

The Rock of the Ages

by John Baltzer Kintree

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Revised 2015

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Foreword

I wrote this novel in 1985. The main part of the plot is about a peace activist who is involved in organizing a human chain that would span the United States, from the west coast to the east coast, as a demonstration of our oneness.

To improve my chances of getting it published, I sent the manuscript to a literary agent who was located in New York. He rejected it, and identified poorly developed characters as a reason for doing so. A friend of mine who read the manuscript told me that it was more like reading an extended letter to the editor of the newspaper than a novel. That might have been an accurate assessment.

Rather than give up, I tried to develop the characters further, and submitted the revised manuscript to a second literary agent who was also located in New York. It was while I was waiting for a response from this second agent that I started seeing articles in the news about Hands Across America.

Millions of people participated in Hands Across America, and very nearly formed a human chain that spanned the United States on May 25, 1986. I was one of the participants. Another participant was quoted in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch as saying, "For a moment we were one."

That pretty much captured the essence of the experience that I envisioned people having when I wrote what I considered at the time to be a fairly fanciful novel. Since the event took place in reality, it seemed to me that there was little point in trying to get the novel published. After I received a rejection letter from the second literary agent, I put the manuscript away, and it has pretty much just collected dust for the last thirty years.

For the sake of posterity, and in case there is some instructive value, and because it is simply so easy to self-publish on the Internet now, I decided to brush off the dust. The manuscript had to be re-typed because the 5 ¼ inch floppy disks on which I originally saved it are no longer to be found. While re-typing, I avoided altering the text, except for correcting spelling and punctuation, and in a few places where it seemed essential for the sake of clarity to add or delete a few sentences. Most of the changes in the text are in the final ten pages.

It was not easy to leave some parts of the manuscript as originally written. Naturally, over a span of thirty years, my thinking about some issues has changed, and sometimes dramatically so. Abortion is one of those issues. Still, for the sake of presenting the thinking and opinions as they existed in the context of the time in which they were written, the original has mostly been preserved.

Right, I might as well confess. Hans Spiegel, the main character, is to a large extent a reflection of myself. Other characters are partly composites of other people I have known, and partly also products of my imagination.

Enough. Here it is. The Rock of the Ages, after the removal of thirty years of accumulated dust.

John Kintree
October 24, 2015

Hands Across the Nation

Stillness. Quiet. Silence.

The vault of the sky sparkled with the pinpoint lights of countless stars. Rising in stark contrast, the dim, dark shapes of the mesa, to the west, and of the mountains, farther away to the east, interrupted the glittering sky.

From behind the mountains, a gradual glow of soft orange signaled the approach of the new day, and sage, tumbleweed, and cactus plants, ghostly shapes in the vanquished, starry light, began to assume a more distinct form.

Coming from the direction of the mesa, a sudden sound, “Skree,” like a shriek, broke the silence. Hans awoke to the sound. He lay unmoving and a few moments later the cry was repeated, “Skree,” closer this time. A flutter of wings revealed the source of the sound, as about a hundred feet off the ground, slightly to the south, a large bird flew by, and uttered its cry for a third time, “Skree.”

“Kind of early for a hawk to be hunting,” thought Hans. “Probably frightened, guarding its nest.”

The hawk flew on its way.

Hans looked at the woman sharing his bed, two sleeping beds zippered to form one, separated from the sandy soil by thin foam pads. “Naomi, my wife, mother of my son, good morning,” he exhaled.

Deep sleep still held her. He could feel her slow, steady breathing, and partook of the warmth of her body. Remaining motionless to avoid awakening her, he regarded her closely. Naomi's dark, wavy hair, cut short, yet feminine, exposed her face fully. As the light from the east continued to grow, her boldly chiseled features and the color of her cheeks were shown, and her forehead was singularly smooth and undisturbed.

Suspended in their cocoon, beneath the infinite sky, suddenly Hans had a sense that this was a moment of all possibilities. At that very instant, the stars could be invaded by a thousand daggers of light, arching their way towards distant targets, to be followed by a response that would light the landscape like a thousand suns. That before the awful darkness.

It did not have to be. The possibilities were endless. The birth of a baby, an unexpected smile, a snowflake falling might tip the scales the other way.

A soft scratching sound came to Hans' ears; one of the citizens of the desert was returning to its home in the sand.

Looking again at his wife, it seemed but seconds later that Naomi's breathing deepened. The quiver of her eyelids indicated that she was on the threshold between dream and reality. Another deep breath, Naomi awoke. She looked at Hans and graced him with the welcome in her eyes.

Hans said, “I love you.”

Naomi smiled.

He reached up and softly touched her cheek.

She smiled again.

They joined with each other.

* * * * *

Hans finished stuffing his sleeping bag into its nylon sack and pulled the drawstring tight. The sun, well above the distant mountains, felt good pressing against his back. Still filled with his thoughts from the morning's first waking, as he started packing the second sleeping bag, he looked at his wife, introspective, steady companion of the journey.

Dressed in khaki shorts and a bright yellow T-shirt, she had pulled some food from the saddle bags of her bicycle and was putting a short, flat stone to use as a seat. Hans watched as she set a package of cheese on the sandy soil, and began peeling a pair of oranges. Humming a little tune as she worked, the oranges were soon ready to be eaten, and he quickly completed his task and sat on the ground beside her.

“Sort of a desolate place, isn't it?” remarked Naomi as she handed him one of the peeled oranges, and opened the package of cheese. Her movements were rapid, as if she was eager to eat and leave.

Hans looked around and soaked in their surroundings. Early June in New Mexico, the desert terrain was not yet scorched dry as it would be in a couple of months. It was hard for him to imagine how the sea, ages past, could have covered this rough, rugged land.

“Yeah, there aren't a whole lot of people living around here,” he responded.

“That's what I mean. There's hardly a sign of human life in sight.”

“Unless you count the road, the telephone and the power lines, and that jet trail up there.”

“Very funny,” said Naomi, wryly. After a pause, “Those are the signs of passing through, ways to get from one location to another. This just doesn't seem like a very hospitable place.” She knew he was only pulling her leg, but her tone still said, “Are you going to argue with me, or be sensible?”

“Not without a lot of effort, it isn't,” said Hans. He knew better than to argue with his wife; she usually won. But, he was not in a mood to hurry, either. They had a long road to follow, and there might not be many moments of calm and quiet in front of them.

He broke off another chunk of cheese, took a bite, and chewed deliberately. It was mild cheddar and required considerable mastication before it could be swallowed. “On the other hand,” he continued, “these southwestern states, New Mexico and Arizona, are among the fastest growing in the country, which is good for us. This part of the route is going to be hard enough to cover as it is.”

Ready to offer encouragement, if it was needed, Naomi asked, “You're not discouraged by the

trip are you?" This was the final leg; after two weeks on the road, they were returning home to St. Louis today.

"Not at all," he said, grateful that his expression of enthusiasm was not forced. "We got a good response from the peace organizations in each of the towns we visited. They could hardly have been more positive. When we get back home for our meeting, we'll have at least some show of support for our proposal.

"That was a good orange," concluded Hans, changing the subject and trying to be casual about it. Sometimes things seemed too immense to be talked about, and at the moment, their plan for a demonstration for peace was just such a topic. He swallowed the last segment, and said, "The kind with the thick skins really stay juicy."

Naomi nodded, "Mine was juicy, too. Well, that was enough of a breakfast for me."

She looked at her husband, and he gave a nod in response. There was little hope for resting in the harness while she was chomping at the bit. Naomi started re-wrapping what was left of the cheese and said, "One more drink from the water bottle, I'll skip behind that rock, and I'll be ready to go."

Hans said, "Me, too," and commenced fastening their gear to their bicycles.

* * * * *

A couple of hours later they pedaled into Las Cruces, an arid, riverside town which showed many signs of growth. The mounting influence of the Spanish speaking people was apparent in the names of the streets and in the bilingual ads on most of the stores. Civic leaders were predicting the 1990 census would disclose a population of more than 70,000 residents, and since census workers were currently collecting the data, it would not take much longer to find out if they were right.

Going straight to the bike shop, Hans and Naomi made it in time to pay the 24 hour rental fee, and they traversed the mile and a half distance to the bus station by foot.

"You certainly don't see stars in the city like we did last night," said Naomi as they walked. She might go for a solid hour without saying a word, and then come out with a statement like that, giving a glimpse of the thoughts passing through her head.

"Not with our humidity and pollution, you don't. And, the higher altitude must make a difference," responded her husband, who being of a quiet nature, was similar to her in that respect.

Without willing it, his thought returned again to those of the morning. The houses, plants, and people they were passing were replaced in his mind's eye with a vision of a lifeless planet; ash filled sky; cold, darkened landscape; nuclear winter; a frigid hell. He wanted to dismiss the image as nothing more than a waking nightmare, but the sense of real possibility and menacing presence remained. It seemed as if colossal unseen forces were locked in battle around them; their lives were the prize to one, and the spoils to the other.

Naomi altered course to avoid a patch of broken glass on the sidewalk in front of her and bumped against him. That contact, her shoulder against his arm, led to a thought, like a rebirth, "We can act. We're not puppets, or pawns. We can choose our path." The sense of overwhelming forces,

caught in eternal conflict receded, and looking again at the world, his stride lengthened unconsciously as a sense of urgency concerning their mission claimed him. A sidelong glance at Naomi revealed nothing concerning her thoughts, but bent over slightly at the waist to offset the weight of her backpack, she had increased her pace as well.

They arrived at the squat, concrete block bus station, had their tickets stamped and luggage checked for St. Louis, and used the restrooms. When the bus pulled in with a rumble and a hiss, they boarded and chose seats near the front.

“We're in luck. It's not crowded,” said Naomi.

“Yeah, if it stays like this, when we feel like getting some sleep, we can split up and have two seats each,” replied Hans, waiting for her to slide next to the window before he sat down. “You know, I really do feel pretty good about the trip,” he continued, returning to their earlier conversation. “Whether we manage to pull this off or not, people like the idea.”

One of his earliest fears had been that residents of the western states would not be receptive to something that had originated in Missouri. “Californians consider themselves the trend setters. They won't think anything good can come from the mid-west,” he had presupposed, but he need not have felt so inferior. Even in California, people had found their concept for a peace demonstration to be a compelling one.

“The best thing,” he stated, “is that residents of Phoenix, Tucson, and Las Cruces are willing to see the route go north of them through Flagstaff and Albuquerque. They would rather not have to travel a couple of hundred miles, but they don't think that will keep too many people from participating. I guess they way they look at it, it beats going all the way to Washington, DC”

Naomi changed the subject this time. “It would have been nice for Joshua to have come with us.”

He thought about their son and the forlorn expression the boy had given them when they had departed. Joshua was eight years old, just finishing third grade. “Yeah, he wanted to come,” said Hans, “but, it would have been awkward for him to have missed the last two weeks of school. And, this was more of a work trip for us. We had a lot of time committed to meetings with local groups. Besides, it was nice for us to make the trip just with each other,” he defended their decision to leave the boy behind.

“We'll have to thank you parents for taking care of him while we were gone,” said Naomi.

“I think they enjoyed doing it, just for two weeks, for us to be out of the house so they could have some fun with the kid themselves.”

His parents had even offered to keep Joshua with them before Hans and Naomi had asked.

“Now Hans, she chided him, “Mom and Dad both have their own things to do. They had their time of taking care of children. Don't assume they want to be full time grandparents.”

“Are you kidding? If we didn't live in the same house, we might be lucky to get him back from them.”

“Hans!”

He shrugged, lifted his hands, palms up, and gave her a goony look. Laughing, she ended that discussion by merely stating, “I’ll be glad to see him.”

* * * * *

The bus slowed and came to a stop at an intersection. Hans roused himself and looked at their surroundings. “St. Louis County,” he thought. “We’ll be at the downtown station in thirty minutes.” They had left Las Cruces about noon the day before, and a clock on the bank outside said 6:30 pm. “We’ll be plenty on time for our meeting tomorrow morning, too,” and a slight surge of apprehension at the thought of the meeting caused him to straighten in his seat.

Naomi was sitting beside him, gazing through the glass, her hands folded tranquilly in her lap. Looking out the window again himself, Hans noticed how green the grass and the leaves on the trees were. “They must have gotten some rain while we were gone,” he surmised. He had missed the greenery during their trip through the southwest, where the dominant color was dry brown.

Everything seemed just as it had been when they had left. They drove past stores, gas stations, churches, fast food joints. “The structure of our lives,” he mused. “The signposts of our time. What will history say about us and our civilization? Are we generous, or greedy; considerate, or self-centered; kind, or calculating? No doubt, all of the above. What do we want history to say about us?”

Naomi appeared to be absorbed in her own reflections, and they had talked considerably in the preceding miles, so he let his questions go unasked. Too keyed up from returning home to doze anymore, he watched what was rolling past the bus for the remainder of the ride. On arrival at the station, the two stiff travelers got out, collected their backpacks at the side of the bus, and walked into the high ceilinged terminal. Finding a pay phone in the waiting area and depositing a quarter, Hans called home.

“Spiegel residence.”

“Hi, Dad.”

“Well, hello. How was the trip?”

“Fine. We just got in. How is everyone there?”

“We’re all just fine. I’ve got supper cooking. Mom and Joshua are out back piddling in the garden. Keith is here, too. He’s moving towards the door right now, and says he’ll pick you up.”

“Okay. We’ll watch for him on the 5th Street side of the station.”

“Keith was Hans’ younger brother. He visited fairly often at his parents’ home, but had his own apartment in the suburbs.

Harold, their father, relayed where the returning pair would wait to Keith, and came back on the line, “He’ll be right there.”

“Great. See you in a bit. Bye.” Hans hung up the phone.

Naomi had gathered what was happening from the conversation, and picking up her pack, she said, “Sounds like they’re okay.”

“Yeah, we can catch up on the news at supper. Dad’s cooking.”

“Good. I’m hungry. He always fixes lots.”

As they walked to the exit, they could see that the bus terminal had its usual variety of humanity. A couple of servicemen with close cropped hair were watching a program on the TV set fastened to the arm of a chair. A woman with several small children had gathered them near her, with their baggage at her feet. Hans could hear the oldest boy pleading with his mother for some money to play a video game. From the way she was shaking her head, it did not look like she was going to give in this time.

“Need a ride?” asked a cabbie as they stepped outside and placed their backpacks on the sidewalk.

“No, thanks,” answered Hans. “We’re waiting for someone.”

The cabbie shrugged, leaned back against his red and black vehicle, and resumed his conversation with another cab driver.

In less than ten minutes, they saw Keith’s car approaching. A little face was pressed against the window on the passenger’s side.

“Joshua’s with him!” exclaimed Naomi.

The car stopped at the curb, the door opened, and the boy ran to meet them. He had inherited his father’s light brown hair, but displayed the same strong profile and bushy eyebrows of his mother.

“Hi, Mom. Hi, Dad.”

Hans picked him up and gave him a hug, while Naomi joined in and kissed the boy on the cheek. Joshua squirmed, prompting his father to put him down. The lad was obviously much too old to be picked up and held.

Naomi said, “We missed you, Joshua. How have you been?”

“Real good. Yesterday was my last day at school.”

Keith stepped close and shook hands with his brother, then he exchanged a hug with Naomi and said, “Welcome back. Supper should be ready by the time we get home.”

“Well, let’s go,” said Hans.

They put their packs in the trunk, climbed into the car, and as Keith started the engine, Joshua

busily began telling them about his first day off from school.

“Me and Gary - “

“Gary and I,” corrected his mother.

“Yeah, Gary and I.” Gary was a few months older than Joshua and lived two houses up the street from the Spiegels. “We started a new game.”

“Oh, what are you planing?” asked Naomi.

“Space station. We started our hydroponics tank today.”

Hans looked at his wife. She had that, “Where does he come up with all this”? Expression on her face. Sure enough, “Where did you learn how to start a hydroponics tank?” she asked.

“That book on outer space that Uncle Keith gave me,” answered the boy.

Keith was an engineer in the aerospace division at McDonnell Douglass, and had given Joshua the book for his last birthday.

“They pulled the old wash tub out of the basement for their tank,” commented Keith.

“Uh huh. And we're growing algae,” reported Joshua. “Gary's dad cut their grass yesterday. We filled the tub with water and put some of the grass in it. It's coming right along.”

“Great imaginations these kids have,” thought Hans. He asked, “What are you going to do with the algae?”

“Eat it.”

Hans laughed out loud.

“When I was your age,” he said, “I wouldn't even eat broccoli.”

Naomi looked at him with surprise and said, “You like broccoli.”

“Yeah, I do now, but when I was little, they couldn't make me eat it.”

Before they knew it, Keith was stopping the car in front of a large brick residence that stood in the middle of the block, flanked by two fully grown sycamore trees. Lois and Harold welcomed them at the door with another round of hugging and handshaking, and the travelers' backpacks went no farther than the hardwood floor of the front hall, as Hans' parents then ushered everyone to the kitchen where supper was ready and waiting.

Harold asked Joshua to lead them in prayer, after which, as they started filling their plates, they gray haired senior inquired, “Well, can you tell us some more about your trip?”

“I think we both feel good about it,” responded Hans. Naomi nodded her head in agreement.

“People were interested in the idea. They were supportive, and expressed a willingness to cooperate. That is about as much as we could hope for at this stage. We'll find out tomorrow whether we really have something or not.”

That was all Hans wanted to say, as his mounting apprehension was making it difficult to swallow his food. Turning to his mother, he prompted, “Joshua was telling about the algae he and Gary are growing. How is the garden doing?”

“Oh, pretty well,” answered Lois readily, that being one of her favorite hobbies. “It rained a couple of days ago, which helped everything. We might even have tomatoes by the Fourth of July, and that's still our lettuce we're eating.”

The conversation went around the table, each of them describing their various activities. After giving some additional details from their trip, Naomi asked if anyone from her church had called while they were gone, and when Harold told her that one of the members of her congregation had been hospitalized, she questioned him about that with deep concern. Following supper, they retired to the family room, and continued the conversation.

The lights outside, along the alley, had been on for about an hour when Naomi decided it was time to start Joshua towards bed. Turning a deaf ear to his protests, she sent the boy upstairs, and a few minutes later, she and Hans went to his room to get him settled under the covers. They sat on the edge of his old, metal frame bed and listened to one final story he had to share with them. As usual, that led to another, and then to another. By the time they returned downstairs, Keith was claiming he had a full day in store so he soon departed. It was not long after that, Hans and Naomi, neither of them having slept well on the bus, said good night to his parents, and went downstairs to their bedroom in the basement.

* * * * *

Hans awoke early. He had had a hard time falling asleep, as tired as he was, so full was his mind with thoughts of the coming day. He mentally began to go through the list of people they wanted to include in their meeting.

There was Victor Carter with the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign. That organization had peaked in the mid '80s, and while the arms negotiations since then had occasionally showed some promise, the arms race continued as the main event for the superpowers. The Freeze Campaign office was in St. Louis so they had met Victor on previous occasions.

Joyce Harris, with Clergy and Laity Concerned, otherwise known as CALC, was also someone with whom Hans and Naomi were already acquainted.

Roger Burdick was with the Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy. He had probably been active in the nuclear disarmament movement longer than any of them, yet Hans knew him only by reputation.

Dr. Elaine Foster was with the Physicians Alliance Against Nuclear Weapons. She was on the west coast, and Hans had never met her either.

Then there were Claire Brown with People Power and Willy Lee with Ground Zero.

The peace movement consisted of more organizations than these, but these had developed the most extensive networks of citizens around the country. They collectively represented several hundreds of thousands of active members, a volunteer army for nonviolent social action.

As Hans considered what he had to say to them, doubt and uncertainty assailed his mind again. “Who am I to propose a national demonstration for peace? Will they listen to me? What if they say, ‘This is silly, why are you wasting our time?’”

More insidious than the immediate fear of rejection was an underlying dread of the dangers and risks that were part of the path; violence, anger, and vested interests that would try to stamp them out. He turned so he laid flat on his back, and a quick prayer helped dispel the paralysis that threatened to seize his mind and body.

As his thoughts came unchained, he reflected on the circuitous route by which he had come to this point in his life. Ten years ago, he had been in graduate school working towards a doctorate in anthropology. He had discovered that the global search for minerals and oil, the logging and deforestation, and the growing appetite for natural resources was pushing the remaining enclaves of indigenous people and cultural diversity into extinction. His determination to try to make others aware of the loss of these different ways of living had persuaded him to leave school before finishing his degree. The fact that his faculty advisor had refused to approve his idea for a dissertation had been a major factor in that decision. His proposed dissertation, in the view of his advisor, was more about politics than about anthropology.

He had been lucky to find a job with a library that provided enough of an income for his basic needs yet left him unencumbered to pursue what he felt was his real work. The next sixteen months had been spent researching and writing a book that documented the cases in which societies that had maintained their simple lifestyles for thousands of years were being driven from their lands and deprived of the means of preserving their cultures, Native Americans being just one example, and it had taken an additional year to find a publisher. Once it had appeared, the book could hardly have been more ignored. Oh, it had received good reviews, but Hans had discovered that few people were interested in reading how their way of life made it impossible for others to maintain their way of life.

Naomi had helped him through that rough period. She was a new minister at a nearby church who believed strongly that witness to their faith meant showing one's love through actions in the world. They had met while he had been writing the book, and had been married while he had still been looking for a publisher. Her trust and confidence in him had been a buttress against his feelings of bitterness and self-doubt when the book had failed to sell.

For the next couple of years, Hans' primary social involvement had been through the peace movement. In his mind, the threat of a nuclear holocaust and the loss of all life had overshadowed what was happening to the world's indigenous people.

Then, two years after Joshua was born, he had finally found a way to integrate his social concerns with his employment. He and Naomi had been visiting with a neighbor, Connie Miller, who had the difficult responsibility of raising two sons by herself, when the conversation had turned to the recent flare-ups of violence at some of the abortion clinics. Connie had shared her fear that her sixteen year old son would succumb to peer pressure to show he was a man by having sex. Giving her friend a complement, Naomi had stated that the values Connie had given her son while he was growing up were

his best hope for resisting that pressure. Then Hans had said that it was a shame someone did not talk with groups of young men about their attitudes towards women, sex, abortion, and having babies; to try to redirect that peer pressure.

Connie had said, “Why don't you do it?”

He had taken her seriously and, tapping into his social sciences background, had developed the outline for a sex-education program. Maintaining her support, Connie had recruited another woman who was active in the Parent-Teachers Organization and who had contacts with the Board of Education. They had managed to get the Board to approve testing it as a pilot project at one school.

After a couple of ground laying meetings with the young men, Hans had found that a nonjudgmental attitude and his own openness were important in encouraging them to reveal their thoughts and feelings. One idea they had displayed was that they were somehow scoring points by “getting insider her pants.” He had provoked considerable discussion and emotion when he had suggested that sometimes the best way to show love for a woman was by not having sex.

In addition to the growth he had seen in these young men, Hans had been rewarded when three years after the program had begun and had been adopted throughout the school district, the incidence of abortion among young, unmarried women had shown a significant decline at clinics in the St. Louis area. At that point, his work had received national attention along with invitations to help establish similar programs in other school districts. The majority of his time the last couple of years had been devoted to providing consultation to schools that wanted to do just that.

As he faced another critical point in his life, his biggest misgiving about his past was that his dedication to social issues, one cause after another and often several at one time, may have detracted from his ability to give to his own family. There had been times, when if they didn't do it for him, he had to remind himself that they were his number one priority and, in truth, his biggest source of satisfaction. At any rate, fortifying his self image with recollections of past actions and accomplishments helped reassure Hans that he was prepared to meet with the representatives of the national peace organizations.

The sounds of people stirring upstairs proclaimed that the day had begun, and soon thereafter, Hans heard water running through the pipes. When he and Naomi had fixed a room in the basement for their bedroom, they had insulated and paneled the walls, but the pipes that ran next to the ceiling were still exposed.

“Dad's getting in the shower,” he thought.

Naomi got up and started sorting the dirty clothes they had brought back from their trip, to put them in the wash.

“You had better wait with that until everyone finishes taking their shower,” he said.

