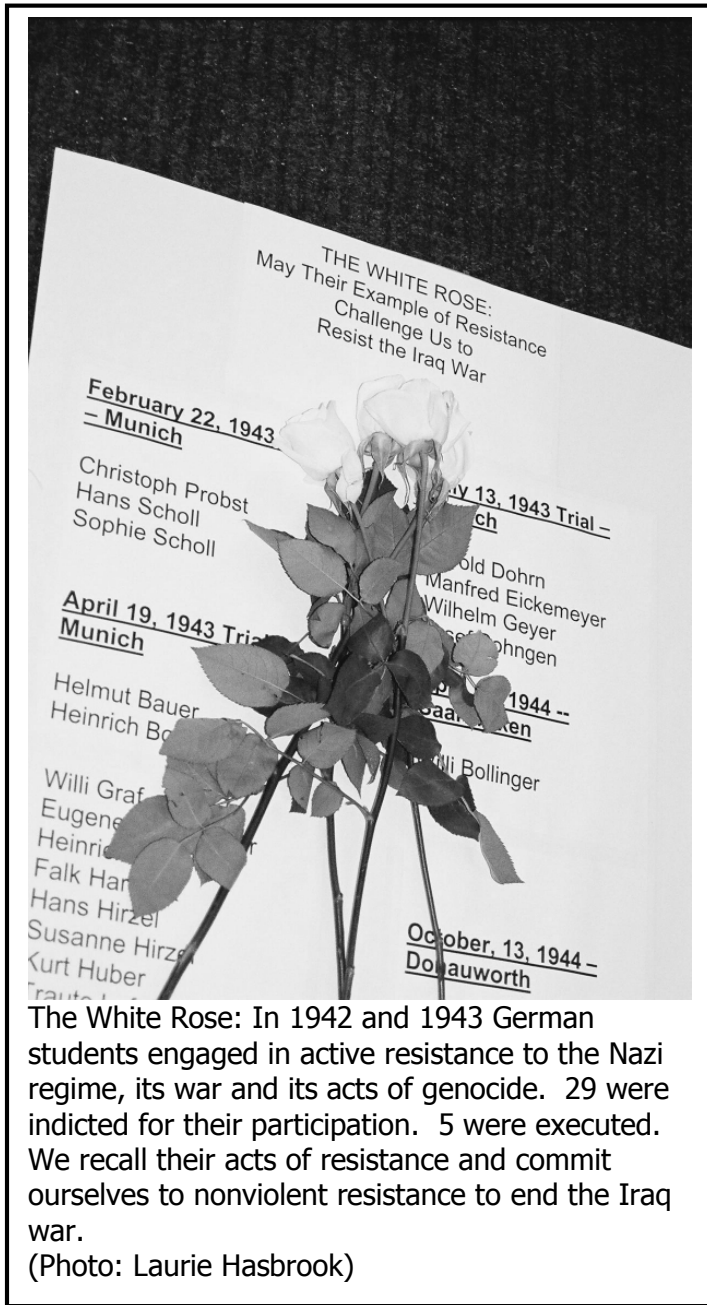
JM: What is the most difficult thing now about living in Iraq?

Security, electricity, fuel (gasoline, kerosene, cooking gas), jobs, education, medical care, and to get back our houses which had been looted by Al Mehdi army.

JM: What has changed the most for you since the US invasion in 2003?

I lost my freedom and security, my brother was killed, my father in law was killed, we lost our houses in town and the prices for all materials has jumped. For example, before the war the price of 1 liter of

gasoline was 20 Iraqi dinar. 1 cylinder of cooking gas was 250 ID. At that time 1US\$ = 3000 ID. Today a liter of gasoline is 500 ID and a cylinder of cooking gas is 25000 ID and it's not easy to get it. The current exchange rate is 1\$=1210ID.



The White Rose: In 1942 and 1943 German students engaged in active resistance to the Nazi regime, its war and its acts of genocide. 29 were indicted for their participation. 5 were executed. We recall their acts of resistance and commit ourselves to nonviolent resistance to end the Iraq war.
(Photo: Laurie Hasbrook)

Reflections on Iraq By Cathy Breen of Mary House Catholic Worker

I began this letter the other day on a bus returning from a two-day trip to D.C. where Maryknoll's Social Concerns office had set up meetings with various groups to address the Iraqi refugee crisis. This was the third trip to D.C. since my return to the states in

early December, part of an ongoing strategizing with Maryknoll colleagues as to how we might make real the desperate situation of Iraqi refugees. We've been able to convey concrete concerns and questions to a Congressperson with an entry to Homeland Security, to the Congressional Progressive Caucus, to the US Conference of Catholic Bishops, and others.

On this particular trip I was not traveling alone. I was accompanied by a dear Iraqi friend who was also going to D.C., and it was wonderful to have so many hours to catch up with each other. While on the bus a member of his family in Baghdad called on his cell phone, bringing their reality there close to us. Security has improved we heard due to the fact that the city is divided up with countless checkpoints and barriers. "It is like being in prison" he said.

A recent communication from another Iraqi friend in Baghdad spoke of improved security in recent months, but that all the streets are blocked. "Though this has helped stabilize the security, it has put a burden on people. It used to take me 10 minutes to get to work....now I spend around 60-90 minutes to do the same." The friend continued "It is as if we were living in a nightmare to awaken and find that we have a country with no systems, something very difficult to understand. You can do anything you want with money or threats, but you can't do anything if you walk in a correct and honest way. There is a complete collapse of most governmental institutions and no hope to improve things as long as political issues control the VIP positions....The people who control the Ministries (apart from the very few honest ones) are not eligible to be in this position or any other position because most of the honest people have been killed or threatened. Those who remain are those who can protect themselves by being in one of the groups or parties. They are the same. ...We feel desperate and hurt from what is going on, as if we don't belong to this society."