“Okay, but they need to be washed sometime today.” Letting the clothes remain in the basket, she found some old articles to wear, and went upstairs.

Hans allowed himself to lie in bed a while longer, then he got up, did some exercises, and took his shower. Everyone pretty much moved on their own schedule in the morning, especially during the

summer.

He was sitting at the kitchen table, contemplating the upcoming meeting, when Joshua came down, and fixed himself some cold cereal. As he finished eating, the boy broke into Hans' thoughts and asked, "Do you want to see our hydroponics tank?"

"Sure," responded his father, returning the present.

Putting their dishes into the sink, they went outside to the back yard and walked to the old wash tub. Inside was a yucky, watery mess.

"Hey, that's neat," said Hans.

"Joshua started stirring around in it with a stick, swirling the soggy grass into a miniature whirlpool. We're only going to pretend eat it," he admitted.

Holding back another laugh, Hans said, "I might just pretend to eat it even if it was real algae." Having satisfied his curiosity concerning the boys' game, he decided to examine the garden. There was only a small space in the back yard that got enough sun to grow vegetables, but the plants they had were healthy; green, golf ball sized tomatoes were already developing in clusters on some of them.

The boy dropped his stick into the muck, and followed him, going on about his space station game; things like airlock entries, solar power packs, and space litter. Hans was glad to talk with his son. It helped him keep his mind from dwelling too much on the impending meeting.

A further diversion was heralded when Joshua's red-headed friend, Gary, appeared at the back gate and called, "Hi, Josh." Coming into their yard, the freckled-and-proud-of-it boy included Mr. Spiegel in his greeting, and asked his friend, "What do you want to do today?"

Hans remained outside for a little while longer, then, leaving the boys to their play, he went inside and found Naomi sitting on the couch in the family room. She had gotten the laundry started, and was taking advantage of the free moment to catch up on her mail. "Let me know when you're ready to make the call," she told him.

It was still too early, but he was ready. Hans felt like a car that was running in neutral with the accelerator pressed flat to the floor.

Going downstairs to another part of the basement which had been converted into a small office, and sitting on his squeaky swivel chair, he rumbled across the concrete floor and positioned himself at his desk. Aside from those items, the office furniture consisted of a 2-drawer file cabinet, a straight backed wooden chair, an overloaded bookshelf, and a table on which sat a computer and printer. He went through a stack of notes and folders that pertained to some just completed programs in outstate school districts, reorganized them, and threw out some papers that were no longer needed.

Finally, the time arrived, and he called Naomi. Coming downstairs with alacrity and joining him in his office, she sat in the straight backed chair and gave him an expectant look.

Hans took a deep breath, and said, "Right," and picking up the telephone receiver, he dialed the operator, and gave her the numbers of the people invited to the meeting. A quick look at Naomi was

rewarded with an encouraging smile. He punched the button on the voice box by the phone, leaned back in his chair, and listened to the electronic sounds that preceded the connections.

As the operator made contact with each of the people on the list, Hans greeted them and asked them to wait until the group was complete before speaking. "Oh, well," he thought, when the secretary at the People Power office expressed Ms. Brown's regrets at being unable to attend the meeting. "At least we'll save the charge on that one."

Once each of the others was on, he asked if they could hear Naomi and him all right, and after each of them had responded, he asked if anyone had had difficulty hearing any of the others. The connection was clear, so Hans thanked the operator, who then hung up.

Keeping the reins on his excitement, he began by expressing his gratitude for their having arranged their schedules to meet that morning.

Hardly hearing him out, a deep, gruff voice with a touch of impatience came from the speaker. It was Roger Burdick, the SANE representative. "Your letter said you wanted to speak with us about trying to organize a human chain all the way across the country as a demonstration for peace."

"Well, it's started," thought Hans. He said, "Yes, that's right, and Naomi and I just got back from a two week trip through the southwest in which we talked with some of the peace groups at the grass roots level about getting enough people to join hands across the nation." Hans was especially glad now that Naomi and he had been able to make that trip. "We generally got a very good response. I think people are a little tired of having to travel all the way to Washington, DC to take part in national demonstrations. Especially where the route might go right through their own city, the enthusiasm was very high."

Roger came on again, "Well, that's very nice. And I don't doubt that the people with whom you spoke thought it was an interesting idea, but you're talking about a tremendous amount of time and expense to organize this, if it can even be done. Why would we want to devote so much effort to this single event?"

"That may be the first question to answer," replied Hans. He imagined the others at their offices around the country, tied together by the thin strands of the telephone system. "If we can decide it is a worthwhile thing to do, we can then talk about how to do it."

Victor Carter spoke next. The sound of his voice was a little cleaner since his was a local connection. "You stated in your letter that you felt this event would 'demonstrate the oneness of humanity' and would 'clarify the underlying unity in the basic values of the United States.' That seems pretty vague to me. I don't see how this would help stop the nuclear arms race."

Hans felt himself getting hot, and he leaned forward in his chair, but an inner note of caution warned him against getting into an argument with Victor. Instead he said, "I could try to expand on my view of the purpose, but I would like to hear from the others first, to see what their reaction to the idea is."

Naomi spoke so softly only he could hear, "Good."

There was a brief pause, then two voices started at the same time. One stopped, and Joyce

Harris, with CALC, continued, "One thing we're dealing with is that people have come to expect that nuclear weapons are simply going to be a part of our lives. Even after what happened last summer, what you heard was 'See, they weren't used. The Soviets pulled back because they were afraid we would annihilate them.' It's like we have become numb to the possibility of destruction on a scale that we can scarcely imagine."

Several other noncommittal comments were made, then Willy Lee, with Ground Zero, spoke. His speech was strained, and the deep emotion in his voice was plain. "People have gotten used to nuclear weapons. The arms race just keeps on going while we talk and hold our rallies. Anymore, I don't think we're going to make it. It's just a matter of time before we use them, and that will be the end of it."

Hans could sympathize with what Willy had confessed. There had been a number of times, especially last year, when he had felt the same way. Roger started to say something about how many minutes till midnight the Doomsday Clock of the Atomic Scientists showed, the closer to midnight, the greater the probability of nuclear war, and Hans' mind flashed back to the previous summer.

He had been in his basement office, trying to escape the heat, when the next door neighbor had called and had told him to turn on the news. A sense of foreboding had struck him as soon as he had heard the commentator describe a coup that was taking place in Saudi Arabia.

By 1989, the world oil glut had disappeared, and the oil companies had started admitting that they could maintain domestic levels of production for only a few more years. The United States was relying increasingly on foreign oil despite all the talk in previous years about becoming energy independent. What had made this news doubly bad was that production of oil in the Soviet Union was declining. The natural gas being piped from Siberia was sustaining the Soviet industry, but the eastern block countries were starting to feel the pinch.

By that evening the reports had claimed that the coup in Saudi Arabia was being led by a fanatical Shiite Muslim group, possibly with support from Iran. Chances were the Sunni majority would have recovered control on its own, but the US had decided not to take any chances, and had begun military operations to restore order. The presence of US troops in the Saudi capital, had provoked a storm of protest from the Soviet Union, as well as from the other Arab countries. Perhaps it had been Soviet fear that the United States would use the coup to strengthen its influence in the Middle East that had pushed their hand. Any any rate, Soviet military forces had moved towards the Persian Gulf.

During the next couple of days, Hans had begun to feel like he was living through a scene from a movie that had become real, and his muscles tightened at the memory. Rumors of a military confrontation between the superpowers had begun flying wildly. Then a Soviet reconnaissance plane had been shot down over the oil terminals on the Persian Gulf. The supermarkets that day had actually been swamped with people who were stocking up on food, and the highways from some cities had become choked with cars.

Hans remembered agonizing at the time that that was the worst thing to do. There was nothing like evacuating our cities to make the Soviets suspect we were about to strike. With an effort, he pulled his thoughts back to the meeting.

Roger had just finished speaking, and Hans jumped in. "I've had my moments, too, of thinking

that we might not make it. Who knows? Maybe we're sinful enough, or misguided enough, or we're just so close to the edge that, by accident, we will do that terrible thing. And, asking people to join hands across the nation may do nothing to move us towards disarmament. But, can you imagine doing it?" Hans could feel the emotion coursing through his voice, and he let it flow unrestrained, "Can you imagine standing in line, holding hands with the people on either side of you, and that line stretching all the way from ocean to ocean, from coast to coast? Can you imagine doing that?"

"I agree." The high pitched, nasal voice sounded like Dr. Foster. She was not a native Californian. "Efforts to bring about nuclear disarmament have been going on just about as long as the arms race, and where are we today? We have a greater capacity to destroy ourselves now than at any other moment in history. If we saw ourselves as part of a bigger whole, if we felt the oneness of humanity, as Hans and Naomi are suggesting, maybe we wouldn't try so hard to do that. I would like to see us forge this human chain."

Joyce Harris, their friend from CALC, spoke at some length and expressed the same sentiment, concluding, "To say it more positively, if we felt the oneness of humanity, maybe we would try harder at peacemaking, maybe we would be more concerned about the needs of others."

"It sounds good to me," said Willy. Having vented his feelings earlier, the representative from Ground Zero was ready to accept the suggested course of action.

"A different kind of national demonstration for peace might be to have people take petitions expressing opposition to the arms race to the local offices of their US Representatives and Senators," interposed Victor. "We could coordinate it so it happens in all fifty states at the same time."

Hans gritted his teeth and thought, "Victor, you rat, don't do that." Rather than respond himself, he waited fervently to hear if someone else would defend the concept of joining hands, and his spirits bounded when, after an endless second, Joyce picked up the gauntlet.

Her speech was deliberate, with occasional brief pauses, as if she was carefully considering each word. "That would lose the symbolic value of a human chain, the symbol of unity. Plus, it's too commonplace. Presenting petitions to our representatives would be nowhere near as dramatic as people gathering in a line all the way across the continent."

"Really," agreed Willy. "Besides, the system is stacked against us. We present our petitions, and who do our so-called representatives listen to? The arms industry lobbyists."

Dr. Foster restated her support for the idea of the human chain, and recognizing that the group had dismissed his counter proposal, there was no response from Victor, but looming before them now was another barrier.

"Do you realize what you're talking about?" Roger's gruff voice still carried a note of impatience. He was not content to talk about a mere idea. "It is more than 3,000 miles across the country. I don't assume you mean to include Hawaii and Alaska. If you allow five feet per person, arms outstretched, you need at least 1,000 people per mile, which means a total of over three million people. And, you're not going to get everyone exactly where we want them. You're really talking about closer to five million people to make this work."

"That's what I like about it," Willy cut in. "It's a challenge."

That brought some laughter.

Roger; however, did not consider it funny. He continued direly, “Just think about the kind of message you'll make if there are hundreds of miles of broken chain. How much unity will you demonstrate if the chain is incomplete?”

Feeling that he should respond to that, Hans said, “Your point is valid, Roger. As well as a challenge, we would be accepting a risk that results which fall far short of our expectations may produce a message exactly the opposite of the one we hope to make.

“Your estimate of five million people is probably correct. You may remember back in '83 several of these human chains were attempted. The first was with 30,000 women at Greenham Common in England. The attempt to encircle the nuclear weapons plant at Rocky Flats, Colorado after that did not quite succeed, although the 17,000 people who took part should have been enough. The biggest was the 64 mile chain that was completed between Stuttgart and the US Air Force base in West Germany. That had more than 100,000 people.”

“I don't think the number of participants would be out of reach,” said Victor. He sounded impressed by the homework Hans had done. “More than five million people took part in the last Fourth of July celebration here in St. Louis.”

“But, you can't relate the number of people who turn out for some kind of entertainment, or celebration to the number who will attend a rally,” Joyce reminded them, exposing some vexation through her thoughtful manner. “How many times have we organized demonstrations when we thought we did well if a couple of thousand people showed up? You see several times that many at a baseball game. And, that's if your team is having a losing season. When a city has a winning team, expect a stadium with 50,000 fans in it.”

Willy vented some of his frustration at what he perceived was the general apathy of the public, and while Hans could sympathize again with the representative from Ground Zero, he felt like saying, “Put a cork in it, Willy. Let's move on.”

As he was wondering how to redirect the group, Dr. Foster spoke with her high nasal twang, “While getting five million people to a Fourth of July celebration may not be the best way to predict participation in a peace demonstration, I agree with Victor that the number of participants is probably not as big a challenge as the distribution. Seeing to it that each of thousands of miles has enough people to form an unbroken chain, especially in the western states,” she paused for a moment, “it would be a miracle if we pulled it off.”

“I'll send copies of a map with a proposed route to each of you,” said Hans. He wanted to give them something concrete to consider. “It starts in Los Angeles, goes through Flagstaff, Albuquerque, Oklahoma City, St. Louis and on to Washington, DC and the east coast. I think the local groups along that line would need to help decide if we use the state roads, or the interstates, and how to get off the highways to connect through the towns and cities along the way. In some places, the interstates would be the best route, but in some states, non-motorized use of the interstate highways is against the law, and we'll have to apply for permission to use them from the state highway commissions.”

“You'd need at least a year to do all of that,” growled Roger through the voice box.

“Yes, we are probably looking a year down the road to be able to put all of the pieces together.” Hans had a ready response, “That would actually work out pretty well. The longest day of the year is June 21st, and it would help to have a day with as many hours of sunlight as possible, to give us enough time to get people into position.”

“At least this is the age of computers,” commented Dr. Foster. “I can’t imagine trying to plot the distribution of that many people without them, but maybe it is possible.” Her voice lifted as if she was visualizing the line taking shape before her.

“You know that I can’t commit the Freeze Campaign to the project by myself,” said Victor, bringing their thoughts back to the immediate needs of the meeting.

“Oh, absolutely,” said Hans. By this time, his nervousness had passed, and he was actually getting a thrill from the interaction. “As much as we would like from anyone at this point is their personal commitment, and that they will present it to their Boards for co-sponsorship.”

“But you haven’t really defined what you mean by ‘co-sponsorship,’” stated Victor.

“Basically, it means accepting the project as one of your own,” replied Hans. “That includes communicating this to your members, devoting some of your staff time to help organize it, and sharing in expenses such as publicity, transportation, and printing.”

That was as honest an answer as he could give. While that soaked in, he added, “I’m prepared to work full time on the organizing for the next year, in cooperation with your staffs.” That demonstrated his own commitment to the project. He also coaxed them with the suggestion, “This may provide you with an opportunity to build your own organizations and to expand your fund raising.”

“We could divide expenses according to our memberships,” offered Joyce.

“That means the biggest groups will be paying the largest part of the bill,” protested Victor.

“Do you know a better way to do it?” she asked.

The interchange concerning the division of expenses, transmitted by the voice box, continued for some minutes, and sitting in his basement office, Hans had a growing feeling of helplessness as it appeared that the decision to proceed with the demonstration might boil down to a matter of money.

After several unsuccessful efforts, Willy finally managed to enter the discussion, “That’s what we need is a budget. My Board won’t approve sharing the expenses of something without knowing how much it’s going to cost. Do you have some figures we can use for that, Hans?”

He confessed with chagrin, “No, I’m sorry. That’s something I’m not prepared to give you,” and mentally kicked himself for not having anticipated that most basic question. Turning to Naomi, he found that all she could give him was a grimace and a shrug of her shoulders. His brain started churning in a panic to think of something quick, and he was gripped with a terrible sense that he might lose them yet.

“Well, actually,” Willy spoke again, “this is the kind of thing that should pay for itself. Not that

we can charge at the gate for admission, since there won't be a gate, but if each participant would contribute just one dollar, we would raise a heck of a lot of money. What I'll suggest to my Board is that we do at least one initial mailing, with a request for contributions, and if the response is good, we'll probably be in for the ride.”

“I'll present it to my Board the same way,” stated Dr. Foster. “At least that will give it a chance to get started. Hopefully, it will snowball on its own after that.”

“I owe you one, Willy,” thought Hans, feeling like he had been pulled from the fire, as both Victor and Joyce declared their willingness to present the proposal to their Boards on that basis.

“How about you, Roger?” asked Hans to get everyone's reaction.

“I'll present it to my Board the same way,” answered the SANE representative, who had remained silent during that entire discussion. For some reason, he sounded very non-committal, but Hans decided not to press him any further.

At that point, he would have liked to have started bringing the meeting to closure, while the going was good; however, he ventured to add, “In terms of proceeding with the organizing, there is one other matter I need to raise before we adjourn. We should maybe have had some church representatives participate in this meeting to make it clear from the outset,” Naomi shifted position in her chair, “but, I think it is important that the meaning of our hands across the nation be broader than simply an expression of the peace movement, especially of the peace movement as an effort to bring about nuclear disarmament. This event can have a wider, deeper impact than that, and I think the involvement of religious organizations would help make that happen.”

Joyce gave her answer, “Certainly, that doesn't create any problems for me. Most of the peace events in which I have participated were co-sponsored, or endorsed by church bodies.”

There were sounds of assent from a couple of the others, and Hans felt an odd sense of relief. He knew that many people preferred keeping religion out of their lives, or were uncomfortable with public expressions of faith.

Carrying Joyce's comment a step further, Victor said, “Yes, I see no reason not to use the churches to help garner support for our cause.”

Naomi cleared her throat and spoke. It was the first time during the meeting that she had addressed the group. “I don't like to think of it that way, that we are going to 'use' the church. I would rather hope that we would be used, through the church, to do God's will. Oh, I know it doesn't always work that way. Sometimes the church is more concerned with the material, self-serving ways of the world than the loving, self-giving ways of the Spirit. But, as important as it is for us to affirm the oneness of humanity, it is important for us to affirm our oneness with God. The church may be a human institution, and fallible just as each of us is, but the church is an important ingredient for that affirmation to take place, for us to know that we are one in the Spirit. That is why we would like for the churches to work with the peace groups in co-sponsoring Hands Across the Nation.”

Hans thought “Well, whether any of the believes what she just said, or not, I believe it. That was beautiful.”

He took his attention from the voice box to look at his wife. She was breathing heavily, sitting on the edge of her seat, her back as straight as the chair's.

There was a bit of an awkward silence that was broken when, with a waggish tone, Willy said, "Besides, churches ought to be good for some money to help cover our expenses."

Laughter, much of it Willy's burst from the speaker again. Although it cost her to do so, even Naomi smiled at Willy's earthy realism.

Not hearing any other responses to Naomi's statement, Hans said, "Well, that may be as far as we can go with our planning today. There are a lot of other matters to consider, but I don't think there is any point in dealing with them right now. Can each of you set aside this time, one month from today, for another meeting? Hopefully, your Boards can act by that time."

The others expressed their willingness to meet again in one month, and Hans made sure they knew they could call, or write, before then if they needed any additional information.

Before they broke, Joyce spoke again, "Hans and Naomi, I really appreciate what you have started. And thank you, Naomi, for what you said."

A couple of other words of thanks were given, farewells were exchanged, and Hans hung up. Looking at the clock on the bookshelf beside his desk, he saw that fifty minutes had elapsed since the meeting had begun. It had seemed longer than that. They would see a charge of about \$250 for the call on their next phone bill, but he could not think of a better way that money could have been spent.

Exhilaration flooded through his body. They had passed the first hurdle, and turning towards his wife, he knew that he was wearing a grin that spread from ear to ear. His euphoria was the result of more than having won a foothold, of having gained some allies who were interested enough to carry the proposal to the Boards of their organizations; it was also the result of having actualized close to a year's worth of dreaming to the extent that the dream had been shared and expressed. Even if they tripped on the very next hurdle, at least they had tried.

"You did good. They did good, too," said Naomi, smiling back as she offered her assessment of the meeting. "The only one I'm not so sure about is Roger. It never did sound as if he accepted the idea like the rest of them."

"Yeah, I think you're right. And, that's a shame because SANE has been in this for a long time, and they ought to be part of Hands. Maybe he thinks we're like the new kids on the block who are trying to take over."

"That could be," said Naomi. "At any rate, we might want to contact a couple of members of the SANE Board to develop some additional support before they vote on whether to co-sponsor the event, or not."

That was Naomi, ever the practical one. Making a note to follow through on that suggestion, Hans recognized again that innumerable tasks would need to be completed in the next year to pull it together, and that a lot of what would need to be done they did not even realize yet because they had not gotten that far. That's what made devising a budget so difficult. How could one accurately estimate the cost of something that had never been done before?

“Now, I have a hospital call to make, and I need to stop by the church to start getting ready for Sunday,” stated Naomi, who stood up, though she paused before moving towards the stairs.

Accepting the opportunity, Hans rose also, and put his arms around her. His wife was of average height and build, and was wearing a pair of light blue slacks and a multi-colored blouse.

As she hugged him back, she spoke softly into his chest, “You don't think I was too preachy, do you?”

“No way. I'm glad you said it. That's the kind of thing that helps us get our heads out of the ruts.”

“Well, I just don't want to sound like I think I have all of the answers; you know, 'holier than thou.’” She pulled far enough away to look him in the face from under her thick dark eyebrows. This was a sensitive issue with Naomi, how to witness, without wearing people out.

Hans was stumped for a moment, then with a burst of inspiration, he decided to follow Willy's lead, and said teasingly, “That's okay, sweetheart, I know you're not holier than me.”

She said, “Oh, you,” and gave him a frown, but she couldn't keep the corners of her mouth from turning up. Then she said, “Thanks,” and reached up to pull his face close to hers to give him a kiss.

He knew his face was flushed as they parted. “I'll take a turn cooking tonight,” he said, trying to bring his blood pressure back to normal. “Supper should be ready around 5:30.”

“That's nice.” Her cheeks had flared a bit, too. “I'll be home by then. I'm going to wait until tomorrow to start getting caught up on visits to our shut-ins.”

She gave him one final squeeze, then climbed the steps to the first floor and departed. Hans sat back down and rolled his chair to the table. Returning his thoughts to the meeting while it was still fresh in his mind, he pressed the ON button of his computer, positioned himself in front of the keyboard, and typed a letter expressing his appreciation, again, for their contribution to the meeting. A reference to the map of the proposed route that he would enclose with the letter was made; then, retrieving their names and addresses from storage, he watched as the letters started to come off the printer.

Once the letters were ready, it took just a minute to get his bicycle up the basement steps to the back yard, where Joshua and Gary were still playing, engrossed in some sort of game in which they were running in slow motion. He told them he would be gone for a short while, and asked them to stay by the house. Without breaking stride, Joshua gave him a slow motioned wave in response.

Hans enjoyed going to the print shop. It was a family run enterprise that gave its customers a lot of personal attention, and the quick bike ride allowed him a chance to burn off some of his excess energy. When he arrived, he chained his bicycle to a post by the entrance and went inside. Standing near the front door, was the slender, curly haired son who was taking on more and more of the responsibilities for running the business, and Hans showed him the map before putting it on the copier.

“If we can get just five million people to assemble along this line, Bill, we will form a human

chain all the way across the country,” he announced.

One of the few people to whom the idea had already been divulged, the young businessman looked at the map, then at Hans, and said, “You mean you’re actually going to do it?”

“We’re going to try. It might take us a year, but we’re going to try.”

“Well, let me know when it happens. I’ll be there.”

Bill stepped behind the counter, and let Hans proceed with the copy machine. Already behind the counter was Liz, the sharp-eyed matriarch and ramrod behind the business. Above the clatter of the big copier, Hans could hear her say something in irritation about the customer who had left just before he had entered. Apparently that customer had made a critical comment about some of their work.

When Hans’ last copy came out of the machine, he retrieved the original, picked up the duplicates, and stepped to the cash register to pay for them.

Turning to take his money, but still speaking to her son, Liz declared, “I could count on my fingers the number of times someone really thanked me for our work.”

“Yeah, that’s the way it goes,” responded Bill. “It seems like few people ever show appreciation for what you do.” Looking at Hans, he said, “It might be different for you. You’re involved in these public service kinds of events, saving lives. You probably get a lot of positive words.”

Hans thought about the recognition he had received and the appreciation that had been expressed. Then he said, “All I know is, I wouldn’t be able to do what I do, if you didn’t do what you do.” He gestured towards the printing machines, and added, “Think about all the fliers, and brochures, and copies of letters you have made for me. None of those programs, rallies, or events would have happened if not for all of this.”

Bill and Liz were both looking at him, smiling. Hans added, “It takes all kinds,” and smiled back at them. “Well, thanks. See you,” he concluded, heading for the door.

“Thank you.”

“See you, Hans.”

Since the post office was only one block away, he left his bicycle chained in front of the print shop, and walking across the street, he stuffed the copies of the maps into the envelopes with the letters, and dropped them into the mail slot. As he unchained his bicycle and started to return home, Hans began to consider how he should word the letter to the church leaders, inviting their participation in the event.

Lost in thought as he pedaled, several blocks from the printers, he was suddenly jolted back to his surroundings by a horn blasting just behind him. His shoulders hunched and his eyes squinted involuntarily in anticipation of the coming impact. Then, as the car roared past, precariously close, and then slowed for the upcoming traffic signal, Hans felt a surge of anger. He was next to the parked cars lane, not impeding traffic in any way, and for an instant he had an urge to try to catch the car where it was stopped less than fifty feet away; although, he was actually relieved, a second later, as it pulled

away and that possibility disappeared.

Fantasies of what he would like to do to the driver of that car were running through his mind, “Oh, for a miniature rocket launcher,” and his nerves were still jangling, blocks away from the encounter, when he gave a short laugh, and relaxed. “Oh well,” he said under his breath. “It takes all kinds.”

* * * * *

Gary had gone on home for supper, and Joshua sat in the kitchen watching Hans chop celery. Once it was chopped, the celery was thrown on top of the carrots which were already steaming. Brown rice was cooking at a slow boil on another burner.

As he started to cut the broccoli, Hans thought, “Okay, the letter to the church leaders is written. If Naomi looks at it tonight, we can get them in the mail tomorrow. They will go to at least twenty Christian denominations, the Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, and the Hindus. Boy, even that isn't going to get it to every religious organization.”

He looked at his son, and noticing that the boy had a slightly troubled expression, Hans asked, “Do you want to help set the table?”

Joshua got five plates from the pantry, and as he started setting them at their places, said, “If we were in outer space, we wouldn't be eating with plates. Everything would float away.”

“Are you guys still playing space station?”

“Yeah. We were practicing our space walking, then Gary said he wanted to stop that and play cowboys and Indians instead, but I said that was a dumb game.”

“So that's what's bugging you,” thought his father. “You had a falling out with Gary.” He said, “Well, it may be a dumb game, but it is nice to take turns doing what the other person wants to do, too.”

“But he always wants to be the cowboy, and I'm the one who always gets killed.” The boy sounded hurt that his father had not taken his side in the dispute.

“Maybe you can show Gary how to play cowboys and Indians without anyone getting killed.” Joshua's face brightened. That was a novel idea. “Maybe you can show him how to do that Indian dance we saw under the Arch last year.”

“Yeah, and the Indian changing. Hey ah hey ah hey ah hey ah.”

Joshua was still chanting as he put the silverware by the plates when Harold walked in.

“Hi, Grandpa.”

“Hello, Josh. It sounds like you're an Indian.” Harold was an administrator for a local day care center. Having raised four children of his own, as well as from his experiences at work, he knew how to take these things in stride.

“Supper will be ready in twenty minutes,” said Hans.

“Good enough. I'll be in the family room reading the newspaper.” Harold liked to change into casual clothes after work, and to relax with the newspaper when it was not his turn to cook.

Shortly thereafter, Naomi and Lois entered. Lois taught music at the community college; although, since the summer session did not begin for another couple of weeks, she was currently on break. As they passed through the kitchen, Hans heard his mother telling Naomi about a friend she had visited that day who had cancer. He declared that he would be calling them to supper in a few minutes.

The rice and vegetables were ready at just about the same time, and completing his service, Joshua let everyone know it was time to eat. As Hans served the food, after Naomi led them in prayer, Lois finished telling about her friend. She sadly described how the woman was being cared for at home now that the cancer had progressed to the point that the doctors had discontinued treatment, and were just trying to minimize the pain.

“It's good she can be at home with her family, if she only has a few days left,” remarked Naomi.

Hans did not feel so much like brining up what he had to say after that, but Lois changed the subject herself by asking how their meeting had gone. Like floodgates released, Naomi and he recounted what had transpired, and how the representatives of the peace groups had responded to their proposal.

“So none of them rejected the idea, but some of them were more receptive than others,” said Harold.

“That's a fair way to summarize it,” replied Hans.

“What could there be to the idea that any of those groups would object to, or anyone else for that matter,” Lois wanted to know. That the proposal was her son's was cause for a certain bias; although, that was something of a two-way street, and Hans would be the first to admit that much of his sense of social justice had come from his parents.

“They might not have objected to the idea itself,” said Naomi, “but, there is a matter of turf, and which peace organization is doing what, and who gets credit for it. Outside of the peace movement there are other vested interests. For example, some people make a living from the arms race. Like Dr. Foster said, 'If we felt the oneness of humanity, we might not try to find so many ways to kill each other.' That sounds good unless it's your job that ends up being canceled.”

“What will this mean for your job, Hans, if the Boards of these groups approve co-sponsoring Hands Across the Nation?” asked Harold. “Will the sex education program be disrupted?” The older man rested his fork on the edge of his plate as Hans answered.

“That work is pretty much under control by now anyway, Dad. There are enough people who are qualified to lead the discussion groups and to advise schools on how to set up the program that I don't have to do it so much myself. And, since we completed that video presentation on teenager attitudes towards sex and abortion last year, I haven't had to give as many presentations myself.”

He wondered whether his father's question had really been a roundabout way to ask how Hans

would handle the loss of income. That should not be a problem. He and Naomi had been setting aside an amount almost equivalent to his earnings for a year, since he had first conceived of Hands Across the Nation. Naomi was not leaving her job at the church, and besides, they just did not spend that much. That was one reason the decision to live under his parents' roof had been made; the younger couple's share of the housing and food bills was certainly less than what they would be spending if they had their own home.

Economic necessity had pushed Hans into moving back with his parents when he had left school, but that had not been the deciding factor by the time he and Naomi had gotten married. It wasn't just that his parents had a big house, either, that they had made it their home. Harold and Lois might have been glad by that point in their lives to have gotten a smaller place, more suited just for the two of them since their children were grown. Probably the initial idea, which Hans had communicated to Naomi, and then to his parents, was the desire to do their part to reduce their demands on the environment. Sure they could each afford their separate place, but was it the right thing to do? Would they be using more than their share of the world's resources to maintain a home of their own?

Actually, Hans and Naomi could have found a residence that would have required little enough in utilities and space to satisfy their sense of justice; they were not limited to his parents' house in their range of options. If they had not cared enough about each other to live as an enlarged family under one roof, their social concerns would not have been sufficient reason to try it and to stick with it for almost nine years. It still might not have worked if not for the stubborn streak in Naomi that made her loath to give up the arrangement once they had embarked on it, for there was no doubt that she was the one from whom the greatest adjustments had been required. Living with her in-laws meant she had less freedom to set up her home the way she wanted, and the young minister was not without plans on how to structure her household.

"Since we're talking about commitments of time and the responsibilities we have," said Naomi, continuing the conversation at the table, "there is something I would like to bring up. I called the adoption agency this afternoon, and" she looked at Hans with an expression of triumph, "there is only one couple ahead of us on the list by now."

Hans wasn't surprised by her announcement, just stunned. It was almost three years since they had applied to adopt a girl, and it had come to seem like it would take forever. Now it might be any day. Looking across the table, he could see that his parents were contemplating what this would mean in their lives.

"Why don't you have any more babies?" asked Joshua with an innocent expression.

"Let's see," thought Hans. "He probably isn't looking for a technical answer. A vasectomy might be kind of difficult to explain anyway, even though the boy is bright. He's a grade ahead of his age at school, but I don't know."

"Well, when you were born, your mother and I decided one child of our own was as much as we wanted," he said slowly. "And, we're really happy with the one we got," he paused, looked in the boy's serious eyes and smiled. "But, there are so many people living in the world; although, it's not just the number, it's also the way we live. You know how the air is some days, when the Arch is half hidden." Feeling that his answer was awkward and overly long, Hans concluded, "Anyway, so each of us might have a better life, we decided to limit ourselves to one child," and thinking, "Way to go, sex expert," he looked at Naomi to see if she wanted to help explain.

“Your father had an operation so we can't have anymore babies.”

Joshua nodded. That was simple enough to understand.

The doctor had been a little reluctant to do it since they only had one offspring, but they had insisted. It was a vivid memory for Hans. The operation had required no more than a quick trip to the doctor's office, like they said, but he had been sore down there for more than a week afterwards.

It had been worth it, though. He looked at Naomi, and she looked back and smiled. He wondered if she knew what he was thinking. He would ask her later that night.

“Does that answer your question, Josh?”

“Yes.”

Speaking like he felt it was his duty to do so, Harold asked, “With the changes in your schedule and income, son, might not re-evaluating your ability to raise another child be in order?”

“What do you think, Naomi?” asked Hans. “Or, should we talk about it later, and give ourselves more time to think?”

“More time? We've been planning this for three years. My position at the church is secure, and besides, we may lose our place on the list if we pass on the next girl,” she answered, obviously irritated that they might even consider putting it off.

“I'd like to have a baby sister,” Joshua offered his opinion.

“I'm glad to hear that, Josh.” Hans told them how he saw it. “My feeling is that this is still a good time to do it. I didn't work out of my office at home eight years ago like I do now, so I should be able to help more with this baby than I could with Joshua.”

There was another element to his feelings, one that was deeper and more difficult to explain. Organizing Hands Across the Nation was a positive action, but at the same time, it was a reaction to a negative thing. It had been during the scare last summer when he had gotten the idea. He had been lying in bed early in the morning, imagining the end of the human story, erased in a few hours' fiery exchange, when another image, of millions of people coming together and joining hands in a line that stretched from coast to coast had come into his mind. It had been a comforting thought. In the same way, the idea of a little girl, a baby, helpless little child that he could love and care for, that was a comforting thought.

“Good. I'm glad you can do it,” said Harold, as if he was try to make up for having questioned their resolve.

“Yes, you can give some child a good home,” added Lois. To emphasize that she considered the matter settled, Hans' mother got up and started clearing the dishes from the table. There was little else to say about it; now it was back to waiting for the baby to arrive.

That evening Naomi read the letter Hans had written to inform the church leaders of their

demonstration.

“Very good,” she said, when she was finished. “You have a way of getting the message across without using a lot of words.”

Hans grinned and thought, “Sometimes.” Then he asked, “What do you think about the list of people to whom the letter will be sent?”

She scanned the names and organizations and remarked, “It certainly is a heterogeneous list.”

“Does it bother you that there are different faiths included, like the Hindus? They don't even believe in one God.”

“She made a face as if she had bit a lemon. “The Hindus do believe in one supreme and absolute God,” she corrected him. “Anyway, I don't think we should exclude people because of their beliefs; instead we should try to include them because of our beliefs. Our message and our vision are for everyone. I'm glad you have all of these groups on the list.”

“Okay,” he concurred, “we'll send the letter to all of them, but that can wait until tomorrow,” and turning off the computer, they went back upstairs.

* * * * *

Sunday morning rolled around, and Naomi got up early to take her shower before anyone else wanted to use the bathroom. Arising a few minutes later, Hans climbed the steps to the second floor to make sure Joshua was getting up. Joshua was not. He laid there like a log, even though his grandparents were talking in the next room about the dinner that would follow their worship service.

'Rise and shine, Josh.” Hans stepped to the window to let up the shade, and morning light filled the room. “Come on. It's time to get ready to go to church.”

Joshua did not want to move. The summer vacation had just begun, and he was already out of the habit of getting up early.

“Why don't we have vacation from Sunday school?” asked the boy.

“Save the hard ones for Mom, young man. Come on, let's go.”

The boy groaned and slowly got out of bed.

“That's good,” said his father. “I'm going to fix a pitcher of orange juice. Come down as soon as you wash your face, comb your hair, and get dressed.”

Once the little fellow was out of bed, he usually proceeded at a no nonsense pace.

“He'll probably be ready before me,” thought Hans, and that turned out to be the case as he took a few minutes to skim the lesson for the adult Bible study class which he had neglected to read thus far.

As usual, Naomi was the first one out the door. She unchained her moped from the little shelter

they had built next to the house, and stood by the front gate, looking for her husband and son. A few minutes later, Hans and Joshua got their bicycles out of the basement. Their church was only two miles from home, an easy fifteen minute bike ride, even for Joshua.

“You two are the slowest things,” said Naomi, a stern expression covering her face. She did not like having to decide to wait for them, or to leave on her own to get to church on time. “You either have to get up earlier, or move faster.”

“I'm ready. Let's go,” said Joshua. He grabbed the handlebars of his bicycle, lifted the front wheel off the ground, and let it bounce against the pavement.

“We won't be late,” muttered Hans as he locked the basement door. “We have plenty of time.”

Instead of arguing about it then, Naomi walked her moped to the street, started the motor, and led the way. Joshua rode in the middle, and Hans brought up the rear.

Gauging from her expression as they chained their vehicles to the rack by the rear entrance to the church, he was relieved to see that the ride had given her a chance to return to good humor. Fortunately, they had arrived early enough that she could complete her preparations without having to rush unduly. Several members of the church were already there, and after exchanging greetings, Joshua went upstairs to join his class, Naomi went to teach the Senior High group, and Hans joined the adult class.

Not to take anything away from Naomi's sermons, Hans had found that he got the most out of church through the discussions with the adults, talking with each other about their understanding of scripture and how it applied to their lives. They had their differences at times, but the members of the class were usually pretty good about showing respect for each other's points of view, even when they disagreed.

This was one of those Sundays. The class was finishing the book of Revelation, and the person who was leading the discussion began by reviewing the last chapters, how after great turmoil and upheaval on earth, Christ would come again to establish his kingdom. She pointed out that Revelation had to be understood in the context of the persecution the early Christians had been suffering at the time the book was written.

Towards the end of the period, one of the younger members of the class questioned with exasperation, “All of these things have already happened; war, famine, disease. What is Christ waiting for? Why doesn't He come?”

“It is not for us to say when the second coming should take place,” he was told.

“But why let all of these terrible things happen? It says it won't be long, that Christ will come 'soon.’”

Hans had an idea on that. “How do we know what 'soon' is to God? The two thousand years since Christ lived, to God, may be just like the blink of an eye.”

That did not help. The questions continued with increasing signs of frustration and agitation.

“Why wait at all? Why doesn't God straighten things out right now?”

“To separate the chaff from the grain,” said another member of the class as if the answer was obvious. “God has to know who is to be saved on the last day, and who is to be cast away.”

“I thought Christ wanted to save everyone.”

“He does, but it's up to us. The way has been set before us and we have to decide whether we are going to follow it, or not.”

Hans took another turn, “I agree that it's up to us to follow the way, but I have problems with that 'end of time' idea. To me, even if we wipe ourselves off the face of the earth, that would not be the end of time. God would keep on going, and keep on creating. I don't think God has ever stopped creating. And, Christ has come, and when we open our hearts to the same love for God and for each other that Jesus had, then we are one with Christ, and we are one with God, and Christ has come again.”

That was just his opinion. Some of the class looked like they might agree with what he had said, some like they might not be sure of what he had said, and some like they hadn't been paying attention.

Then the white haired man sitting beside him declared, “None of us can have the same kind of love that Jesus had.”

That opened up a whole other keg of worms, but they did not have enough time to get into it very far, as the children were coming down from their classes. Joining his father, Joshua related with zeal how he had spent the morning helping make a model of a Jewish town like the one in which Jesus had been raised.

“Can I see it?” asked Hans.

“Oh, no. Not until it's finished,” replied the boy. “Then the teacher is going to put it on display.”

“Well, I can hardly wait.”

Going into the sanctuary, they sat on one of the heavy wooden pews and listened as the music director opened the service with a series of flourishes and improvisations on the organ. Majestic notes reverberated from the arched ceiling and magnified the mood of communion with the Divine.

Hans thought Naomi looked quite beautiful standing at the pulpit, wearing her cream colored blouse, her dark brown hair carefully combed, and a sensitive, intent expression on her face. He also thought that she gave one her better sermons that morning, and he absorbed almost every word. The topic was “How We Know God,” and she had broken it into three parts; through the scripture, through the world around us, and through the Spirit.

At the end, she shared some of the times she had felt the presence of the Spirit in her life, and that was the part that caught Hans the most. He related it to the times when he had felt the presence of the Spirit; although, he had memories of other occasions when he had reached out, and had not been

able to feel anything. As she spoke, we wished that he could be filled with the Holy Spirit. He wished that he could totally direct his life in accordance with God's will.

* * * * *

It was a week since Hans had put the letters to the religious leaders in the mail, and he sat in his office, looking at the phone, considering how to make his approach. After consulting with his wife, he had decided that his first call would be to the president of their own denomination, Rev. Morris Hale.

Rev. Hale had been in St. Louis for a convocation several years ago. Unfortunately, when Hans and Naomi had met him at a reception during that visit, an unspoken awareness of disagreement had hung in the air. The position the national synod had taken was to support the woman's right to terminate an unwanted pregnancy; however, Hans felt that the church should teach its members that the unborn baby was to be nurtured and cared for, not to be killed. Although his own opposition to abortion had been expressed through efforts at public education instead of through legislation, because the synod had aligned itself with the "Pro-Choice" forces, Hans felt that his views were in conflict with those of the church. He had regretted the existence of that barrier in his previous meeting with Rev. Hale, and hoped, as Naomi had, that it would not interfere with their ability to establish a rapport now.

"Can't sit here thinking about it all day long," he concluded. "The only way to get it done is to do it."

Calling the denominational office in New York City, he gave his name to the secretary, and asked with some trepidation, to speak with the president.

"Hello, Hans," he heard a moment later.

"Hello, Rev. Hale. How are you?" he asked, and felt a drop of sweat trickle down his side from his right armpit.

"Fine. How are you?"

"Pretty good."

And Naomi? And you have a little boy don't you?"

"Yes, Joshua, he's eight years old now. They're both well."

Hans was impressed. They had only had a few minutes conversation at that reception, and he would not have expected Rev. Hale to remember that they had a son.

"Did you get our letter?" he asked.

"Yes. That is quite an interesting idea you have, Hans. It made me think of the Great Wall of China. You know that I visited mainland China last year, and did the usual tourist trip to the Wall. It really is a fantastic feat of engineering and construction. The difference is that they were building with bricks, stone, and dirt to keep out invaders, and you want to build with people for a witness for peace. What kind of chance do think there is to construct a human chain across the country?"

“Right now I’m operating on faith more than anything else,” replied Hans. “Although it’s much closer to becoming a reality as a result of our meeting with the representatives of the major peace organizations. If their Boards approve co-sponsoring the event, all kinds of contacts at the local level will be opened, and based on the initial response Naomi and I got from the local groups in the southwestern states, those contacts would be fruitful.”

“What would you like to see us do to help bring it about?” asked Rev. Hale. As yet, the head of their church had not indicated any inclination to support the event.

“For one, the United Church of Christ has a peace network. Members of our churches in all parts of the country are working at sharing concerns about the arms race and about our relations with other countries. Activating that network to encourage participation would be an invaluable expression of support.

“For another, there are expenses such as phone bills, printing, travel, and so on that will be incurred. A contribution of \$1,000 would be a big help right now.” Hans was satisfied that he had been able to state his request matter-of-factly enough.

“How is the meaning of the demonstration going to be made clear?” asked Rev. Hale in a cautious manner.

“Is that a loaded question?” wondered Hans, and he replied, “Some of that may happen on the day the human chain is formed, with speeches, or proclamations, or whatever; that still needs to be planned. But, I think most of the statement of purpose needs to be made while organizing it.

“We want people to experience our oneness. We want to express our desire that other than military solutions to our problems be found. We want to show that we’re all just people, and that none of us is really very different from each other. Maybe we can invite people from other countries to join with us in building hands across our nation. In organizing within our church, and within other faiths, it can be a way to declare that we are all God’s children. That is the meaning it has for me.”

“You’re not going to try to include unborn babies in this are you?” Rev Hale unloaded his real question.

Hans jerked upright in his seat as if he had been stung. He was so angry he hardly knew how to respond.

“I’m just asking, Hans, to know if that’s another part of your agenda.”

“Well, to tell you the truth, that never even occurred to me; although, now that you mention it, since you saw the connection, maybe it’s a point that deserves to be made.” His voice was on the verge of breaking. “Do you think we should ask pregnant women not to participate?”

“I’m sorry you’re so upset at my question,” said Rev. Hale, somehow managing to sound like a parent soothing a child that was throwing a temper tantrum, “but, I want to make sure the denomination is not supporting a Pro-Life event.”

Instead of surrendering to the impulse to say, “Shove it,” and then hang up, Hans replied, “Given that most peace activists are Pro-Choicers, I don’t expect Hands Across the Nation will turn into

a Pro-Life event, even if I wanted it to.” As soon as he said that, he became angry at himself for falling into the trap of putting people into boxes, identifying them with labels like “Pro-Choice’ and “Pro-Lifer.” The whole purpose of Hands was to break down those barriers so the human being could be seen.

“Good. I’m glad to hear the event is being planned strictly to promote peace,” said the church leader, as if Hans’ last statement had been a sign of capitulation.

“Well, to be honest, Rev. Hals, some of the people who participate may make the same connection you suggested, and include unborn babies in the human family.” Hans wanted to make certain they understood each other’s position.

“That’s okay, as long as we leave that to the individual, and don’t make it a stated purpose of the event.”

“Then we’ve had a lot of sound and fury for nothing. That’s all it has been since it started,” thought Hans, who then said, “I can abide by that.”

“Well, I’ll have someone with the Office of Church in Society, OCIS, get in touch with you to talk about communicating this to our local churches. Do you have a corporation set up to accept contributions?”

Struggling to shift gears, Hans managed to respond in a conversational tone, “We just have a checking account in the name of Hands Across the Nation. I suppose we could incorporate, but Naomi and I both thought that there were enough groups working on peace as it is. And, really, most of the work in organizing this will be done through existing groups.”

“Okay. You know how tight money is these days, but I don’t think \$1,000 will be a problem. Why don’t you put that request in writing, and we can probably have a check to you in two or three weeks. If there is any other way we can help, with the planning, or with contacting other groups, let me know.”

“Thank you. I appreciate your saying that.”

“I’m not just saying it. I mean it.”

“We might ask the OCIS staff to help with the planning then.” He guessed that Rev. Hale wanted a representative on the committee, to make certain the event stayed on course. “As many minds as we have working on it, the better it will be.”

“Very good. I’ll ask our staff to work with you every step of the way. Thanks for calling, Hans, and thanks for what you’re doing. Say ‘Hi’ to Naomi for me.”

“I will. Goodbye.”

Hans got out of his chair, walked around the room, and sat down again. That conversation had skirted on the edge of disaster.

“If I can’t get a simple, “Yes,” from my own denomination, he thought, “I’ll bet there are some

bad moments coming when I call the rest of the religious organizations. And, I need to keep cool.”

Those expectations were pretty much realized over the next few days, as he contacted the other denominations, but in a way contrary to what his interchange with Rev. Hale would have led him to think. Accepting the proposal at face value, the mainline Protestant denominations and the Catholics got right on board, but the responses from the fundamentalists ranged from a lack of interest to downright antagonism.

“If we had proposed a demonstration to express the 'oneness of humanity' as a means of opposing abortion instead of promoting peace, we would be getting the fundamentalists, but the mainline denominations would be staying away in droves,” conjectured Hans as he slowly gave up hope in his conversation with one of the conservative church leaders. “What a paradox. I guess part of the problem is that we don't all agree on what makes for peace.”

The comments the reverend was making nailed that point home. Hans had heard a lot of it before, the “peace through strength” argument, that their arsenal was necessary to defend themselves from Soviet aggression, and something about “will” and “posture.”

“To have millions of people cooperate in a single event would be a demonstration of will, and what's wrong with a posture of friendship?” asked Hans.

“You're a fool if you think those atheists care anything for your friendship, except to use it to gain more power,” was the response.