In the stack of papers I'd brought with me on the bus were two articles I would refer to those of you who are stout-hearted enough to bear more bad news. One is of an interview of Dahr Jamail by Jeremy Scahill for the Nation. The other is "Iraq's Tidal Wave of Misery, The first history of the planet's worst refugee crisis" by Michael Schwartz. Though hesitant to burden my Iraqi friend with the heavy content in these pieces, I was also anxious for his opinion. I wish time and space would allow me to share some of his comments but he shared, for the most part, in the viewpoints of both articles.

One thing that struck me in some of the meetings I had in D.C. was the marked lack of Iraqi perspective and input. What are they experiencing, sensing, wanting? What is their advice in the face of the chaos and suffering that seems to have no end? In the years since the war and occupation, I often recall the words of an Iraqi to me when I was in Baghdad (about ten months into the US-led occupation) "You Americans took the cotton out of our mouths that Saddam had placed there, but you put it in your ears!" To quote Michael Schwartz (professor of sociology at Stony Brook University):

"Most horror stories come to an end, but the most horrible part of this horror story is its never-ending quality....From the vast out-migration and internal migrations of its desperate citizens comes damage to society as a whole that is almost impossible to estimate. The displacement of people carries with it the destruction of human capital. The destruction of human capital deprives Iraq of its most precious resource for repairing the damage of war and occupation, condemning it to further infrastructural decline. This tide of infrastructural decline is the surest guarantee of another wave of displacement, of future floods of refugees."

I see the smiling face of a ten year old Iraqi boy in Amman before me. Not in school, he is working in a carpenter's shop for 1 Jordanian Dinar a day (approx. \$1.40). The father faces immediate deportation back to Iraq should he be caught working. Once this family owned a home and two cars in Baghdad, but they had to flee because of sectarian violence. He is Sunni and his wife is Shi'a. Their money has run out and they have been reduced to a beggarly status. I met the mother and the youngest of their four children as we got off a bus to walk the remaining blocks to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). We struck up a conversation, albeit haltingly on my part, in Arabic. I was going to attend a meeting; she was going to beg assistance. I later visited the family in their dismal rented apartment and was able to leave a gift of money for them from donors in the states.

This letter is becoming quite lengthy and so I will try and bring it to an end. What now? What do we do in the face of such calamity? It is clear that everybody must be doing something. For myself, I am aware that I've taken great advantage of my community in being absent for such long periods of time over the last years. I was gone for six months in 2006 and for another six months in 2007. Mindful that the war goes on, the needs around me are also great. We have an eight-month old baby in the house and

another baby due in early June, and I find that I am needed here for the next months. But we are blessed indeed! I can't tell you what joy the children are to all of us. .

My own thought is to return to the Middle East in July and to stay on for a three to four month period. En Shallah. God willing. In the meantime, we are aware of Iraqis in Jordan and Syria who face an imminent return to Iraq as their money has run out. They can no longer pay for rent, electricity, gas, water and food.

I will close now sending you my love and gratitude. It is your constant friendship, prayers and support that help me realize we are all part of one family wherever we might be.

Cathy Breen

RESOURCES

White Rose background:

The following two films complement each other:

"The White Rose", 1982. VHS movie.

"Sophie Scholl: The Final Days" (2005). DVD movie.

Website: <http://www.jlrweb.com/whiterose/>

"Battlefield Without Borders" by David Smith-Ferri

Website: <http://www.battlefieldwithoutborders.com>
David wrote two thirds of the poems while in Iraq after encounters with Iraqi people, in a wide-range of settings – from hospitals to homes to bomb sites. The book sold out in four months, and in November, 2007, Haley's published a second edition of the book, with twelve new poems and a new foreword by Kathy Kelly. This book is being sold to raise funds for the Direct Aid Initiative, which provides urgent medical assistance to some of the 2.25 million Iraqis who've fled their country and now live in Amman, Jordan or Damascus, Syria.

Order from:
David Smith-Ferri
2918 Mill Creek Rd.
Ukiah, CA 95482

Make checks payable to: MECCS/DAI. Price: \$17, includes shipping and handling (\$3) and a \$12 contribution to Direct Aid Initiative to assist Iraqi families.

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**“America in Peril”
by Bob Aldridge**

Bob Aldridge is a former design engineer for Lockheed who worked on the development of the Trident nuclear missile. He resigned from his work in the 1970's as he became convinced that the U.S. was developing the capability to wage an offensive nuclear first strike war. His book "First Strike: The Pentagon's Strategy for Nuclear War" detailed this strategic shift. Since then he has worked diligently to end the nuclear arms race and provided expert testimony at numerous trials of activists. Bob offers his expert research via the Pacific Life Research Center, available on-line at <http://www.plrc.org>

America in Peril is Bob's latest effort. He argues that the Declaration of Independence has been relegated to history courses. Lulled by passivity, we take our inalienable rights for granted. Under the guise of a “war on terror” and “national security,” our

democracy is being systematically undermined. Bob paints a disturbing picture, delving into the decay of civil rights and showing how the government is not only keeping tabs on the populace but also steadily eroding humanitarian law.

He presents two possible outcomes: the path to martial law and dictatorship or a worldview that can save this country if enough perceptive people put it in motion. America is indeed in peril. The test we all face is profound.

Available from: Hope Publishing House; P.O. Box 60008; Pasadena, CA 91116.

Cost: \$16.95 per book plus \$3 shipping for first book and an additional \$1 shipping for each additional book. California residents, please add 8.25% for sales tax.