After saying, “Goodbye,” Hans got up, went outside and picked up the newspaper, and sat in the family room to read. It took him a while to get the conversation out of his consciousness, and he hoped that he had not been as closed minded as the person with whom he had spoken.

Rev. Hale's comment about the Great Wall flashed through his thoughts. “Maybe there are other ways to pursue peace. They say that good fences make good neighbors. Does that include the Berlin Wall? I still don't see what's wrong with a posture of friendship.” He had hardly begun to look at the headlines: SUPREME COURT RULES ON EUTHANASIA, HUNDREDS DEMONSTRATE AT NRC HEARING, BRAZIL REQUESTS WORLD BANK EXTENSION, when the telephone rang, and he got up to answer it.

“This is Hans Spiegel.”

“Hello, Mr. Spiegel. This is Dolores, from the adoption agency.”

All thoughts about the conversation and the newspaper instantly disappeared. Could their three year wait be an end?

“We have some good news for you. We have a baby girl who is ready for adoption. Can we set a time when you and your wife can come to the office and complete the paperwork? There are just a few final forms that need to be filled out, then you can take your daughter home.”

“How about tomorrow morning?” He suggested the earliest possible time.

“That would be fine. Say, 10:00 am?”

“That sounds good. How old is she?” he asked, eager to know something of this child who was to be their daughter.

“She's three months old. You were lucky. There was no question about her mother putting her up for adoption. Sometimes there are complications, and it takes as long as six months, or more, to make certain there is no question of the mother letting the baby go. It is not uncommon that they do change their minds.”

“Does she have a name?”

“No, the foster parents who have been taking care of her since she left the hospital have just been calling her Baby Girl. I think they knew this was one they would not be keeping for long.” Understanding the feelings behind his questions, Dolores added, “She's a healthy little girl.”

Satisfied for the time with that, Hans said, “Well, thanks for calling. We'll look forward to seeing you at ten tomorrow morning. Bye.”

Turning and looking out the window at their yard and the houses across the alley, he thought, “How sad. How terribly sad. And, not just for the baby, to be brought into the world by a mother and a father who could not, or would not accept her as their own, living her first three months nameless. It's sad for the parents that they could not claim the daughter they created.”

He called Naomi to share the good news, and to make sure she was clear the next morning.

“Of course I'm free,” she declared. “I'll reschedule my appointments and take the whole day off.”

That evening, at supper, they were all excited about bringing the baby home. “Your crib and car seat are still in the attic,” said Lois, her wrinkled face beaming.

“Do you need your car tomorrow, or can we use it?” Hans asked his parents.

“I don't need it tomorrow,” answered Harold.

“Neither do I. Go ahead and take it,” said his mother.

“We can get the crib down this evening and set it up in our room in the basement,” said Naomi. “And, we'd better make a trip to the store to get some infant formula and diapers.”

“Can I go when you get her?” asked Joshua, looking from his mother to his father.

“Sure,” said Hans. “You can see her for the first time when we do.”

Giving her look of assent, Naomi remarked, “We'll have to send letters to everyone to let them know we are finally getting our daughter. Maybe we can invite them here for the christening.”

“If you want to ask your parents to stay here, go right ahead,” responded Harold. “We can roll out pads on the floor, if we have to, to fit everyone in.”

“Is she white?” asked Lois.

“You know, I didn't even think to ask,” replied Hans, arrested in the act of serving himself a second helping of green beans. “That was not a condition that we placed on the agency. All I know is she's three months old, and all she has for a name so far is 'Baby Girl.’”

“Baby Girl,” repeated Joshua with disbelief. “Is that her name?”

“That's what the foster parents have been calling her,” said Hans. “But, we're going to give her a real name.”

“Have you chosen one yet?” asked Lois, looking embarrassed from the crassness of her last question.

“Yes,” said Naomi. “We decided to name her Mara.”

“Mara. That's a pretty name.”

“That is a pretty name,” agreed Harold.

“It's been so long since we had a three month old, I can hardly remember how they act,” said Hans looking around the table to see if anyone else wanted more mashed potatoes, before he cleaned them out.

“They eat, sleep, and dirty their diapers,” said Naomi, as she passed him the butter. “And, they cry for each of them.”

“Oh, they do more than that,” objected Lois. “They look you in the face, and smile, and let you know they are aware of you.”

“I know,” said Naomi, giving her mother-in-law a look that said, “I was only kidding.”

“She's just reminding me that I'm going to get to do more of the feeding and changing this time,” said Hans. “I can hardly wait.” He meant it. He was glad that he could work at home so he could watch Mara at the same time.

Late the next morning, Hans drove with Joshua sitting beside him, while Naomi was in the back seat with Mara. They had just spent a couple of hours at the adoption agency to complete the paperwork and to be introduced to their daughter. Mara had fussed. It was an upsetting day for her, so many strange hands and faces. Perhaps the motion of the car had a calming effect, because she had finally stopped crying when they had driven away.

Joshua unfastened his seatbelt and started to turn around.

“Stay in your seat, Josh,” said his father.

“I want to see the baby,” the boy pouted.

“We'll be home in a few minutes. You can see her then. Put your seatbelt back on,” said Hans with his “don't make me say it again” tone of voice.

In unspoken protest, his son flopped back in his seat and refastened the restraint.

Naomi told them that Mara had fallen asleep.

“She sure likes to cry,” commented the boy.

“I don't think she likes to cry, son. She's just letting us know she's unhappy. That's how babies communicate,” said Hans.

“Did I cry like that”? asked Joshua.

“You did sometimes. I think we all did. It's just part of growing up, but she'll be all right. All she needs is a home and a family to love her and to take care of her. That's what we are going to do.”

Joshua was silent for a minute.

“Do you wish we would have gotten a baby boy, or someone closer to your age that you could play with?” asked Hans.

“No, I can play with Gary. I was just thinking what it would be like to be adopted. What if they weren't nice?”

“The people who adopted you?”

“Uh huh.”

“I guess that happens sometimes, too. Things don't always work out the way we would like.”

“I'm going to be nice to Mara.”

“That's good, son. I know you will.” Glancing quickly at the boy sitting beside him, Hans blinked a couple of times to keep his eyes clear. Then, he looked in the rear view mirror. Naomi was watching the baby.

* * * * *

The next couple of weeks seemed to race by. Hans had his hands full during the day with Mara to take care of and the rest of the religious organizations to contact. In between the feedings and the diaper changing, he somehow managed to complete his calls.

When the date of the second teleconference arrived, Naomi took the morning off, and joined him in reviewing the list of people to include. Claire Brown had written back to apologize for having missed the first meeting and to indicate that she felt People Power would respond favorably to the project. Her name was still on the list, as well as Victor Carter, Roger Burdick, Joyce Harris, Dr. Foster, and Willy Lee from the first meeting, and they had added Alice Powers with the United Church of Christ, Father Ron Welsh with the United States Catholic Conference, Alex Simon with the

American Jewish Committee, and Omar Kemal with the Nation of Islam.

“That's an awful lot of people to have on one telephone call,” said Naomi doubtfully.

“Yeah, I'm not sure how well this is going to work,” replied Hans. “But, it will be nice for everyone to get to hear how each of the others is involved.”

“Just so they are involved,” said Naomi somberly. “Without their support...,” her voice trailed off.

Hans did not want to think about that possibility either. “Hey, we're going to need the support of more organizations than these before we're finished. If our demonstration is really going to help bring peace, everybody has to feel like they can be a part of it.” Those in particular that he had in mind were the conservatives who had expressed reservations about allying themselves with the “peace” organizations. However, for good or for bad, the organizations on their list for today were the groups with whom they had initiated the organizing. If their Boards approved co-sponsoring, and if it was done in the right spirit, he hoped that they could still broaden their base of support.

Naomi pointed to the clock, and picking up the receiver, Hans gave the operator the expanded list of participants. As soon as the connection was checked and they knew everyone could hear and be heard, with a strong inner sense of anticipation, Hans asked for each of them to give a report on the responses they had received from the Boards of Directors.

Victor's report was the first to come from the voice box. “When I left the meeting last month, I was persuaded that this was something the Freeze Campaign would want to co-sponsor, but my Board has some problems with it. They wanted to know why there is no call for a halt to the arms race. There is no specific proposal for action other than asking people to join hands in a line that spans the country, which is the same reservation I had with it before,” he concluded as if to say, “I told you so.”

“What action did the Freeze Campaign take?” asked Hans, trying to keep his voice even. He felt like he had been punched in the belly and his air had been knocked out. The hope of broadening their appeal was already in danger.

“I was asked to come back and to share our concerns with the others, to see if we can include a more specific course of action in our statement of purpose.”

“Okay.” Rather than deal with that then, Hans decided to carry on with the others, “Roger?”

“The SANE Board voted to co-sponsor the event; however, there were a number of comments at our meeting similar to what Victor just expressed,” rumbled from the voice box. He sounded less than thrilled by the action of his Board, and Hans wondered briefly what their decision would have been if not for the extra contacts that had been made.

“Joyce?”

“CALC voted to be a co-sponsor. Those kinds of concerns were not raised at our meeting, but I would like to hear your response to them,” she said in her deliberate way.

“Let's go ahead and hear from Dr. Foster, Claire, and Willy first.” He wanted to assess how

much pressure to narrow the statement of purpose might come from the others.

“We conducted a quick survey of some of our members, and Physicians Alliance Against Nuclear Weapons wants to co-sponsor the event,” reported Dr. Foster, apparently giving unconditional support.

“The People Power Board has not yet met,” said Claire. She sounded apologetic. “I can't really say what our organization will do at this time.”

“Ground Zero wants to co-sponsor, and we have already communicated this with our local chapters,” said Willy emphatically. He had a mercurial temper; one moment serious, and the next acting the comedian.

“That could have been worse,” thought Hans, breathing a little easier. Dealing with it head on now, he said, “Maybe we should have spent more time at the last meeting addressing Victor's concern. I'll try to respond, and we have representatives from four religious groups who might have something to add to the discussion.

“One basic principle of conflict resolution is if you can get people who are in disagreement to examine their beliefs and values, very often their most fundamental values and beliefs are the same. If these shared, core beliefs can be raised and clarified, from that point of agreement, one can begin to bring some movement towards resolving the conflict. For instance, Victor, do you like it when people laugh at you, or make fun of you?”

“Of course not,” the Freeze representative said guardedly, as if he expected to become the butt of a joke.

“I don't like to be made fun of either. In fact, I don't know anybody who does. From that, we could extract a principle that it is best not to make fun of another person because no one likes it.” Hans continued, “Another way of expressing that same value would be the Golden Rule, 'Treat other people the way you would like to be treated.' I dare say that each of us in this teleconference agrees with the Golden Rule.

“The point is that it is a lot easier to overcome areas of disagreement if one first identifies with the other person in some basic way. There are people who disagree with me on nuclear disarmament. They believe our weapons are needed to protect their loved ones from Soviet aggression, but that doesn't mean they don't want peace, also. My feeling is that it is more important right now to demonstrate our common humanity and desire for peace than it is to endorse a specific course of action.”

A storm of voices came over the voice box. It sounded like everybody wanted to respond at the same time. Hans waited till the noise abated, then he broke in, “It looks like we need to establish some order to this meeting. We have not yet heard from any of the religious organization representatives. Let's give them a chance to respond, if they want, and then go through each of the peace organizations.” Without pausing to give anyone a chance to question his authority to direct the meeting, he said, “Alice?”

Letting her go first was taking a risk. She may have discussed this with Rev. Hale, and while they professed to the principle of leaving matters of moral choice to the individual's conscience, they

might not want to pass on an opportunity to make a strong statement against the arms race.

“Yes, well, as you know, Hans there are members of the United Church of Christ who advocate actions that range from disarmament to adding new weapons systems to our arsenal. This event can be used to emphasize differences, or to build a new basis for understanding. If we limit the message of the event to a specific proposal, we might not get the number of people to participate that we need to complete the chain. Also, I think if we succeeded in mobilizing five million people to join hands across the nation who believe in nuclear disarmament, we would also succeed in hardening the opposition from those who advocate a different course of action.”

“By golly,” thought Hans. “She's endorsing the original concept of the event.”

Roger thundered, “This sounds misleading, or dishonest. We want to see nuclear disarmament, but we're going hide that so people who disagree with us will participate in this event?”

Deciding that it was more important to give each person an opportunity to speak than to deal with Roger's question, and hoping that the gnawing sensation in his stomach was not a signal that he was avoiding a confrontation, Hans said, “Father Welsh, it is your turn if there is something you would like to say.”

“The Catholic Church has sought to preach a consistent ethic of life for some years, and I feel, too, that we will gain more by emphasizing our areas of agreement rather than of disagreement.”

There was no further outburst from Roger. Now Hans wondered if the representative from SANE had decided that the deck was stacked against him and there was no point in speaking further.

“Mr. Simon?” Hans followed through with the rest of the group.

“Wouldn't it be nice if we actually treated each other as we like to be treated? That is something that would affect our everyday lives perhaps more than even nuclear disarmament. We have not been afraid to fight for our rights, for our homeland, but we prefer peace. It would be better not to have to fight, and as long as we feel our rights are respected, we can respect the rights of others. The American Jewish Committee would like to be involved in this human chain, I think as a simple expression of unity and our oneness.”

“While we are speaking cordially with each other, I will do the same,” said Omar without prompting, giving a hint of another source of conflict, “but, I would like ask Mr. Simon later how his people have shown respect for the Palestinians who are still without homes.

“I understand what you are saying, Mr. Spiegel. There are within Islam as many divisions and sects as you have denominations within Christianity. The Shiites who supported the attempted coup in Saudi Arabia last year believe they follow the true successor to Muhammad. They were fighting the Sunnis. That is just one example of Muslims fighting Muslims, and it is not the will of Allah that this should happen.

“There are many Muslims in the Soviet Union. They and I are followers of the same faith, but we would be fighting each other if our two countries went to war. We believe in the One God who is also the God of Abraham and of Jesus, and I would like to call upon my brothers in Islam to join in this hands across the nation as you have expressed it.”

Hans looked at Naomi, but she shook her head. Based on the previous remarks, he felt encouraged to say, “We're back to you, Victor, and I think we are still talking about an event which does not advocate a specific course of action. Instead, we are trying to affirm our most fundamental values and being.”

“Don't you think we should hear from everyone who attended the last meeting before deciding that?” asked Victor, contesting Hans' conclusion.

“Yes, let's do that. I'm sorry,” said Hans, admitting that he was jumping the gun. “Roger?”

“The SANE Board has already voted to co-sponsor the event,” he said gruffly.

“Uh oh,” thought Hans. “It sound like he doesn't want to have anything more to do with us.” He asked, “How do you feel about it personally? Do you think it is dishonest?”

“Well, what do you propose to do after this event, if all that happens next June is a human chain when we still don't have oneness, or agreement?” demanded Roger.

“A follow-up to Hands Across the Nation is something we will want to talk about, Roger, but I think we are saying right now is that there is oneness. We are one in our humanity, and each of us is deserving of respect and love just on account of that. If we can truly feel that, then we will have accomplished the first step towards resolving our differences.”

Now Hans waited. He wanted to make sure Roger had a chance to express his opinion. The silence lasted several seconds, then with some uncertainty, as no response was given, Hans continued, “Joyce?”

“I'm feeling better about this all the time,” her positive tone was like a balm on an open sore. “I like the idea of getting back to our basic values.”

“Dr. Foster?”

“Yes, I'm really eager to see this happen,. By the way, I didn't know you were such a social scientist, Hans.”

“Uh, my background was Anthropology. I even wrote a book about it once.”

“Oh? I would like to see it.”

“You're one of the few. Claire?”

“The People Power Board will meet in two weeks. I feel almost certain that we will approve co-sponsoring based on what has been said and the support you have from the other organizations.”

“Willy?”

“We're with you.” That simple statement expressed volumes of support.

“What do you think, Victor?” Hans fought to keep even the slightest trace of exultation from his voice. He could crow after the meeting was over.

“It seems like we're demonstrating the obvious, but if that's what everyone else wants to do, I'll present it to my Board again.”

“I have one more question,” said Willy. He paused for effect, then continued in a light-hearted way, “I'm just wondering how many millions of people turned out for your Fourth of July celebration at the Arch.”

Hans could almost feel the tension within the group dissolve. He even heard a chuckle, or two, come out of the voice box.

“Not that many, right, Victor?”

“No, the weather turned bad around the Fourth. We got quite a series of thunderstorms, and had one of the smallest crowds ever,” confirmed Victor. “But, it was still millions.”

“What will we do if the weather turns bad for us?” asked Claire.

“We can hardly set a rain date for this kind of event, and chances are there will be bad weather somewhere along the three thousand mile line. We'll just have to hope for the best,” replied Hans. “From what I have heard so far, the third Sunday in June looks good. Can we use that as our target date?”

No one voiced objections.

“Then the next thing we need to talk about is distribution,” continued Hans. “Assuming we can get enough people to take part in this, how do we get them to the right places?”

He had thought it through to a large extent already, but wanted to give the others a chance for more input.

“I have a suggestion.” The baritone voice could only belong to Roger. “Let's figure that anyone within one hundred miles of the line will assemble at a point directly north, or south of where they live. Since Arizona and New Mexico are the least populous states through which the line passes, they should be the center of our efforts. If we draw lines on our map that converge on that center, like the spokes of a wheel, we will funnel people from other parts of the country to where they are needed.”

“Yes,” said Joyce, “and, if we assign a number to each mile along the route, then we will know exactly where to ask people to assemble.”

Several of the others offered ideas on the organization of the event. This went on for some time, till Hans, mindful of the movement of the hand around his clock, integrated their remarks and summarized their ideas.

“That means we need to know every mile of the route exactly, and we need to know it in time to assign those numbers and to make the proper distribution of people. And, we need the name of each of the participants so they can be directed to the proper places. To do that, the local groups along the line

need to get busy working out the exact route, and the groups all around the country need to get busy signing up people who want to participate. Does everyone agree that that is the strategy we should follow?"

A few words of assent were heard.

Breathing an inner sigh of relief, Hans said, "Well, it sounds like we know what we have to do. Oh yes, there is one other matter we might consider. Inviting people from other countries to join in this event might strengthen the message of 'oneness,' so we could be thinking about ways to make that possible. Unless someone has something to say about that right now, let's set the next time we want to meet."

Joyce spoke, "I don't think we will need to meet so soon after this. It is going to take a while to get the word to the local groups, and for them to do anything with it. Maybe the second Tuesday in October."

They settled on that date, and as no one had any further comments, or business, they brought the meeting to a close. Reading the time, Hans figured, "Oh boy, more than an hour. This call is going to cost a bundle. It's a good thing we got the check from the denomination."

"What do you think?" he asked Naomi.

"It's not easy to get that many people to agree to something." The entire meeting had passed without a single remark from her. She had thought that there were enough opinions being expressed without her adding to them, but her thick brows drew together now as she sought to draw out her impressions, "Victor's concern about the meaning of the event led to some good discussion, then for a minute, I was afraid Roger was going to obstruct the meeting, but somehow we got through it without losing anybody."

"Yeah, he surprised me at the end when he suggested how we could assign people from more highly populated areas to Arizona and New Mexico. I wonder what brought him around."

"Maybe making the discussion more personal, when you asked if he thought what we are doing is dishonest, did it. That might have made him feel like his views and concerns were being considered, and for the first time he began to identify himself with what we are doing."

"Maybe so. Another possibility is he saw some way that this demonstration will further his own interests."

She made a rueful expression and said, "Given the way things usually work, that may be a more likely explanation."

The corners of her mouth turned back up, but her brow furrowed even further, as if she was trying to get in touch with some embryonic thought.

"Feeling the oneness of humanity may not be enough, Hans. We surely know, inside, that the Soviets and the Chinese and all of us share a common humanity. What we don't know, or feel is love. What I hope happens when we hold hands is that we'll feel a bond of love."

Hans stared at his wife, then exclaimed, "If something like that occurs to you the next time, don't hold back, for goodness' sake, say it. That's what we need to hear."

"I won't hold back. It just didn't come to me during the meeting."

"Huh, yeah, that happens to me all the time. Well, do you think we should check to see how Josh is doing with Mara?" he asked, remembering their other responsibilities.

"I haven't heard her," she replied. "She went back to sleep before I came down, but I'll check on my way out. There are some things I need to do at church, one of them is preparing the notice of Mara's baptism for this Sunday's bulletin."

"Let's see," said Hans. That was another event that required planning. "Tonya and Frank are supposed to get here Saturday morning." They were Naomi's sister and brother-in-law. They had two children and were going to serve as Mara's god-parents. "And, your parents are coming that afternoon. Paul and Cindy should arrive Saturday, too, but they're staying at Keith's." Paul was Hans' older brother.

"It's a shame Mary and Bill can't be here," said Naomi.

"Yeah, well, Denver is a bit far. We'll be lucky to see them at Christmas." Hans' sister and brother-in-law were the farthest removed members of the family.

"Who's cooking tonight?" asked Naomi.

"Mom is, isn't she?"

"Oh, yeah. Well, I should be home by five o'clock." She got up and started for the stairs. "It was a good meeting, and having the religious organizations represented did add another dimension to the discussion."

"I think so, too." Hans got out of his chair and followed her upstairs. "I'm going to bring Mara down to my office. See you later."

* * * * *

Taking care not to spill any of the bright red drink, Hans placed the punch bowl on the table and stepped back to admire the spread. The table was covered with dishes of cheese, crackers, carrot and celery sticks, sliced fruit, zucchini bread, and dip. It was enough for a meal.

"Looks pretty good."

That was Frank. He and Naomi's father were talking nearby, watching as the food was set out.

"Yeah. We should be ready to begin in a minute," said Hans. "Thanks again to you and Tonya for being Mara's godparents."

"Oh, heck, it's an honor for us." They stood silent for a moment, then Frank continued, "So, you're spending more of your time on this big peace demonstration."

“Yes, the sex education discussion groups are in the hands of capable people. Mara takes a lot of my time, Naomi lets me watch her during the day, but most of my work is going to organizing the demonstration.”

“When are you going to get a real job?” asked Naomi's father. He worked as an assistant manager in the branch office of a bank, and as difficult as it was for him to understand how his daughter had chosen the ministry for her life's calling, it was even harder for him to accept what Hans did.

Hans looked at him with words stuck in his throat. He was usually slow in giving retorts to remarks like that, and on other occasions he had thought that was just as well. Quick words were not always the best words.

“It's not easy to find a good job,” he finally managed to say.

That seemed to pacify the older man. He had spent twenty years in a position that had allowed for little further advancement. More than once he had vented his dissatisfaction with his job.

Before anything further could be said, Lois poked her head through the door, examined the state of preparations in the dining room, and said, “I think we're ready. Would you call the children, Hans?”

The sounds of playing children could be heard through the open window. They were running around in the back yard.

Hans extricated himself from the interchange in the dining room, went through the kitchen and the family room to the back door, and called to the kids.

It was a hot, humid day. Fortunately, the shade provided by the trees helped shelter them from the intense heat. The children were putting the trunk of one of the trees to use as a base in a game of tag.

“Hans called again. “We're ready to eat. It's time to stop anyway. You don't want to mess up your good clothes.”

The message that food was on the table sank in, causing a mad rush towards the door, and a tangle of hot little bodies crowded past him. Joshua was among them, sweat streaked from his temples down his cheeks.

The adults were already moving towards the dining room, and after a few more minutes to get everyone together and the children settled, Rev. Hutchings, a friend and professor from Eden Seminary who had helped Naomi with the baptism, offered a word of thanks.

As their guests served themselves, and assisted some of the smaller children, they broke into little groups to eat and to talk. It was common knowledge within their home that Hans and Naomi were involved in organizing the biggest peace demonstration that had ever been attempted, and the conversation often turned to Hands Across the Nation, but Hans did not like to dwell too much on that subject. He wanted to avoid being separated from the others by virtue of attaining some kind of celebrity status, an image to maintain that would keep him from being human.

Rev. Hutchings was visiting with Harold and Lois and some of their neighbors by the ornamental fireplace in the dining room. "Your part of the city is looking pretty good," he was saying. "There does not seem to be quite as much rehab of houses going on around here as in some neighborhoods."

Setting his cup on the nearby mantle so he could give serious attention to his plate, Hans' father paused before starting to eat. Their guest had touched on a subject that was dear to his heart. "Yes, This area has stayed fairly stable. There is really more rehab taking place east of here, closer to the river."

"It's a shame that houses would ever get to such a state of disrepair in the first place," said Rev. Hutchings. "I took a sabbatical from the seminary a few years ago and traveled through Europe. It is not uncommon there to see block after block of buildings that are three or four hundred years old and in excellent condition. There is no reason why solid, brick houses like these could not be occupied hundreds of years from now, as long as they were maintained."

Harold was intrigued by Rev. Hutchings remarks, as were some of their other guests. Hans joined that group for some time, then deciding he should see how the others were doing, he moved on.

Naomi was talking with Tonya and their mother, a few paces away, and Tonya was saying, "I wish I could quit my job and stay at home with the kids, but Frank's salary just isn't enough for our expenses. He was laid off more than five months last year, construction has been really slow. Not that my salary brings in that much, but the way utilities and food prices have been going, we need every bit we can get."

Tonya was getting sympathetic attention from her sister and mother, so Hans kept moving.

Paul, Cindy, and Keith were sitting in the front room along with a couple of members of Naomi's congregation, and Paul was entertaining them with an account of some videotapes he had been making with a new video recorder. Hans' older brother was artistically gifted, and worked for a large design firm based in Chicago. Cindy was a hair dresser.

Over the years, it had seemed that something greater than the intervening miles had come to separate them from the home base in St. Louis. It wasn't a lack of success, in fact they were the envy of their audience. Their house was something of an electrical marvel, and they were not shy about revealing how much it had cost. Now they were describing how their computer was programmed to open the shades of their windows at certain hours, to operate small valves on the little plumbing system that automatically watered their plants, and to continually monitor the security of the house at all possible points of entry.

It seemed like they always had some new thing to talk about, and their gadgets were fascinating in a way, ingenious applications of modern technology, but after a while that conversation left Hans feeling flat. It seemed like his older brother and sister-in-law's house would be quite as happy without any human occupants.

Frank and Naomi's father were still talking with each other, but they were now in the hallway, and Hans moved to join them. He liked talking with Frank, his brother-in-law seemed so in touch with the basic stuff of life. Far from being hooked on a lifestyle of conspicuous consumption, he was more

of a model of conservation, and had a deep appreciation for a clean environment, and for not taking out of the system more than it was capable of giving.

Frank was explaining what he had been doing during his off time last year. He had insulated the walls of his house and had made some movable insulation panels for the windows of all the rooms they heated. With those improvements and with the small, high efficiency furnace he and Tonya had put in the year before, their heating bills had been more than halved.

Naomi's father wanted to change the subject, and turning to his other son-in-law, charged, "Okay, suppose you have this big peace demonstration, what is that going to do? It's not going to change anything. We still have to be ready to stop the Soviets from spreading their hold on the world."

"Maybe there are different ways of dealing with them," said Hans, bothered that Frank may not have been finished.

"With a Ruskie? That's not likely."

Striving to maintain an even keel, Hans said, "There's a phrase in Russian that goes, "Ya hachoo bache vashien droogom." Hans knew his pronunciation left much to be desired, but it was close enough. "Do you know what that means?"

"It sounds like a sneeze with gibberish."

"No, it means, 'I want to be your friend.'"

That silenced the older man for a moment. Hans continued, "Even the Russians understand what a friend is. They know when someone is being honest, and fair, and considerate with them. The people of the Soviet Union don't want to fight."

"Yeah, maybe the people don't, but what about their government? You can't trust them. They want to put their fist on the rest of the world just like they've done it over there."

Frank got into it, "So what does that mean? Do we have to kill hundreds of millions of innocent people because of what their rulers do?"

"When it's them, or us, you don't have any choice."

"I disagree," said Hans. "We have the same choice Jesus had when he decided to die for the sake of others. He decided to be obedient to God's will, to return good for evil, and to love his enemies, even the ones who hurt him the most."

The older man's face got red, and he looked like he was going to have a fit. Thinking that may have been a low blow to someone who prided himself on being a pillar of the church, Hans changed his tactics, "I don't think it has to get to that point, that we either have to kill them or be killed. Even the Soviet rulers are human beings. They have the capacity to do good just as they have the capacity to do evil.

"Take some of the things Frank was talking about, like how to heat a home with as little fuel as possible. The Soviets are just as concerned about diminishing reserves of oil and natural gas as we are.

Maybe we could try harder to be friends by sharing some of what we know about insulation and renewable energy. Or, maybe we could try harder to reduce our own consumption of resources, and to stop taking such a large share of what the earth has to offer. And, if they take advantage of our friendship, if they think they are better off fighting us instead of cooperating with us, at least we will have done what is right.”

“It's never right to let someone take advantage of you.”

Hans had a flash of *deja vu*, as if he had been through this conversation a thousand times before. Whatever it would take to change each others minds was more than words. He excused himself as gracefully as he could, tried to give his father-in-law a sincere smile, and moved towards the back of the house, feeling totally balled up.

The kids were assembled in the kitchen. They had finished eating, and had been making a lot of noise going up and down the stairs to the second floor.

“What have you guys been doing?” he asked.

Joshua said, “They don't have any steps in their house, so I was showing them ours.”

“Oh.” So that's what it was all about. Frank and Tonya's house was built on a concrete slab, and was only one story high, so Joshua's cousins had not had many opportunities to climb up and down steps.

“Did you show them the basement?” asked Hans.

“No. Mom said not to disturb Mara.”

They had fed Mara as soon as they had gotten back from church, and then had put her in her crib to sleep.

“Do you want to ask Mom if we can bring her up now?” asked Hans.

Joshua went into the dining room, and came back a minute later.

“She says it's okay.”

Hans led the way down the basement steps.

“Hey, it's cool down here,” said one.

It was noticeably cooler in the basement. As hot as it ever might get outside, they never had to air condition their bedroom to sleep at night, or even Hans' office during the day.

“She's awake.”

She certainly was, such a clamor from such a little one. Hans changed her diaper, and the children watched, making little comments as he did so. They were fascinated by the baby.

She stopped crying, and picking her up, he said, "Let's take her upstairs and show her off."

"Yeah." They thought that was a great idea, and charged up the steps to let everyone know she was on the way.

Mara had gotten accustomed to the Spiegels in the last two weeks, but she did not like to be held by very many new people. She had started crying during the baptismal service when Naomi had given her to Tonya. When Rev. Hutchings had sprinkled water on her head, she had begun such a ruckus that Hans could not get her to stop. After a couple of minutes, he had had to carry her out of the sanctuary to keep her from drowning out the choir.

The baby did look cute wearing her fluffy yellow dress, and Harold got his camera ready to take more photographs. The best picture was the look on Paul's face, later in the afternoon after some of their guests had left, and Mara had been fed again, when she spit up on his shoulder and he felt the warm milk and dribble soaking through his shirt.

Paul and Cindy did not have any children, so he was not used to that kind of treatment. He handled it well; though, instead of dropping the baby, he gave her to Cindy, who was sitting right beside him. Harold could have taken another good picture a moment later when Mara filled her diapers and Cindy promptly got up and handed the baby to Naomi.

The only one who did not find that amusing was Mara. She started crying again, and Naomi responded by taking her downstairs, changing her, and soothing her for a few minutes with a soft song.

Gathering their children, Frank and Tonya departed soon after Naomi and Mara returned to the front room. They weren't the only ones with a long drive home, and with brief intervals between their leave taking, Naomi's parents, Paul and Cindy, and Keith said farewell, and the Spiegel residence was restored to normal.

* * * * *

The heat was not abating. The highs through the first week of August had been in the upper 90s, and several days it had gone over 100 degrees.

Hans was glad the meeting with the representatives from the local chapters had been set for mid-morning. That way the five mile bike ride to the World Community Center could be made while it was relatively cool. He was wearing a light colored T-shirt, shorts, tennis shoes, and a helmet that not only protected his head in case of a collision, but helped keep the sun off as well.

The World Community Center was fairly centrally located in the metropolitan area, and the St. Louis chapter of the Nuclear Weapons Freeze Campaign and the Mennonite Peace Witness had offices there, so it made a convenient place to meet.

The Freeze Campaign had finally decided to co-sponsor, but they had not yet had a chance to inform their members, and some of the other local groups had not received mailings from their national offices, either. Hans had sent the necessary information to these people, and had spoken with them by phone so they would be prepared for the meeting.

A handrail on the side of the building made a good bike rack, to which Hans chained his

bicycle. Going down the steps to the basement door, where the meeting room was located, he entered, and discovered that Tim, the Mennonite Peace Witness staff person was already there. The tall, lanky peace activist had started making coffee, and was setting out some cups.

“Hi, Hans. How many people are you expecting?”

“Art should be coming down.” Art was the Chair of the St. Louis chapter of the Freeze Campaign. “Betty should be here for CALC, Leslie for People Power, Arnold for Physicians Alliance Against Nuclear Weapons, Terry Meeker for the Human Rights Office of the Archdiocese, and George Tern is coming for SANE. That totals eight, counting us.”

They all knew each other fairly well already. Some of them had been active in organizing protests and demonstrations on the peace issue for ten years, or more, and Hans marveled sometimes that they did not throw up their hands and give up.

While he had a few minutes, he went upstairs to use the drinking fountain. After the bike ride, he was thirsty, thirsty, thirsty. As the others gradually arrived, they settled in the chairs around the room, and engaged in small talk before the meeting began.

Arnold Reich, with the Physicians Alliance Against Nuclear Weapons, sent word that he would miss the meeting, so as soon as everyone else was present, Hans started. “I appreciate your taking the time to meet today. Before things go too far, it seemed like it would be a good idea to run our strategy before the groups at the local level. If we can identify some of the weak spots in planning our three thousand mile human chain now, we might be able to save some confusion later on.

“One of the first tasks before us is determining the final details of the route. We thought this decision would best be left to the local groups, anyway because they are most familiar with the suitability of roads and highways in their area.”

“That makes sense to me,” said Betty. The CALC representative was an elderly woman, a veteran of countless demonstrations and protests. “I don't see how anybody but people from St. Louis could pick the best route through St. Louis.”

“One thing I've been wondering,” said Art through his thick black beard, “since we are going to have an unbroken chain that goes across streets, and we're going to be blocking traffic, is how long the chain should last. We can't hold it all day.”

George said, “Oh, we don't have to hold hands all day. If we can do it for one second, that's all it will take to have completed the chain.” Unlike Roger Burdick, the local SANE activist was a low key, soft spoken sort. He had chosen to sit on a cushion on the floor.

“I would say it is pretty impossible to get five million people to do the same thing, all the way across the country, in one second,” said Terry. The Archdiocesan representative was a newcomer to the mid-west, but was already an important member of the local movement. “For one thing, Washington, DC is three hours ahead of Los Angeles.”

Hans had already encountered that in his teleconferences. “We'll definitely have to arrange this according to the time zones,” he said. “One possibility is that we would ask people to join hands at 4:30 pm in the Eastern time zone, 3:30 in the Central zone, 2:30 in the Mountain zone, and 1:30 in the

Pacific time zone.”

“Why that late in the Eastern time zone?” asked Leslie. She was able to be present today because the state legislature was currently out of session. As the People Power lobbyist, Jefferson City became her home when the General Assembly convened.

“It's not established yet,” said Hans. “I'm just suggesting that as a possibility. But, we might want to set it at 4:30 in the Eastern zone because that makes it 2:30 in the Mountain zone. It might be nice to have it even later in that zone because that is where we are going to have to bring people the greatest distances.”

“We had better make sure we know where one time zone changes to another,” remarked George. He slid on the cushion until his head was resting on the seat of the sofa against which he was leaning.

“Oh, that's no problem,” stated Art. “They know that down to the inch.” Bringing it back to his earlier concern, he said, “We still haven't dealt with how long people should hold hands to make sure the chain is complete. Do we need to say an hour, or a half hour? We need to have some margin for error.”

“Certainly not an hour,” said George. “I don't even think a half hour. Maybe ten minutes would be enough.”

Tim said, “I just hope I'm not standing next to someone with sweaty hands.”

“What if you have an itch?” asked Leslie. “You're going to let go to scratch.”

The group took a couple of minutes to joke about sweaty hands and itching. It was a moment of levity that had everyone feeling good.

Task oriented as usual, Hans brought them back to the point after he thought they had clowned long enough. “A half hour is probably longer than we need to make the chain last.” He was going back and forth in his own mind about the optimal duration for the chain. “Holding it longer than ten minutes might be difficult.”

“As far as blocking traffic goes,” continued Hans. “I don't know if we really need to worry too much about that. Streets are blocked for parades for hours at a time. Emergency vehicles will be able to get through if they have to. It's just a matter of opening the line and letting them through. If we need parade permits, Art; I guess that is something we will ask the local groups to look into.”

Helping keep the meeting on track, Betty said, “Let's talk about the route. The chain is going to be coming from the southwest, along Highway 44. Watson Road and Chippewa parallel the highway, so we could shift people to the side streets from Watson Road.”

“Why don't we look at a map,” said Tim. He went upstairs to his office and came back a minute later with a St. Louis map.

While he was gone, Hans reminded them that Highway 44 was an interstate, and that non-motorized use was prohibited.

“You mean unless we get permission from the state highway commission,” said George, as he made himself more comfortable, crossing his legs and folding his hands on his belly.

“I think we should stay off the interstates,” exclaimed Art. “As fast as the traffic moves on the highway, it's not safe. Besides, the state roads are more scenic.”

“But they have more hills and curves, which could be hazardous,” said Terry. “And, if we use the state roads, we're going to be adding miles to the route.”

“The state roads are narrower, too,” added Betty. “And, you don't have nice wide shoulders to park cars for people who will want to drive to their place in line.”

Terry proposed, “Let's submit our applications to use the interstates. If the highway commission turns us down, we can use the state roads as a backup.”

Hans did not like having to make their plans contingent on the actions of the state highway commission, but unable to think of a better alternative, he said, “We still need to determine the places we will get on and off the interstates in order to put in our application.”

“Here's the map,” said Tim. He opened it, and spread it on the floor for everyone to see.

A casual dresser when she was not in the state capital, Leslie knelt by it in her blue jeans and sleeveless blouse, and traced a route with her finger. “Instead of paralleling the highway along Watson Road, why don't we get off I-44 earlier, maybe at Meramec Station Road. We could go up to Big Bend Boulevard and into the city from a more central line.”

Peering over his feet as Leslie delineated the route, George said, “I like that. Let's go right through the middle of the city, right down Lindell. How about bringing the chain under the Arch?”

“That would be a good place to have some exhibits,” said Hans. “A little international festival with countries that join us in our hope for peace.”

“How do we get across the river?” questioned Betty, her gray head bent forward as she studied the map.

The Eads Bridge would work,” suggested Tim. He wanted to have more of a hand in determining the route than contributing the map. “It has very little traffic anymore, and it's a historic bridge.”

“We will need to talk with people from East St. Louis to make sure they can pick it up alright there on the Illinois side of the river,” remarked Hans.

“You know,” declared Art. One could see that something was bothering him by the way he was tugging on his beard. “We might apply for permission to use the interstates as our first choice, but I don't think we should just let the possibility of using the state roads sit. State road 50 coming from Illinois to Jefferson City, and state highway 54 southwest from there would be our alternate route. We ought to ask the groups along the state roads to plan the details of that route now, without waiting for a ruling from the highway commission.”

Hans looked at the representative from the Human Rights Office, and Terry said, "I think that would be wise," accepting the modification of his proposal with composure, and George and Betty offered words of agreement.

More comfortable with that resolution of the question of using the interstates versus the state highways, himself, Hans said, "Good. That's the strategy we'll share with the other chapters." With that settled, he asked, "Is everybody happy with the route we planned through St. Louis? Get off I-44 as soon as possible, through the center of the city, under the Arch, and across the Mississippi on Eads Bridge?"

He looked around the group and saw a general nodding of heads and looks of satisfaction.

"Well, that's one piece of the puzzle. Several thousand more pieces to put together, and ten months to do it, not bad."

"As far as numbering the miles along the route goes," Betty raised another point, "do you really want to do that from 1 to 3,000, or do you think it might be better to break it into smaller sections and number the miles between each town separately? It might be easier to work with in smaller pieces, making sure each section is complete and connected with the others, instead of looking at it all at one time."

Adding Betty's suggestion to a page of notes he was keeping, Hans said, "I don't know. Until we get more of the route defined, it's hard to say. But, you may be right. If we go from mile number 1 to more than 3,000, any little change or revision of the route would change the numbers for a lot of miles. Breaking it into smaller pieces really makes sense.

"If we can turn our thoughts to something other than the route, I would like to check with you on the process of signing up the participants and assigning them to their positions. This may be the most critical piece of the puzzle. We can't just let everyone haphazardly decide at what point in the line they will be located.

"Even if we manage the chain in pieces, we will need a central means of overseeing the final distribution. I have access to plenty of storage through the modem connection on my office computer, but there's no way I can enter the millions of names we are going to collect."

"You don't have to," said George. "In fact, no one group has to. We have a modem on the computer at the SANE office. They have one here at the World Community Center. Most organizations have them now, or can easily get to one. All you have to do is write a program on a central computer to accept and organize the data, give the access code to each of the local chapters, and they can directly enter the names and addresses of their own people."

"Yes, that would be the simplest way to do it," agreed Art. "And, as far as the distribution goes, that can be done with each person's zip code. The program can be written to assign people with certain zip codes to certain sections of the line. It can even be done according to that map where the lines converge on the New Mexico and Arizona part of the route."

"Good grief," thought Hans. "The way they are talking, they make it sound easy."

"Can you do that?" he demanded.

“Do what?” asked Art.

“Write that program.”

“No, but I know someone who can.”

“I know people who can do it, too,” said George. “It’s not that difficult. You could probably do it yourself if you put your mind to it.”

“That’s okay,” said Hans. “I’ll be glad to let someone else have a chance at it. Will you talk to the person you know, Art, and find out what it would take to get that program written?”

“Sure.”

“Well, that helps a lot,” said Hans. “We will certainly be better prepared to answer some of the questions other groups may have as they start to meet. We will let them know we need the details of their sections of the route as soon as possible so we can submit our applications for permission to use the interstates. We’ll go ahead and develop a backup plan to use the state roads and highways. And, we’ll get this program written so the names of people who sign-up to participate can be worked into the distribution pattern. Can you think of anything else we need to do right now?”

“Yes,” said Art. “We never did decide what period of time the chain should last. We need to have some figure when we submit our applications for permits.”

“Oh, yeah,” said Hans, “that was kind of left hanging. Well, what should we do?”

“Put down a half hour on the permit applications,” suggested Leslie. “If we hold hands less than that, fine, but we want to give ourselves plenty of time in case we decide to use it later on.”

That was satisfactory to the group, and after a few other minor matters, they adjourned and departed to the heat of the noontime sun.

* * * * *

Instead of returning home through Forest Park, the way he had come, Hans decided to bicycle east from Skinker along Lindell. This was a grand boulevard that bordered the north side of the park, and ran straight through the heart of the city. Some of the stateliest old houses in St. Louis were to be found on the north side of the street, homes perhaps, for presidents of large corporations. Each house was distinctive; although, there were common elements of ornamental brickwork, bays and turrets, and covered driveways. The front yards were immense; many of the houses were set back at least a hundred feet from the street. Continuing on Lindell past the park, the buildings changed to offices, banks, and churches, and the street remained one of the most impressive in the city.

On an impulse, Hans made a detour to the north. It did not take very many blocks before the character of the buildings changed again. He was pedaling through residential neighborhoods, but the houses here were smaller, closer to each other and to the street. It was not that those houses were more average that made the difference, it was the signs of decay; vacant lots where buildings once had stood, boarded up buildings, and houses, still occupied, that were in a painful state of disrepair.

“Looks like somebody wrote this area off,” thought Hans, not only on the basis of the housing, but also because the unemployment in these neighborhoods was especially high, and mostly black people lived there now, while it had once been all white.

Hans stopped and put his foot on the ground. The gutter of the house he was passing was hanging loose from the eaves. It must have been detached for quite some time because the wall was starting to settle at that spot. Water splashing on the ground next to the house had eroded the dirt away from the foundation.

That was a sorry sight. Once the foundation was gone, there was little hope for the building, and the damage here was already done. Even if the gutter was repaired right now, the cost to save the foundation and to repair the wall would be huge. Another few years, and this would probably be another weed and rubble covered vacant lot.

Music came from one open window. People still lived there.

Pedaling slowly away, Hans passed a liquor store at the next corner. A group of men were hanging out in the shade of the trees in the adjacent lot.

Farther along, he passed a man who was sitting alone in the doorway of a boarded up building. Usually Hans got a lot of looks as he bicycled by, but this man did not lift his eyes from the cracks in the sidewalk. Hans noticed that the shoes the man was wearing did not fit his feet. His heels were sticking over the backs, flattening then to the soles.

“How can we do it?” wondered Hans. “We know how to split an atom. We can alter the genetic structure of living cells. We can program a computer to plot the distribution of millions of people along a 3,000 mile line. How can we ignore the suffering that surrounds us?”

“I just did it myself, passed right by that guy without saying a word. What could I do? Give him a few dollars and say, 'Here, get yourself some decent shoes?' He might just spend it on booze or drugs. He might rather remain in oblivion than bother about getting shoes that fit. What do you do for someone who is so busted up inside they have given up on themselves?”

“I almost wish I hadn't come this way. I wouldn't have seen that house with the foundation caving in, and I wouldn't have seen that man who is caved in just as bad. What can I do about it? If I went back, what would I do?”

Again, Hans stopped pedaling. For a moment, he considered going back, and was torn. Struggling inside himself, he was painfully aware of his indecision. Finally his sense of inadequacy won out. Maybe a word of kindness would be enough. Maybe not. Maybe the only real offer of assistance would be to ask him home, “Be a part of our family, till you are able to make it on your own.”

As he continued pedaling towards home, alone, he felt like he had lost, like he had not done as much as he could have.

“We can bring the line this way. I'll ask the others if we can bring the line this way. This has to be part of what we do. They have to be a part of what we do.”

Making a mental note to ask the others to revise the route to detour off Lindell along the way he had come, he still felt there was more that he could do, and the feeling did not go away.

When he returned home, Naomi was waiting, ready to leave. She wanted to visit with several members of the congregation who were residents of nursing homes, or were shut-ins.

“I fed and changed Mara within the half hour, and Joshua is playing in the back yard,” she gave him a quick status report.

When Hans started to give her an account of the morning's meeting, she stopped him and said, “I'm sorry, honey, but I have to leave if I'm going to make all of my calls. Why don't you tell me about it this evening?”

She really did not want to be detained, so Hans bit his tongue, except to say, “Okay, have a good afternoon.”

Naomi gave him a kiss, and picking up her portable phone, she exited by the back door. By this time, he was hungry so he started to set lunch fixings on the kitchen table; bread, peanut butter, jelly, cheese, lunch meat, and fruit.

“Come and get it,” he called out the back door to let Joshua know that lunch was on the table. Naomi had already unfastened her moped, and was gone.

His son came to the door with two ripe, red tomatoes. “How do these look?” asked the boy, holding them up for closer inspection.

Hans started salivating as he imagined biting into those juicy, garden grown tomatoes. “They're beauties,” he said. “Let's eat them with lunch.”

He asked the boy to wash them while he finished making a couple of sandwiches for himself and one for Joshua. As he sliced the tomatoes, Hans had another idea. “Why don't you take these out to the family room,” he said and pointed at the sandwiches.

“I want my tomato on my sandwich,” stated the boy.

“Oh, sure, can't do without that,” said Hans, apologetically, inserting a slice of tomato under each of the bread covers.

Then, while Joshua took their food, Hans got a blanket, laid it on the middle of the floor, added some toys, and placed Mara among them. She was four and a half months old now, and noticeably bigger than when they had brought her home. As they ate their lunches, Hans and Joshua watched the baby.

She laid on her back, looking around and soon, when her attention was attracted to the toys on the blanket beside her, she started making motions with her arms, trying to move her body so she could reach the closest toy, a small cloth bear. After a brief moment of futile groping she started to cry.

“She can't reach her toys,” said Joshua, and he started to pick up the bear to move it closer to

her.

“Just a minute, Josh. Don't give it to her yet.”

The boy gave his father a perplexed look, but sat back down, saying, “But she's crying. She wants her bear.”

“Watch her for a minute. It's not just because the toy is out of her reach that she's crying. She's also frustrated that she can't move herself.”

As he spoke, Mara stopped crying, and renewed her efforts to reach the toy. This time she tried more with her other hand. As far as Hans knew, Mara had never yet managed to turn herself over, from her back to her stomach. She was about the age when babies did that, and judging by the way she was reaching over with her far hand, that was what she was trying to do. A moment later, her efforts still unsuccessful, she started to cry again.

Joshua look at his father.

“Not yet, son.”

Once more, Mara stopped crying and tried, reaching across, to turn over. This time she almost succeeded in twisting onto her shoulder and over, but she was unable to turn far enough, and ended up still lying on her back.

“Go ahead, Josh. That's probably as far as she can go for now.”

Joshua picked up the toy and put it in her arms. Her movements were so clumsy that she could hardly hold onto it. As much with her arms as with her hands, she guided the stuffed bear's ear towards her mouth.

“Hey, Dad, she's sucking the bear's ear,” said the boy with a giggle.

“Yeah, isn't that something?” He paused for a moment, then said, “I wasn't trying to be mean, Josh, but if we make everything too easy for her, she might not learn how to take care of herself. She won't always have her big brother around to do things for her.”

“But she couldn't reach it.”

“That's why I let you go ahead and give it to her. She had tried as hard as she could, and we don't want her to do without because of her limitations. We can't expect her to do more than she is able to do. The same goes for you, or for anybody else.”

“How can you tell if somebody has tried as hard as they can?” asked the boy with a characteristic display of clarity that was beyond his years.

“Hmm, that's not always easy. I guess it takes attention. Like with Mara, she needs attention. We have to spend a lot of time with her to be sensitive to her needs.”

That evening at supper, Hans shared with his family what had happened at the meeting with the

local peace groups, and the alteration in the route he was going to suggest. The strategy of having each group enter the names of those who signed up for the demonstration in a central computer caught his father's interest.

“How are you going to pay for the computer time?” asked Harold.

“Most of the co-sponsoring groups are including appeals for contributions in their mailings, and they are helping to cover the costs of organizing the event,” said Hans. “As we identify more of the expenses we can approach other sources of funds, too. The Catholics and the Presbyterians have both committed to making grants to charter buses to transport people to their locations in the line. They are thinking that far ahead, and the money is there.”

“I like the idea of re-routing the line through some of the poorer sections of the city,” said Lois, responding more to the human element. “How can we talk about building peace in the world if we are not even dealing with the problems that exist in our own country?”

“I saw some problems of a different sort today,” said Naomi. She had feelings to unload from her afternoon of visitations. “You know Mrs. Rill? She stopped coming to church services about five years ago.”

Hans knew who his wife was talking about; although, five years was probably as long as it had been since he had seen her.

“It just got to be too difficult for her to get out of her house,” continued Naomi. “Her family is all gone, and so are most of her friends. If not for her telephone and the meal deliveries, she might go for days without contact with another human being. I don't know how many times she has told me before, but she told me again this afternoon about the day her husband died. She just seems so alone.”

“The sad thing is there are so many people like that,” said Lois with an, “And, I hope it doesn't happen to me,” look.

“Why don't they live together?” asked Joshua. “Then they wouldn't be alone.”

“They get used to living in one place,” said Harold. “It's their home, and any other place would be unfamiliar. It's difficult for some people to make a change at that age, and there aren't always good alternatives for them, either. Or, they may not be able to afford the good alternatives, so they stay where they are, doing the best they can.”

Hans went to bed with mixed feelings that night. Naomi had gotten tied up with Mara, and then talking with Lois and Harold and the evening had slipped away without further opportunity to discuss the events of the day. While the progress in planning and organizing the demonstration was encouraging, the lingering images of poverty and brokenness, bottled up inside, still bothered him. It was one of those times when the division and pain in the world made him wonder if they were going to make it, even to think that it might be better if the slate was wiped clean. Erase everything and start over.

He thought about Mara, and some of the poison drained out of his mind. Asleep in the crib at the foot of their bed, she was a wonder and a joy. Growing, struggling to do a little thing like turn herself over, cared for by her brother and the rest of them, she had truly become a part of their family.

“We're kind of like her,” thought Hans, “struggling to turn ourselves over. Maybe we'll learn yet.” He fell asleep.

* * * * *

Early October manifested itself with chilly nights and trees shedding their leaves.

Although the issue of co-sponsorship had been laid to rest, and Naomi continued her presence, Hans still had a hard time relaxing for the third teleconference. Now that several months had already been invested in organizing the demonstration, there just seemed to be that much more at stake. Plus, he was disappointed that Dr. Foster and Willy Lee were unable to attend this meeting.

“So the groups along the eastern half of the route decided to use the state highways,” repeated Joyce, following Hans' report.

“Yes, and that puts them a lot farther along in their organizing because they have avoided the complication of applying for permission to use the interstates.”

“How long will it take to get the decisions from the highway commissions for the rest of the route?” asked Roger. His voice was still gruff, but he no longer sounded impatient.

“Hopefully, no more than a couple of months,” replied Hans. “All of the applications have been submitted. Now it is up to the highway commissions how quickly they move on it, or how much further documentation they want before they make a ruling.”

“The coverage in the west coast press was excellent when the applications went in,” remarked Roger roughly, and Hans figured the SANE representative sounded that way even when he was happy.

“Yes, sending out press releases to announce Hands Across the Nation at the same time we applied for permission to use the interstates was a good stroke,” said Alice. “The Associated Press called our office to ask to what extent the United Church of Christ is involved.”

“You were quoted in the article that appeared in our newspaper,” stated Roger. “The Catholics and the Presbyterians were cited, also.”

“What about the Jewish involvement?” asked Alec.

“Nothing was said about that,” answered Roger.

“There was no mention of the Jewish involvement in the east coast press, either,” said Claire.

“Why were we treated like that?” asked Alec. His upset was evident in his voice. “Is the contribution of the Jewish people to our demonstration of unity going to be ignored?”

“Your name was included in the press releases,” said Hans. “So was Omar's. I guess the press decided not to pick up on that aspect of the event.”

“It's still early,” said Victor. “We're lucky we received the coverage we got. I have a feeling we

are going to need a lot of public support to get those highway commissions to act, and to act favorably. How many names have been entered so far as participants?"

"Less than 200,000," replied Hans, wondering if Alec would think they were evading his concern, "and almost one fourth of those are from the Los Angeles area. The local peace groups must really be busy out there."

"I think that is fantastically good!" exclaimed Joyce. "To have that many people who are willing to commit themselves to an action that is still eight months away is wonderful."

If they had been in the same room, Hans would have given her a hug for being so cheerfully optimistic.

"How many people are you figuring per mile?" asked Roger.

"The computer was programmed to assign 1,250 people to a mile before considering it filled and assigning any additional registrants to another section of the route."

"You'd better make it 1,500," uttered Roger. "We should allow a wider margin for people not being where they are supposed to be."

"And maybe 1,700 people per mile for Arizona and New Mexico," said Claire. "That section of the route is going to be the most difficult for participants to get to." The People Power representative was even more conservative in her planning than Roger.

"Okay," said Hans. "Do you see any other weak spots in our planning?"

"How about more publicity?" asked Naomi. The earlier press releases had been her idea. "It would be nice if we could find a way to put this before the public's eye at least one a month until next June."

"We could do another press release that emphasizes the interfaith nature of the event," suggested Alice.

"Maybe there should be an Interfaith Task Force that would issue a joint statement of support for Hands," said Joyce, elaborating on Alice's idea.

"I can give you a statement to include," offered Alec. He sounded much happier at this turn of events.

"So can I," said Omar. "That was a thoughtful suggestion."

"What about the other religious organizations?" asked Claire.

"I'll write to each of the organizations on our list that showed any interest, and ask them to contact Alice within a week if they want to be a part of the statement," said Hans, recognizing that this was her brainchild. "Is that alright, Alice?"

"Yes," she replied without hesitation.

“Hey, we're on a roll,” thought Hans.

“You mentioned at our last meeting about inviting participants from other countries,” recalled Victor. “That might make a good follow-up story to the statement from the Interfaith Task Force. Maybe it's time to move on that, or have you already started?”

“No, I wasn't really sure how to proceed,” replied Hans.

“That's something I can help with,” stated Roger. “SANE has contacts in more than thirty countries already. We have people who are familiar with our state department and with the foreign governments.”

“How about the communist countries?” asked Father Welsh.

“Do you mean, should we include them?” Roger threw the question back.

“Oh, of course we should try to include them,” said Father Welsh. “I mean, how do we make it possible for them to be included?”

“I'm not sure about that right now, myself,” responded Roger, “but I'll work on it.”

“We may need to be ready to help pay travel expenses for foreign representatives,” said Naomi.

That resulted in a moment of silence. It did not seem like they could ever talk for long without running into the issue of money.

“If we subsidize a representative from each of 150 countries, at \$500 per person, that's \$75,000,” figured Roger.

“Do we want to put the effort into raising that much money for that purpose?” asked Hans.

“Compared with how much we spend on some other things,” replied Joyce, “that's not really very much. I think international representation is vital to what we are doing, and we are getting the best response to our request for contributions for this event that we have ever gotten. We can raise the money.”

“That's one. How do the rest of you feel?” asked Hans.

“We can offer to help,” said Roger, “but, I don't think we should automatically pay everybody's way.”

“Right, and let's limit the number that we help from any country to one person,” added Claire. “It takes 5,000 donors sending \$15 each to raise \$75,000. That's as much as People Power might net from a single appeal, and you can only go to the well so many times.”

“So letters to groups in other countries should state that we would like for them to be represented, and if they would not be able to send anyone on their own, we will help cover the costs for one person.” Hans restated the proposed restrictions and asked, “Are there any objections to that?”

The group must have been satisfied that they were neither being stingy, nor overly generous because no one spoke up.

“Super,” responded Hans. “Is there anything else, or can we go ahead and set another meeting time?”

“I don't we think we should wait so long for the next one,” said Joyce. “How about December?”

They settled on the same day and time in December. That would be a couple of weeks before Christmas.

Thanking them again for their input and for the work their organizations were doing, Hans hung up, looked at his wife, and said, “One day at a time, huh?”

Four months had passed since the first teleconference. So much had already taken place, and so much more remained to be done. The only way to keep from being overwhelmed was to work at it bit by bit, one step and one day at a time.

“I thought it was a pretty uneventful meeting,” she replied, as if it was all in a day's work.

He wondered, as he had in the past, if her time sense was different from his, perhaps as a result of childbearing. The basic biological fact of carrying a child for nine months, feeling that gradual development and growth, waiting for the awful climax of birth; what did that do to a woman's sense of time? For the moment, he could only wonder.

Mara had given them an hour of quiet, but she needed to be checked. Joshua was back in school, and Mom and Dad were both at work, so they had put her in her crib in their bedroom. If she was awake, she would not want to be left there much longer.

* * * * *

Hans paused in his raking and looked at the trees. As many leaves as there were on the ground, the branches were still full. That was the problem with sycamores. They did not drop their leaves and get it over. A few at a time for the next couple of months, they would still be shedding, and the leaves were so big that it did not take very many to look like a lot.

He had taken a nap that afternoon after the teleconference, and upon getting up, had felt the need for a little physical activity. Tidying up the yard had seemed like a good thing to do.

As he finished cramming a pile of leaves into a large plastic bag, one of his neighbors, a burly former police officer walked by.

“Hi, Hans.”

“Hi, Ralph. How are you?”

“What do you think about those Dodgers? Are they going to put away the Yankees in four

games?”

Hans answered after a fashion. He did not pay that much attention to baseball unless the Cardinals were contenders.

“Say, I saw your name in the paper the other day. It was about people standing along the highway to hold hands across the country. What do you want to do that for?”

It was a serious question, and leaning on his rake Hans responded, “It's a way for people to show their desire for peace, by taking time out from all the other things we do to stand hand-in-hand in a unbroken chain all the way across the country. It's a demonstration of unity and oneness, maybe not of what we think, but of what we are.”

His neighbor soaked that in, then suggested, “The paper said you are asking for permission to use the interstates. It's too bad you aren't waiting another ten years, to do it as part of a national Fourth of July celebration in the year 2000. They have to give you permission for that.”

Hans nodded and said, “You're probably right. That's not such a bad idea, either, except we may not have ten years.”

“Aw, Hans, you worry too much. Nobody's going to push the button. They have too much to lose. We might see a few thousand soldiers get shot up somewhere, but nobody's going to start a nuclear war.”

“I hope you're right,” replied Hans, “but, you know the number of countries that have the weapons to start it is growing. Even if it doesn't happen, who wants to live with the possibility? Did you hear about the survey where one out of two high school students said they believe the nuclear holocaust will happen during their lifetimes? What kind of a way to live is that?”

Hans could not help getting emotional as he thought about those young people. Another thought occurred to him, and taking a deep breath, he continued in a more even tone, “For the countries of the world to spend more than a trillion dollars a year on weapons and armies doesn't make sense either. Why is the military solution considered the only 'practical' way to behave, and anything else is 'idealistic'?”

“That's just the way it is, human nature.” The retired policeman was not likely to be surprised by the worst that people might do. “I think you have a neat idea, though. What would I have to do to get in line?”

“You can probably walk to it,” said Hans. “It's coming through St. Louis along Lindell. Hold on a minute and I'll get a sign-up sheet.”

“Can you put my name down for me?”

“No, you have to sign it yourself. I can be back with the form in no time.” Hans dropped his rake, raced inside to pick up a form, and returned as quickly as he could.

As Ralph signed the form, he said “I appreciate this, Hans. This is a really good thing.”

Ralph resumed his walk, and Hans returned to his raking. As he gathered the leaves into a pile, he reconsidered what he had said about people viewing the military solution as the only practical way to behave. "A more accurate way to have said that might have been 'the only practical way to behave in some situations,'" he thought. "If it's forced on us, maybe the only thing to do is to fight. Suppose the other person is totally unreasonable, intent on hurting me for no good reason. Do I have to accept being hurt in order to avoid harming them?"

At that point, Hans' brain lost the ability to think it through any further. The idea of suffering for the sake of someone else just didn't make any sense. He shook his head, and surveying the yard, saw that a few leaves remained on the ground. "So what," he thought. "There will be a few more tomorrow. That's good enough."

He tied the plastic bag with a twister seal, and carried it with the others to the dumpster in the alley. The city would haul them to the incinerator with the rest of the trash.

"That seems like an awful lot of organic matter to burn up and throw away. Somebody ought to do something about that. But, not me. Not this time," he thought, and slammed the lid of the dumpster shut.

Entering the house through the basement door, he made certain it was locked securely, and put away the rake. Rather than start something new in the little time that was left that afternoon, he stomped upstairs. Joshua, who had come home from school about the time his father had gotten up from his nap, was playing peekaboo with Mara in the kitchen.

Hans sat at the table to read the newspaper while the children played. Gradually, his eyes focused on the words in front of him. For a change, there were no headlines reporting violence glaring at him. The way Hans felt by now, even if the nuclear stockpiles of all countries were somehow magically dismantled, he would continue to organize their demonstration. Building those bonds of love and of oneness would still be of use.

Halfway down the front page was an article reporting the findings of a recent study of the global population. They estimated close to 5.2 billion people, and one out of five was considered to be living at a level of extreme poverty. As many as twenty million people, a large percentage of those children, had died from hunger related causes in 1989, yet the world population had grown by close to eighty five million people that same year.

He looked at his children. Neither of them, as far as he knew, had even gone a single day without at least one good meal. The closest he had ever come to appreciating hunger had been the time he had fasted for three days. He had almost been able to feel his body begin to feed off itself, cells breaking down and being used by other cells for food. He had imposed that on himself; though, and had known that there was food in abundance within easy reach. Slow, relentless, unavoidable starvation was still a fate that he could scarcely imagine.

Harold came in the front door with a familiar jingle of keys and entered the kitchen. Of late, Hans' father had taken to stopping at the YMCA for a quick workout, but it was his turn to cook this evening, so he had come straight home.

As he started taking food from the refrigerator, Harold said, "We just hired someone new at the center who seems to be especially good with toddlers and babies. If you find it difficult to manage with

Mara, we do have the space for several more her age.”

“Thanks, Dad. That's good to know, but we're managing alright here. Naomi has been able to watch her the times I have had to leave the house.”

It was unusual that there were several openings. There were so many families in which both husband and wife worked, and single parents with children, that the demand for day care facilities stayed pretty high. He suspected that a good number of those parents, like Tonya, wished they could be at home and watch their children themselves.

There was an article in the middle of the paper that caught Hans' attention. “Josh, listen to this.” He read out loud. “Design for space station is complete. A team of scientists and engineers from seven countries has finished a three year project to design the first permanently staffed space station. The station will have a closed environment capable of sustaining a crew of up to five members without support from earth.” He stopped reading and said, “How about that? Science fiction writers have been telling us about self supporting stations for years. Now they're going to do it.”

Harold said, “Jules Verne's writing had a lot of ideas that later became reality, too. I guess that's why some of those writers prefer to call their works 'future histories' instead of science fiction. They have seen possibilities of things that actually might happen.”

Joshua left Mara in her walker, and stood next to his father. “It says the space station may be ready for its first crew in 1998,” read the boy. “That's eight years. I'll be sixteen by then.”

Hans looked at his son. Joshua's face had a distant expression, as if his mind was busy in some dream world.

“Are you thinking about being an astronaut?” asked Hans, aware of his son's interests.

“Yeah, and exploring other planets.”

“That's all right,” thought Hans. “Lord knows we have plenty of unresolved problems here, but it would be a shame to cut the development of the human potential in other directions.”

Harold looked over from the stove. “Do you remember the first moon walk, Hans? Some people did not believe it. They thought it was a stunt filmed in a movie studio.”

“Yes, I remember that. It's still pretty incredible to me to stand outside at night, look at the moon, and think about people walking around up there. It's a good thing there are astronauts who can do it. I don't even like to fly. It gives me ear aches.”

“How are they going to talk with each other if this is an international crew?” asked Harold. “Are we going to expect everyone else to be able to speak English?”

“The article doesn't say,” answered Hans, looking at the paper again, “but, that's probably how they will communicate, English and computer.” He expressed another opinion, “It's a shame the Soviets are not included in this. They really have done more with space stations, and would surely have something to contribute to the effort.”

“Well, our government saw fit to limit the participation to 'friendly' nations,” said Harold, with a touch of sarcasm.

“You would think it would be friendly to invite the Soviets to work on it with us.”

“That would be like inviting the bear into the butcher shop. We'd have to negotiate whether the resources of outer space would be developed by public, or private ownership,” stated the older man, identifying a key element of the conflict.

“I would like to learn to speak Russian,” said Joshua, breaking into their conversation.

Both men looked at the boy. “Why would you like to do that?” asked his father.

“So we could talk. If we're in space and they need help, so we can talk.”

The boy sounded sincere, as sincere as only a child could be.

“There are tapes that teach the Russian language,” said Hans. “We might be able to get some from the library. Would you like to hear what it sounds like?”

“Yes,” answered the boy as if he expected to listen to a set of tapes a few times, and learn another language as easily as that.

“Can I get some help setting the table?” asked Harold.

Knowing that message from Earth was meant for him, Joshua made his martyr's look and moved towards the pantry to get some plates.

It was several days before Hans was able to stop at the library, as notifying each of the religious organizations of the formation of an Interfaith Task Force for Peace was at the top of his list of things to do. He also spent some time calling the different highway commission offices to make sure the applications to use the interstates had been received and were being processed.

When he got to the library, he found that they had just obtained a program for a computer course on the Russian language, but it was not compatible with his system. Checking out the sound recording that came with an instruction manual instead, he made a mental note that the programmed learning course was there as a future possibility.

That evening, he and Joshua listened to the recording and followed along with the printed phrases together. They had fun with it, but he could see that it was more than the boy could tackle by himself. If Joshua's interest held, he could take a course on Russian in high school, or when he was older, he might pursue it on his own with the help of the computer program.

When Hans got the boy settled in bed that night, Naomi having gotten caught in a late committee meeting at church, Joshua said, “I am going to learn to speak it,” not discouraged in the least.

“You have plenty of time, Josh. You don't have to do everything right now.”

“And, I'm going to be an astronaut, too.”

“Well, I hope you'll remember to write when you get off to visiting other planets,” said his father with a grin.

“I won't write. I'll use the radio,” said Joshua with a straight face.

“Right.” Hans kissed the boy on the forehead. As he turned out the light and left the room, he heard his son reciting the sounds of the Russian alphabet, “Ah, beh, veh, deh, ...”

* * * * *

It was almost a month later when the newspaper carried the article concerning the endorsement given by the Interfaith Task Force for Peace. Instead of appearing as a news item in the front pages, it was back in the religious section. Although fewer people were likely to see it there, Hans was not upset when Naomi showed him where the article had been printed.

She handed the paper to him and joined him on the couch, restraining her excitement with difficulty. This was important, because from her experience, most of the people who took an active stand on the issue did so out of their religious convictions, and this was an opportunity to say how their faith guided their actions.

Hans scanned the article quickly to get the general sense of it, then went back through it more thoroughly.

“Isn't it good?” said Naomi.

“It's excellent,” he agreed. “They did a complete job of printing the quotations from the representatives of the different religious bodies. Even the Jews and the Muslims got credit for their contribution.”

“Yes, and that part where they say we are all children of God, and we should know that especially in the United States because people of so many backgrounds and faiths live here, that is great,” she exclaimed, her face flushed with the force of her feelings.

He found the lines to which she referred, and read the next two sentences out loud, “Therefore, as we in our diversity come together to join hands across this nation, we will seek to remember that those who live in other countries are also our sisters and brothers. How then shall we treat our sisters and brothers to be pleasing to God? I don't see how anybody with any kind of faith could believe that blowing each other up would be pleasing to God.”

“Hans, some people believe that eliminating Godless people from the earth, even if it means blowing them up, would be God's will,” she said with a note of distress.

“To me the very act of destruction, of killing another human being is a Godless act. There is no way we can be one with God at the same time we are doing a Godless act.”

He could hear the argumentative tone in his own voice, and thought, “Relax Hans. If what you say is true, it's not your saying it that makes it so.”

She was not the one he needed to convince anyway, of which she reminded him by declaring, “I expect we will see a response from those who disagree with us before long.”

“Yeah, even though we've succeeded in keeping the purpose of the event as broad and noncontroversial as possible, we're bound to get some hostile reactions before we're through.”

“Write a letter to your congressman if you must, but don't nauseate everyone with this public display,” intoned Naomi, mimicking an irate observer of a demonstration in which they had participated several years ago. The statement had been a classic expression of opposition to demonstrations of any sort.

“Writing letters and voting are important,” retorted Hans, “but if we didn't have other peaceful means of blowing off steam, we'd probably be blowing up bridges.” The incident had happened long enough ago that he had figured out how he would have liked to have answered the man.

“Yes, we want to build bridges, not tear them down. I'd like to keep that article after everyone's had a chance to see it.”

“Okay,” he replied, and set the newspaper aside to be saved.

Mara rolled next to the couch and reached for the paper. She moved around pretty well in her walker now. Sometimes the wheels got hung-up on the edge of the carpet, but her mobility for an eight month old was something with which to be reckoned. Just about everything in reach got picked up and put in her mouth, even the baseball glove Joshua had gotten for his last birthday.

“You don't want to put that newspaper in your mouth, do you?” Hans said to Mara.

She gurgled and cooed back at him.

“Oh, you do. Well, that may not be such a good idea,” he said, and moved the newspaper out of her reach. The baby had some toys on the tray of her walker, and picking one up, Hans tried to interest her in it. Not this time. So much for that.

“She has a mind of her own,” said Naomi.

“She had a mind of her own from the start,” replied Hans.

Mara pushed away from the couch and rolled around the room. Watching her as her attention was attracted to one object after another, Hans felt once again that they had been exceptionally blessed when she had become a part of their family.

* * * * *

A couple of days before Thanksgiving, Hans got a phone call from Roger Burdick, the person whose conversion concerning the demonstration he still could not fathom.

“I thought you might be interested in hearing how we are proceeding on contacts with people from other countries,” said Roger in his thick, deep voice.

“Yes,” responded Hans with hopeful anticipation, “I was beginning to wonder about that.”

“We went ahead and mailed information to the peace groups in other countries of which we were aware. That turned out to be thirty five countries. About a dozen responses have come back so far, and they all expressed an interest in having at least one person participate, especially since we offered to help cover their travel expenses.

“I don't see that we'll have any problems getting one or two representatives from each of those thirty five countries. The question is how hard do we want to try to include people from the other 133 independent countries and 47 territories and colonies in the world.”

“I thought we wanted to try to have representatives from as many countries as possible, excluding no one,” replied Hans.

“That's what I thought, too. In countries where we don't have a peace organization contact, we sent letters to the heads of several of the churches. I thought that might tie in with our Interfaith Task Force.”

“Beautiful,” said Hans. “That's great.”

“That is with the exception of the communist countries, since most of their governments don't allow just any average citizen to leave. We have to follow channels there, and ask those governments if they would be willing to have a representative take part in our event.”

“Have we gotten any responses?”

“Not yet, and it may take a little while for them to decide if there is some kind of catch to it, or if they can use it for propaganda. Of course, even if they decide to send someone, our own state department may deny entry. That's not very likely, and it would probably be done only on an individual basis, still it could happen.”

“But the main concern is whether the governments of the communist countries want to have representatives participate in a peace demonstration that takes place in another country,” Hans repeated what Roger had said to make sure he understood. As he listened for Roger's reply, he heard a faint clicking sound from the receiver.

“That's it. You know, we may be letting ourselves in for some criticism by giving the communists a chance to make some propaganda, like they're the goods guys and the United States is the one that needs to disarm.”

“That's not the point we're trying to make,” protested Hans.

“Given the demonstration is only taking place in the United States, we may have a hard time convincing some people of that.”

“We are going to have a hard time convincing some people of anything,” said Hans with exasperation. “They already have their minds made up. They won't even listen to what we have to say. I'm sure we will be criticized and worse, but to deny representatives from communist countries a place

in the line ourselves would be contrary to the spirit of the whole event.

“As far as pointing fingers goes, the values we are raising are for the communist countries as well as for our own. That needs to be made clear every step along the way.” There it was again, a faint clicking sound.

“Which values do you mean?” asked Roger.

“That violence as a means of accomplishing an ends is never acceptable. As long as anybody is willing to hurt another person for his or her own gain, we will never have peace.”

“Then we'll never have peace.”

“I understand that, Roger, and know our human failings. That's why it's so wonderful when we reach for the ideal, because we are doing it in spite of our imperfections.”

“How many people do you think share your value that violence is never acceptable? Do you expect to stand still and meekly take abuse from someone?” Roger sounded anything but meek.

“We don't have to stand still. There is such a thing as returning good for evil.”

“Hans, you are a dreamer.”

“And, you're not?”

“Oh, I'm not sure my ideals allow for letting someone to get away with an injustice,” said Roger.

“Good. It's not good for them to get away with it. But, let's not try to do to them what they were doing to us. Let's not try to hurt them, or respond out of anger. Let's act out of love, even though they are trying to hurt us, even though we may suffer as a consequence.”

“Have you been talking with your wife again?”

“Hans laughed, “Yes, Naomi and I do talk about it. We try to help each other follow the way.” The clicking sounded for a third time, but Hans ignored it. Rarely did a conversation flow like this. There had been a couple of rough, choppy spots, but he felt like his being had emptied into a vast deep well of life, emptied, and filled, and was ready to be filled again.

“Well, when do you expect we'll know how many foreign representatives we'll have?”

“Probably months,” answered Roger. “Longer if they assign it to a committee. Do you hear that clicking?”

“Yeah, I can't figure out what that is.”

“Maybe there's a tap on your phone. The last time I heard a clicking like that, it turned out to be a wiretap.”

“Well, hell!” exclaimed Hans. He didn't know whether to be affronted at the possible invasion of his privacy, or amazed that they could be so clumsy at it. “If that's what it is, who do you suppose it could be.”

“I don't know; could be the FBI, or the Justice Department, or just about anyone. You've gotten enough attention by now, it's hard to say.” There seemed to be little doubt in Roger's mind that someone was listening to their conversation.

Now Hans got angry. For a moment he felt an urge to start cussing, then he entertained a notion to taunt them by reciting a cake recipe, or some similarly inane bit of information.

“What can be done about it?” he asked.

“Call the phone company and the police. If it's an illegal tap, they'd better get it off right now.”

In a sudden rush to conclude the call, Hans asked, “Will you keep on top of developments with the groups in the other countries? And, don't hesitate to get our Interfaith Task Force to help follow through with the contacts you started.”

“I'll keep at it. God luck, Hans. Talk with you in a couple of weeks.”

“Thanks for calling, Roger. Bye.”

He sat and stared at the phone as if it was a snake, poised and ready to strike. “What do you think about that, Lord? Someone else thinks they have the right to listen in on me.”

Remaining still for a moment, he breathed a silent prayer. “Don't worry about it. Just speak the truth, and act in love, and you'll be alright,” came to his mind.

“Thank you, Lord,” he whispered.

* * * * *

The next day, Hans called the local Freeze Campaign office and asked to speak with their black bearded chairperson.

Both the phone company and the police had assured him that there was no tap on his phone when he had called them after speaking with Roger, but he did not know whether to believe them, or not. He did not know what to think except that he could hardly let it affect his work.

“Hi, Art. I thought I would check with you about our local permit applications.”

“It's turned out to be fairly routine, mostly just a matter of asking for a parade permit and filling out a form that describes the route and the date of the event. They are not used to having this many intersections blocked at a time, but the length of time is short enough. I told them it would not be longer than thirty minutes.”

“How about the grounds under the Arch?” asked Hans.

“They get a little nervous about something new coming in that close to the Fourth of July. By the third Sunday in June they will already be preparing the grounds for the Independence Day celebration, but again, we aren't really demanding anything of their facilities. All we want is for people to stand in line and hold hands.”

No clicking sounds could be detected yet.

“Another reason I'm calling is that I spoke with Roger Burdick yesterday. He thinks we will have participants from at least thirty five countries, and possibly a good many more. Do you think holding an international festival under the Arch is feasible?”

“I don't know,” said Art. “What do you mean by 'festival'?”

“Something that shows the diversity of the people who are taking part. I guess, really, it can't be much of a show for the limited time they will be here. It might not be more than an area with booths and tables where artwork, crafts, and pictures from each country can be displayed that Sunday morning and early afternoon. Maybe 'festival' is the wrong word for it.”

“If the grounds under the Arch don't work, Washington University and Forest Park are right next to the route. One of those might allow the kind of display you're talking about.”

“Would you mind looking into it, Art? We have another teleconference with the national organizations in a couple of weeks, and I would like to be able to offer this as a possibility at that meeting.”

“I can inquire about having an international display at the Arch, but I don't have any particular contacts at Washington University or at Forest Park.” Art's voice sharpened as if to say, “I'm doing my share, don't dump anymore work on me.”

“Okay,” said Hans. “If you let me know about the Arch, I can make further inquiries, if necessary, myself.”

“How are we doing with the state highway commissions, Hans? Does it look like we will get permission to use the interstates?”

“We've had one rejection out of four responses, so far. That was California. Illinois, Texas, and Arizona have given approval, and we are still waiting to hear from Missouri, Oklahoma, and New Mexico.”

“Why did California reject our request?”

“They said they could not give us permission because it would create a 'potentially hazardous situation' for both pedestrians and motorists.”

“Maybe they know best,” said Art. “Have you ever seen the way they drive in L.A.?”

“Yeah, I'm trying to look at it from the bright side, too. At least we know plenty of time in advance, and it happened where we have the most registrants. It will be more serious if any of the remaining three states rejects our applications,” he said with a note of concern creeping into his voice.

Still, there were no clicking noises to be heard. He wondered if the wiretap had been removed, unless it was still there, but silent, or maybe there had never been a wiretap. Roger could have been mistaken.

“Try not to worry about it too much, Hans. Have a happy Thanksgiving.”

“Thanks, Art. Same to you.”

“Really,” thought Hans after hanging up. “If I’m going to worry at all, there are more important things in the world to worry about than wiretaps and highway commissions. Like, what am I going to fix for supper tonight? It’s my turn to cook.”

* * * * *

Thanksgiving was observed with the traditional feast at the Spiegel’s, which somehow emphasized for Hans how unequally their blessings were received. Sentencing had just been handed down to the last group of demonstrators who had participated in civil disobedience at the General Dynamics headquarters. Betty was one of those who had been arrested and charged with contempt of court, and when the elderly woman had refused to promise not to trespass there again, the judge had given her three months, which she was serving at the moment.

That was one sacrifice Hans had not yet felt called to make; although, he had considered it. The story about Ralph Waldo Emerson’s visit to Henry David Thoreau while Thoreau was serving time for an act of civil disobedience came to his mind. When Emerson had asked his friend what he was doing in jail, Thoreau had asked him what he was doing out of jail.

Of course, having children made a difference. It made Hans think that if serving time in jail in protest of the arms race might help make the world a safer place, then maybe jail was where he should be. However, he had a demonstration of a different sort at the moment that left him with little time to contemplate a stay in prison.

The fourth teleconference began at the appointed hour, with everyone present, the main matter before the group being the actions of the state highway commissions. Now, he was beginning to feel like he and Naomi were meeting with old friends.

“We really missed the boat on that one,” Dr. Foster was saying with a penitent tone. “We took our own highway commission too much for granted. Someone should have been in Sacramento with more information, and the governor should have been contacted. We just didn’t push like we could have.”

“Maybe what we learned from that defeat can be put to use in New Mexico,” said Hans, trying to find a silver lining in that cloud. “We now have permission from each of the other states since both Missouri and Oklahoma finally gave us approval. This last request is critical.” Again, his concern was showing through.

“We have to contend with mountains, deserts, and very few people, and the alternate route through New Mexico is definitely inferior and longer.”

“The Santa Fe chapter of the Freeze Campaign learned that the New Mexico highway commission is meeting Wednesday next week to consider our application,” announced Victor. “Maybe someone can make a presentation on our behalf.”

“How about you, Hans,” said Joyce. “You are the most qualified person to speak for what we are trying to do.”

“I agree,” said Alec. “Can you make the trip?”

Hans looked at Naomi.

“With preparations that need to be made for Christmas, I have to stay here, but I can manage alright with the kids if you go,” she said, and nodded her head in a show of support.

He looked quickly at his calendar, and was relieved to see that no major appointments appeared during the next week. To make connections, spend a day in Santa Fe, and return, he had to figure at least two days for the trip.

“I’m clear to go,” said Hans, making a snap decision. “What else should we do to increase our odds?”

“What is the nature of their commission?” asked Claire.

“Six members serving staggered terms,” replied Hans. “They are appointed by the governor.”

“Father Welsh spoke, “New Mexico is a strong Catholic state, and I know the bishop of the diocese of Albuquerque. I can ask him to talk with the governor.”

“We can’t give them any reasons to deny our request,” said Dr. Foster. She was still galled by the defeat they had suffered at the hands of her own state officials. “The California highway commission said they rejected it on the grounds of safety. We need to have an answer for the state’s concern for liability in the event of an accident.”

“Dr. Foster has a point,” said Roger. “If the state grants permission for pedestrians to use the interstate, and somebody is injured, they could be held liable. An insurance policy that would protect the state from a suit in the event of injury might improve our chances of having our application approved.”

“Do you know what insurance for a special event like this would cost?” asked Victor. “There will be several hundred thousand people involved in New Mexico alone. To buy insurance, if it’s even for sale, might be hundreds of thousands of dollars, just for the one day.”

“We could ask each participant to pay a dollar or two for a registration fee that would cover the insurance costs,” suggested Roger.

“That would complicate our registration process tremendously,” objected Joyce. “Besides, the sign-up sheets already have a release from liability statement on them.”

“Even if that’s binding on the participants who sign those sheets, it leaves out anyone who just

shows up without registering in advance,” countered Dr. Foster.

Hans began to feel lost as he listened to the discussion. He would have been much more comfortable talking about ways to make the event safe for the participants instead of about the need to protect themselves and the state from suit. While the others talked, he thought with a sigh, “I guess it’s just a part of being responsible for our actions. A person can’t be too careful. There are people who deliberately hurt themselves in order to sue for damages, and it could happen to us.”

“Let’s tell the commission that we’ll sue them if they deny our request to use the interstate, and someone gets hurt on the state road,” wisecracked Willy.

Roger ignored that and said, “We should have enough members among our various organizations to guarantee the medical care for anyone who requires it as a result of our event. Even if we don’t have the money right now, it could be raised through a special appeal.”

“That is a resourceful suggestion,” remarked Naomi, who had exhibited a growing willingness to assert herself in the last couple of meetings. “We can provide our own insurance.”

“We still need some kind of legal document to assure the state that we will live up to that kind of commitment,” said Dr. Foster.

“I can have a lawyer write it if the rest of you would be willing to be part of the agreement,” claimed Roger.

“That sounds like the best way to go to me,” stated Hans. “Though that’s easy for me to say, not having an organization to commit to it.”

“I think it’s a good idea,” said Joyce. “CALC has been working at building support groups for years. This just does it on a larger scale. I can check with our Board within a week, if Roger can get that statement written.”

“If the rest of you carry this to your Boards for inclusion,” said Hans, “I’m sure that kind of statement would strengthen our application.” He paused briefly before continuing.

“If we can leave the matter of the New Mexico highway commission now, Roger called a couple of weeks ago to report that invitations to participate have been made to the citizens of the other countries. I hope some of you are working with him in following through with his initial contacts.”

Roger cut in, “Each member of our Interfaith Task Force was given a list of the foreign church leaders that we contacted so they could reinforce the letter I sent, or notify additional people.”

Several of the church representatives confirmed that, and a couple of them reported that they had followed through with additional letters of their own.

“By the way, Hans, is the line clear?” Roger’s voice grated on Hans’ ears. He had decided that with no solid evidence that the phone had been tapped, there was no reason to bring it up with the group, but Roger’s question left him no choice but to tell them about it.

“The phone company and the police claimed that there was no trace of a tap when I called them

after our conversation. I haven't heard anymore clicking sounds, and when the phone company checked the line again a couple of days ago, they said it's clear. I suppose with the right eavesdropping equipment there are ways of getting around that, but I don't want to worry about that possibility.”

Maybe it was best that the rest of the group knew about it. He could not see how they were reacting, but he felt soiled again at the idea of an intruder in their meeting.

“Hey, big time stuff,” said Willy, but somehow his attempt at levity sounded hollow this time.

He looked at Naomi. She was sitting back in her chair with her eyes half closed. “Have you ever heard a woman describe how she feels after she's been raped?” had been her comment when he had told her that they may have had a tap on their phone.

“It's pointless to speculate about it, if we don't have any real evidence,” said Claire. “Let's shake it off, and get on with the meeting.”

That appealed to Hans, and in the silence that followed Claire's remark, he unveiled his newest idea. “To make the presence of the participants as visible as possible, I was thinking that we might have all of the foreign representatives assemble at one place in the line. We have permission to use an area on the grounds under the Arch for an international display.”

“I don't care for that,” said Willy, before Hans could finish his proposal. “If we have representatives from 80 or 90 countries, and they are distributed throughout the line, that would be every thirty five miles, or so. I think they would be more visible that way, at least more Americans would come in direct contact with them than if they are all assembled at one spot.”

“I agree with Willy,” said Joyce. “A decentralized approach would be better than having them all in one place.”

Omar added, “If the citizens from the other countries arrive on Saturday, and we find a home in each of the different communities for them to spend the night, we will increase the impact of their visit. The local media in each of those communities might even write stories about their visitors.”

“Well, we'll let that idea drop,” said Hans. He could tell which way the wind was blowing. “It sounds like there are a number of reasons for spreading the representatives from the other countries through the line.” As he said that, he thought, “Can't win them all. Really, what ever made me want to gather all of the foreign guests in St. Louis? Oh well.” Out loud, he asked, “Are there any other matters we should consider before adjourning?”

“How many people have registered so far?” asked Alice Powers.

“Oh my goodness,” thought Hans, even more embarrassed, “I forgot to give them the latest count.”

“A little over 500,000,” he said, conscious of the vast numbers necessary yet to reach their goal, “and they are continuing to register from the locations closest to the route.”

“That is still excellent for this point in time,” said Joyce. “But, I think we should meet in another month to make sure we are doing everything we need to do.”

“That sounds good to me,” replied Hans. “We ought to know what the verdict from New Mexico is by that time, too. Can we meet again in January?”

They settled on that, and ended the meeting. Placing the receiver back on the hook, Hans shook his head and started moving papers around his desk.

“Don't be too disappointed they disagreed with having the international display in St. Louis,” said Naomi, observing that he was upset.

“I'm not so disappointed that they didn't care for the idea as that I had it in the first place,” he chastised himself. “It really was trying to center too much of it here in St. Louis, like trying to hog the show.”

“Oh, I'm not so sure about that,” countered Naomi. “After all, the entire event was your idea, and you having put so much into organizing it, holding an international display here seemed like a pretty natural thing to do to me.”

That settled him a bit. “Thanks. Guess I'd better call the airline and get the schedule for the departures to Santa Fe.”

“You had better call the highway commission office first, and make sure you can get on the agenda for their meeting,” counseled Naomi.

“That's right. It wouldn't hurt to find out exactly when they meet, either.”

He got the number from long distance information, and a minute later was talking with the commission secretary.

“Yes, my name is Hans Spiegel, and I'm calling from St. Louis about the highway commission meeting next week. I would like to make myself available to answer any questions the commission might have about the request to use Interstate 40 for the peace demonstration next June, but before I make the trip, I want to find out if I can have a place on the agenda.”

“I'm sure the commission would like to hear your testimony, Mr. Spiegel, but I should advise you that the conference room in which the commission meets has video communications capabilities. Unless you really want to make the trip, you might consider that as a way to give your presentation.”

“What on earth?” exclaimed Hans to himself. “Why didn't I think of that?”

“That's a champion idea,” he said out loud. “What time does the commission meet?”

“They meet next Wednesday at 1:00 pm. If you call again that morning, I can give you the approximate time during their meeting when they will be discussing your application.”

“I'll do that. Thanks very much for suggesting the video,” he said, and hung up.

“Amazing. Nothing like saving myself a two day trip,” he thought.

The voice box was still on, so Naomi had heard the entire conversation. She said, "I remember people from the phone company giving a presentation on video communications when I was in high school, but it's still hard to get used to it in practice. I wonder if this is what it was like a hundred years ago when the telephone was first introduced."

"Could be," said Hans. "Our kids grow up with it just like they do with computers, trips to outer space, and lasers. What blows my mind is to think about the things that our grandchildren will grow up with that will even be new to Josh and Mara, things that we don't even know about."

"It would blow my mind too, except I don't know enough about those things to think about them," said Naomi.

"Oh, trying to get smart, eh?"

"Yes, but I'm glad you don't have to make that trip." She got up, stood behind the chair where he sat, and put her arms around him. "I like keeping you close to home." She kissed the back of his neck, causing the hairs to rise. "Mara's asleep, and we have the house to ourselves," she suggested.

* * * * *

Monday morning, Hans went outside to pick up the newspaper. It was nippy out, giving them a taste of the harsher weather that was on its way. Grabbing the paper, he quickly ran back up the front steps and stepped inside. The front hall was chilly, also, even though the furnace had started coming on a week ago, because the radiator in the hallway was shut-off. Several years ago, they had taken to reducing the heating area of the house to keep their bills reasonable.

Sitting in the family room, Hans opened the paper. The room was really an enclosed porch, and the back wall, which faced south, was mostly windows. It was too early in the day to get much heat, but by noon, if it stayed sunny, that would be the warmest spot in the house.

Flipping quickly through the paper, a headline describing a demonstration in West Germany caught his eye. Five hundred West Germans had encircled the building in which the Bundestag met. They had fasted and prayed for the entire week that the legislature would vote, before they recessed for Christmas break, to remove all nuclear missiles from German soil.

"There we go," said Hans out loud.

The final paragraph of the article contained a statement from a leader of the action that some of them would be in the United States in June of next year to participate in Hands Across the Nation.

He stepped into the kitchen to see what time it was, and thought, "I'd better wait a couple of hours before trying to call the west coast."

Descending the steps to his office, Hans turned on his computer, and started his daily routine of examining segments of the route. He did his work quietly, and caught his breath each time he shifted position and his chair squeaked.

This was Naomi's day off, and she was still in bed, sleeping. The week had been very busy for her, with extra preparations to be made for the Christmas service, and the coming week was going to be

even busier.

At least things looked to be relatively quiet at the Spiegel residence this year. Mary had written from Denver to say that she and Bill would not be able to make it, and Paul and Cindy were going to spend the holiday with her parents. Hans was sorry they could not all be together, especially since this was Mara's first Christmas, but he was so engrossed with the progress of the peace demonstration that he was really giving little thought to the family gathering.

This morning's first matter of concern was the definition of the route. The eastern half stayed on Highway 50 so it really did not pass through any major cities except for Cincinnati and Washington, DC; however, it did cut through more than a hundred smaller towns. It was definitely the most scenic route that could have been chosen, as well as following Main Street, USA. The route to the southwest missed a lot of the towns because the local groups had been asked not to stray from the interstates unless the detour was less than one mile. Without that condition, they could get sidetracked from the highway in so many places that they might not have enough people to complete the chain.

With the exception of New Mexico, the route was virtually complete, and he remembered with some nervousness that the highway commission meeting in Santa Fe was only two days away. Those six people could make such a difference in the outcome of all their efforts.

Blocking out those thoughts, he turned on the modem and dialed the number to the data bank. The entries were organized by zip code, and each entry included the name of the registrant, their address and phone number, and the location in the route to which they were assigned, and the code number of the group, or person, who had made the entry. The computer was supposed to accept an entry only if the person who punched the access code had an identification number.

As Betty, who was still behind bars, had suggested, they were labeling the route by sections. This way if their mileage estimates between towns were off a little, it would not have a cumulative effect, and leave them with several miles to which no one was assigned.

He looked at his list of towns and typed West Virginia, Augusta, 2, 4, Hanging Rock. Displayed before him now was a list of the registrants who had been assigned to the second of the four miles, going from west to east, between Augusta and Hanging Rock, West Virginia.

There were 279 names on that list. "Not bad," thought Hans, and he tried several more. Illinois, Odin, 2, 5, Salem; 87 names. "Not so good." Arizona, Navajo, 4, 8, Chambers; 6 names. "Terrible." California, Los Angeles, 4, 17, Los Angeles; 1,500 names. "That's what we want."

That mile in Los Angeles has as many people assigned to it as it would get. Each of the other 17 miles within Los Angeles was more than likely full, also. Any further registrants to that section of the route would get a letter explaining that there were already enough people assigned to that location, and requesting that they accept a position farther away where they were still needed.

The map showed close to 500 miles between Los Angeles and Navajo, Arizona. "That's a long way to go for a thirty minute demonstration," thought Hans. "On the other hand, this may be a once in a lifetime event."

Naomi came in from their bedroom with Mara, and stepping close, she looked at the display.

"I hope I didn't wake you up," he said.

"No, I was just about to get up anyway," she replied. "How are we doing?"

"We've got a long way to go, honey." Handing her the paper, he said, "Look at this. There is an article on page 7A in which some West Germans say they are coming to participate in Hands."

Naomi shifted Mara to her other hip, read the article, and shared a reflection when she finished, "I feel kind of sorry for people in West Germany. They seem so much at the mercy of events that are beyond their control. Even if they persuade their own government to have the missiles removed, the entire planet can still be made uninhabitable by the United States, or the Soviet Union. I would feel so helpless if I lived in another country, and had to watch this madness."

"Even in this country, it's easy to feel helpless. The only defense against getting totally depressed in that case is to try not to think about it," said Hans. "That's what a lot of people here do, bury their heads in the sand, which is just like asking to get it in the ass. Sorry, honey." He apologized for being vulgar.

"That's okay. I couldn't have said it better myself." She started towards the steps. "This looks like a good day to work in the family room, and I still have a couple of presents to finish."

"Have fun." He turned off the computer, picked up the phone, and called the SANE office, but the line was busy. He waited a minute, and tried again, still busy.

There was a stack of newsletters that he set by his desk when he was too busy to read when they arrived, a stack which had been growing rapidly in the last few months. Pulling out a newsletter from the World Federalist Association, he read an account of their recent efforts to promote institutions such as the United Nations that could increase cooperation among the countries of the world. "We could use more of that," thought Hans, wistfully. "Forty three countries are involved in armed conflict around the world right now."

"It's enough to make you wonder if some people like to fight. Sigmund Freud thought World War I proved there was such a thing as a 'death wish,' that we are biologically coded for aggression and violence. There has to be some way to overcome that."

He picked up the receiver and dialed the SANE number again. This time he got through, and the person who answered the phone connected him with Roger. Hans gave a quick summary of the article, and read the last paragraph.

"That's just great, to get it in the news from West Germany," growled Roger. "I mailed press releases to all the major news services after I called you last month. The releases announced that we were inviting representatives from each of the 168 independent nations to join us in building a human chain across the United States. The media did not pick up on the story."

"Why don't you try again," said Hans, "and give them an idea of some of the countries that have already indicated that they will be represented."

"I did that the last time. I'll take another shot at it, but the lack of response may be a sign that the opposition has mobilized to the point that they are able to squelch any treatment of our press

releases.”

“That's a possibility,” reflected Hans. “The major owners of the mass media are probably the same people who own most of everything else. If they take a dim view of our demonstration, it's conceivable that they might discourage any advance publicity.”

“You probably want to know about the statement that accepts responsibility for the welfare of the participants in New Mexico,” stated Roger. “Our lawyer advised us to put a limit on the amount for which we would accept responsibility. The SANE Board decided to go with that recommendation, and the other groups were more comfortable with that, too. What we have is statement, with authorized signatures from SANE, CALC, Ground Zero, and the Physicians Alliance Against Nuclear Weapons, that commits us to covering any claims up to a total of fifteen million dollars.”

Hans was not sure how to evaluate that. Fifteen million dollars sounded like a lot of money, but the way medical costs were going, it could be eaten up really fast.

“What about the Freeze Campaign and People Power?”

“We couldn't get commitments from their Boards this quickly.”

“Well, why don't you go ahead and send a copy of that statement to the New Mexico highway commission. By the way, instead of going to Santa Fe, I decided to talk with them by video.”

“Oh? That's smart. I'll send them a photocopy of the statement by modem. They'll have it ten minutes after I hang up with you.”

“I really appreciate everything you are doing to pull this together, Roger. Your contribution already has been invaluable.”

As he said that, Hans thought, “What a change in attitude for both of us. At first, I considered Roger nothing more than a grouchy old spoilsport. I even suspected that he was responsible for the clicking on the phone, but he has proven himself by now; although, I still don't know what brought him around.”

“Well, like my old football coach used to say, 'Teamwork, we need teamwork.' I wasn't too sure where you were coming from at first, Hans, but the more I talk with you, the more it sounds like you have yourself centered in a pretty good place.”

Hans felt a warm glow. “It makes me feel good to hear you say that, Roger. There may be a few million people in between, but I'm looking forward to joining hands with you next June.”

There was a loud guffaw from the other end of the line.

“The same goes here. Take care, Hans. Bye.”

Hans went upstairs to be with Naomi and Mara, taking the steps two at a time, like he had springs on his feet.

“Oh good. It's sunny.”

* * * * *

Two days later, Hans sat nervously, looking at the video screen in the conference room of the Human Rights Office in St. Louis. He had called at the appointed time, but had been asked to wait while the New Mexico highway commission finished the item of business they were presently discussing.

The six commission members were seated behind a table at one end of a large room, listening as someone was making a presentation at a portable podium facing them. Behind the presenter were chairs, enough for perhaps fifty people, and the room was packed. Some of them might be waiting to make presentations of their own, or were reporters, but he guessed that most of them were supporters who had come at the request of the Santa Fe chapter of the Freeze Campaign.

The sound had not been turned on from the other end, so he could not hear what they were considering, but a couple of commission members either made comments, or asked questions, and apparently were satisfied with the information they received because the presenter began putting his notes back in his briefcase. As the presenter stepped away from the podium, the view on the screen changed.

“They must have their video screen and camera on a movable stand,” thought Hans. The sound came on and suddenly he could hear, but all he could see were the six commission members and the heavy wooden table behind which they sat.

He wished Terry Meeker, the staff person from the Human Rights Office, had remained after showing him how to operate the communications equipment. It would be nice to have a friend in the room. Hans' heart was pounding. He swallowed once, didn't get it all, and swallowed again; then, two deep breaths helped him control himself.

The commission chairperson spoke, “Would you state your name and the organization you represent?”

“Hans Spiegel, representing the Committee for Hands Across the Nation.”

Sitting to the right of the chairperson was a young man in a light gray three piece suit. He looked sharply at the screen and said, “The organization that submitted this application was the Santa Fe chapter of the Nuclear Weapons freeze Campaign.”

“Yes, they collected the information that was necessary to prepare the application. An attachment to the application lists the national organizations that are co-sponsoring the event, and I am speaking on behalf of those organizations.”

“He sounds like he already has his mind made up,” thought Hans. It might not be their purpose that would cause their request to be denied. They had done some checking, and had discovered that the New Mexico highway commission had never granted permission for non-motorized use of the interstates. The bicyclists doing the cross country ride, the Indians walking to Washington, DC, and others; they had all been denied.

“Is there something you wish to add to your application?” asked the chairperson.

“I want to emphasize the extraordinary nature of the event which is being planned. We estimate there will be close to half a million people assembling in New Mexico along. It would impose a hardship on them to have to gather along a route other than Interstate 40.”

An older man at the other end of the table spoke, “Your application states this event is going to be a demonstration for peace. I suppose you know the interstate highways were built 90 percent with federal money, and the purpose was for national defense. Have you spoken with anyone with the Federal Highway Administration about using the interstates for your demonstration?”

“No,” said Hans. “We made no effort to pursue this with the Federal Highway Administration. Jurisdiction for use of the interstate highways is in the hands of the states, as long as that use does not interfere with the movement of personnel and materials that are needed for a defense or national security purpose. We do not want to impede, or interfere with such traffic.

“Anyway, allowing us to form a human chain along the interstate would not be contrary to our need of defense. Efforts at building an enduring peace based on respect for each other as human beings may be the best defense we can have.”

He could almost hear a couple of them thinking, “But the Soviets have no respect for the rights of others.”

“We don't know that our action will result in any positive responses,” he added. “It's more an expression of faith on our part that showing our unity of will for peace is what we are called to do. That is why so many religious organizations are included in the list of co-sponsors. You might want to know that the bishop of the diocese of Albuquerque was one of the first to register to participate.”

That struck home. For a moment there was silence. Then, the one woman from the commission spoke. She was dark haired and looked like she might be part Indian. In a tone that was not unsympathetic, she said, “We have an obligation to consider the safety of those who use the interstates. These highways were not designed for pedestrian use.”

“Safety is our concern, also,” said Hans. “We will take every precaution to prevent injury to anyone as a consequence of our demonstration. The alternate routes are narrower and rarely have shoulders on which cars can stop without blocking traffic; many of the participants in New Mexico will be driving to their positions in the line, and we felt that the interstates would actually be safer because of that. We will have a monitor every tenth of a mile; they will help direct traffic and will keep the participants to the side of the highway. And, you should have a statement, signed by some of the co-sponsoring organizations that accepts responsibility for meeting medical expenses that may result from Hands up to the amount of \$15 million.”

The young man in the gray suit said, “We just received that two days ago, and our legal staff has not had a chance to review it. I move that we table consideration of this application until we can get a legal opinion on this statement.”

The older man at the other end of the table seconded the motion.

“Those in favor say, 'Aye.'”

“Aye.”

“Those opposed.”

Silence.

“The motion carries. Is there anything else you want to say?”

The sounds of a disturbance came from the speaker. Turning his eyes from the video screen, the chairperson raised his voice and said, “We'll have to remove some people from the room, if they don't behave themselves.” He stared off to the side for a moment, then returned his gaze to the camera.

Keeping his disappointment to himself, Hans said, “I appreciate your consideration of our request. We will hope to hear from you as soon as possible.”

The connection was broken, and he sat looking at a blank screen. Still no decision. That was almost as bad as a rejection.

“What could I have said that would have made any difference?” he wondered. “How discouraging.” His head bowed, and his shoulders bent as if a burden of great weight had been placed upon them.

From somewhere, he felt a sense of renewed strength, and sat up straight again. One possibility was that the woman and the two men who had not spoken would have supported the application. The young man might have made the motion to table just to cause a delay. With that thought to cheer him, Hans got up and left the room.

* * * * *

Friday evening found the Spiegels relaxing at home. Hans was reading the newspaper, Harold and Lois were looking at some Christmas cards they had received, and Naomi and Joshua were working on a puzzle.

Christmas was next Tuesday, and Joshua was out of school for the next week and a half. There had been a voluntary gift exchange that day for which he had taken a nerf football, and had received a 500 piece puzzle of the Grand Canyon.

Crawling to the card table at which her mother and brother were working, Mara pulled herself up by holding onto one of the table legs, but she was unable to see over the top. Naomi picked her up and held the baby on her lap.

“Don't let her have any pieces,” said Joshua, protective of his game.

Naomi pushed her chair just far enough away that Mara's outstretched hands could not reach the puzzle. The baby struggled to move closer, but Naomi held her tight and said, “Now that's Joshua's. He doesn't want any of the pieces to get lost before he's ever had a chance to put it together.”

Rather than contend with the baby, as she persisted in grabbing for one of the pieces, Naomi put her back on the floor. Once she could no longer see the puzzle, maybe she would forget about it.

“I’ll be surprised if that’s the end of that ruckus,” thought Hans as he tried to focus his attention back on the newspaper.

He had been busy since Wednesday contacting everyone he could who might have influence in New Mexico. Father Welsh had said he would talk with the bishop again, and an action alert had been mailed to members of the various peace organizations, asking them to write letters to the governor. They were not ready to throw in the towel yet.

Turning to the religious section, he was attracted instantly to the headline, HANDS ORGANIZERS CALLED COMMUNIST DUPES. There it was, a group of fundamentalist Christians was accusing them of doing the work of the Godless communists.

Hammering mainly at the emotional level, there was not a whole lot of substance to the article that he could see. Then, noticing the Associated Press byline at the top, he realized that meant newspapers all around the country might be printing it. They had been expecting something like this, but it was a blow anyway.

Hans put down the newspaper and closed his eyes. “Great way to get into the Christmas spirit,” he thought. “Damn, what lousy timing. I wonder if they released that statement now because the New Mexico highway commission is still considering our request to use the interstate. It wouldn’t even have taken a wiretap for them to find that out.”

He opened his eyes and looked around the room. “Probably not. I’m just getting paranoid.”

Mara was still fussing. Now she wanted her mother to pick her up again. Grandmas was trying to distract the baby by calling her and holding up one of her toys, but she wasn’t interested. She wanted one of the puzzle pieces, and probably if she got one, she would soon want another.

Speaking to his sister as if she could understand, Joshua said, “Forget it. You’re not getting any.”

It was beginning to get on Hans’ nerves, that constant whining and crying. He felt like getting up and slapping the baby to shut her up. While he was at it, slap Naomi for not taking care of her, and slap Joshua for being so possessive with his damn puzzle pieces; slap then all.

Hans got up, walked over, and picked up the baby. “What’s the matter, Mara?” he asked. “Do you want something and can’t have it? I know just how you feel.”

He swung her in an arc, almost to the floor, then tossed her into the air and caught her. That brought a smile. He threw her into the air again, almost to the ceiling. She was all smiles and laughing now. One more time, and he put her back on the floor.

Lois still had the toy. She called, “Mara,” and held it up again. This time the baby crawled to her grandmother and reached for her toy. It looked like she felt better.

Hans did. “Hey, that’s what Christmas and babies are for,” he thought.

* * * * *

Some of the people at church had strange looks on their faces Sunday morning.

“I’ll bet they saw that article,” guessed Hans.

Some of them might have been swayed by it, and some of them might even have agreed with it. At best, those people thought Hans was soft headed. They were convinced there was no use in talking with the communists. The only language they understood was force. However, nobody said anything about it when the Spiegels entered. Joshua went to his class, Hans took Mara to the nursery, and Naomi want to lead her class.

For some reason, it seemed like the church members reacted much more to him than to Naomi. Possibly that was because their interaction with her was as a congregation to its minister, and they knew he had devoted the better part of the last six months to organizing the demonstration. Towards the end of the period with the adults, Hans decided to bring it up himself.

“Did anybody see the article in the religious section of Friday’s paper?”

He could tell that several of them had.

“What did you think about it?” he asked.

“Well, we know you’re not a communist,” said one of the older women.

That was a nice place to start. Looking around the circle, all of a sudden people seemed more comfortable, like they were glad to talk about it. Maybe they had felt guilty to be harboring suspicions against their minister’s husband. Several minutes were required to explain what it was all about to the members of the class who had not seen the article.

“That’s ridiculous,” said one of them. This was one who had registered to participate in the demonstration the Sunday Hans had brought sign-up sheets to the church. “Even if it was true, I would rather be a communist than a hypocrite.”

“Uh oh,” thought Hans. “It’s nice to have somebody help defend you, but name calling isn’t going to get us anywhere.” He could see eyes and jaws around the circle hardening at that last statement.

“We can put those kinds of labels on people,” he interjected, “but we’re going to have all kinds participating in this, and I wouldn’t care if some of them are communists, or hypocrites. I only hope that at the moment we come together and hold hands we can forget about all of that and just remember we’re people. We’re all human beings and we’re all God’s children.”

The older woman who had spoken earlier smiled at him.

“That’s about all the time we have,” said the class leader. “Don’t forget we’re serving treats to the children Christmas morning.”

Two days later, Hans sat in the sanctuary with Mara on his lap, while Joshua was up front with the other children, acting the part of one of the shepherds in the story of the birth of Jesus. The

sanctuary was decorated with wreaths and evergreen boughs, and the Christmas candle was burning on the center of the alter along with the candles that had been lit each Sunday during Advent.

It was a better than average program this year. The children were well rehearsed, and some of the parents had gone to considerable trouble in making the costumers. Hans thought the sheep with the cotton ball skins were particularly effective. Removing his bathrobe after his part in the service, Joshua rejoined his father and sister.

Naomi's message was very brief that morning, but also very powerful. Christ was born in a stable. Who would have expected the Messiah to enter the world from such a humble beginning?

Since most families had plans for other activities after the service, it did not take long to get the church locked and to start back home. Enjoying the mild weather while it lasted, the Spiegels walked with Mara riding in a stroller. Less than a block from the church, Joshua opened his sack of treats, and assessed its contents; a peppermint stick, an apple, an orange, and some pieces of hard candy. After a brief moment of deliberation, the peppermint stick was the first to go.

They found Keith already at home when they arrived. Hans' younger brother was not much of a church goer, and he had stated straight out in the past that organized religion held little attraction for him.

“Merry Christmas, Naomi. Merry Christmas, Josh and Mara. Merry Christmas, you dupe,” said Keith with a great big grin.

Hans grabbed his brother and started pushing on him. That was not easy to do because Keith was better than 6' 4” tall and weighed over to 200 pounds. They wrestled briefly in the front hall, then broke.

“That's good exercise,” gasped Hans. “We ought to do that more often.”

“What's all the commotion?” called their father from the kitchen. “You trying to tear down the house?”

“Uh, we're just saying, 'Hello,’” answered Keith.

Walking to the back of the house, they joined the others. Since there were only seven of them this year, they were forgoing the big table in the dining room, but that was no real sacrifice as the kitchen was warm and cozy. A turkey was baking in the oven, filling the air with its aroma, and there were low fires under two covered pots on the range.

“We'll be ready to eat in ten to fifteen minutes,” announced Lois as she set a large bowl of salad on the table. “Would someone bring another chair from the dining room?”

Keith and Hans went into the dining room together. Picking up a chair, the big guy paused and in a serious tone said, “That article was so typical. They call themselves Christians. There are probably more Christians in the Soviet Union than in the United States. At least it means something to be a Christian in the Soviet Union. Here, it's more like belonging to a social club.”

The way Keith was twisting on the back of the chair, Hans was afraid he was going to break it.

He was, also uncomfortably convinced that what his brother had said was more than a little true.

“What do you suggest doing about it?” asked Hans.

“Me? I don't know. I'm as bad as everyone else; I just don't pretend to be any better, like all those people in church. That's why I can't stand to go there.”

“That's a pretty harsh judgment. It overlooks what this day is all about. As bad as we are, God sent his son to be with us.”

“Yeah, and look what happened to him.”

“Look what happened to him, Keith. He lives.”

The young engineer stood still, and appeared to be pondering the matter deeply. Perhaps his experiences in the world were too much for him, because he slowly shook his head and carried the chair out of the dining room.

* * * * *

New Year's Day had come and gone, and still there was no word from the New Mexico highway commission. The next teleconference was just a few days away, and Hans hated to think about telling the others that they had failed to get permission to use Interstate 40. On top of the slow rate at which registrations were coming in, he feared that might cause some of the groups to consider backing out before they got into it any deeper.

Looking out the window at the back yard, Hans wondered if the mail would even be delivered that day. They had gotten several inches of snow along with frigid cold weather the last week, then it had turned a little warmer and they had been hit with freezing rain. The effect on the trees was breathtakingly beautiful, sunlight glittered off a thousand ice covered twigs and branches, but it was also very dangerous. The roads were perilous, and the sidewalks were even more treacherous.

By mid afternoon, the other side of the street was not so bad, as the sun had melted most of the ice, but their side was shaded by the houses, and the sidewalk remained slick. Finally, more than an hour later than usual, the mailman made his way up the street towards their house. Holding carefully to the handrail, Hans went down the front steps, and exchanged a word of greeting with him, and accepted their mail. Back in the warmth of the kitchen, he started sorting the letters.

With a twitch, he saw that one of the envelopes addressed to him had a New Mexico Highway Department return address, and in a fever to see the contents, he stopped sorting, placed the rest of the mail on the table, and tore that envelope open. He figured there were just three possibilities as he withdrew the letter and searched for the key word; rejection, approval, or another delay.

Hans let out a whoop, then walked in a circle around the table, stopped, and read the letter entirely. Approved. There was no doubt about it, their application had been approved.

“Power!” he exclaimed, pounding his fist against his thigh. “We have power.”

Surprise mingled with his relief and exultation. How often did a people's movement crack

through the arteriosclerotic bureaucracy and armor of the establishment?

Naomi came upstairs. She had been using the phone in his office to check on some of the shut-ins.

To her questioning look, he exclaimed, "We got it! We have permission to use the interstate through New Mexico."

Pulling her close, he hugged her, and was rewarded with a healthy squeeze in return.

His mother, who had stayed home rather than risk an accident on the icy streets, came through the door from the family room with Mara following in her walker. "That's wonderful," she said, having overheard his pronouncement.

"What's going on?" yelled Joshua from the second floor. Since the schools were closed, he was upstairs playing with his model of the space shuttle, and he came running down the steps, not to miss out on anything.

"For the first time in history, the New Mexico highway commission has approved a request for non-motorized use of the interstate," Hans proclaimed when his son arrived.

"Is that all? I thought maybe school was called off for the rest of the week," said the boy, sounding totally unimpressed.

That helped put things into perspective.

"No, sorry, nothing that important." Hans could not contain his glee, "But if you want to take the rest of the week off, that's fine with me."

"It's not all right with me," protested Naomi.

"Hey, we may have just escaped Armageddon. We have to celebrate somehow," said Hans, gesturing widely with his arms.

"Well, not like that," she admonished him. "You can't just let our son stay home from school with nothing to do." Her voice took a flinty turn. Education was something she took seriously.

Hans felt his hackles rise, and his brow darkened. He had made a playful suggestion and his wife was jumping all over him. Lois could see that the kitchen was starting to get hot, and she retreated to the family room.

Noticing his mother's departure, Hans eased back. Arguing at the moment, with the news they had just received, did not appeal to him at all. "It looks like you go to school tomorrow, unless it's closed," he said to the boy, settling that question.

Joshua turned around and went back upstairs relieved that he had not been the cause of a fight between his parents. He didn't mind going to school that much anyway.

Neither of them said anything for a minute, then Naomi asked, "Can I see the letter?"

He handed it to her and watched, without comment, as she read. His ego was a bit bruised from having backed down, and he began reconstructing the scene in his mind, “So what if he stayed at home for a few days? I'd be here. He can learn as much from me as he can at school.” Impressed with the soundness of his argument, he thought, “Yeah, I could have confounded her with my superior reasoning.” Having taken the scenario into the realm of the ridiculous, his sense of humor saved him, “Come off it, Hans. You're getting goofy.”

“This is worth celebrating,” said Naomi. She handed back the letter, regarding him closely. “I was thinking about baking some chocolate chip cookies.”

“Now there's a peace offering if I ever heard one,” thought Hans, and he responded, “Well, now, we don't want to overdo it, but as long as you're offering, I accept.”

She knew he was feeding his ego, and let him get away with it. Turning towards the basement door, she said, “I have several more calls to make, unless you need to use the phone.”

“No, that's okay. Go ahead.”

He held up the letter, read it again, and thought, “Now what do I need to do?”

Mara bumped against his leg.

Hans picked her up.

* * * * *

“That's very encouraging,” said Joyce Harris, her congratulations conveyed through the voice box, “especially since New Mexico had never granted permission to use the interstate before.”

“Yes,” exulted Dr. Foster. “It shows it pays to put the extra effort into it; the letters, your presentation at their meeting, the calls from the bishop.”

Willy Lee had a different estimation of the action of the highway commission. “Did you ever think they might have done it just to give us more rope to hang ourselves? This way, if we fall flat on our faces, they can say they gave us every advantage.”

That had not occurred to Hans. “It is hard to know what their motives were,” he said. “We sure can use every advantage though. Our current count on registrations is only 600,000. We got a mere 100,000 people in the last month.” They would be in serious trouble if the rate did not pick up rapidly.

“I guess there were too many other things going on during December,” said Alice Powers. “Does that create a problem? We still have five months to go before the event.”

“We don't really have five months to continue registering people,” replied Hans, trying not to reveal any lack of confidence, but not wanting to give them a false picture, either. “We should send a mailing to each of the registrants in May to confirm their locations in the line, and to give them a chance to contact us back if there are any problems. We don't want to wait to the very last day to do any reassigning of positions if that turns out to be necessary.”

“I don't think we can wait until May,” stated Roger. “As many local groups and people as have access to our main registry, we ought to do a mailing to our known contact people by April, to validate our list.”

“That would give us just three months to register more than four million people. Any fewer registrants than that and we run the risk of having gaps in the chain,” said Omar, almost like he was saying, “Did I really want to get out of bed this morning?”

“There's something I have had in mind as part of a follow-up to our human chain, but it might be best to work into our strategy now,” said Hans. They had to do something to boost their registrations. “Some of you have been involved in organizing small meeting groups in people's homes before. I know the Freeze Campaign has done this. I suggest we ask each of the people who have already registered to invite a group of friends to their homes to talk about the event, and to encourage additional participation.”

“That's a good idea,” agreed Victor, for once seeing eye-to-eye with Hans. “We should be using house meetings in addition to our other efforts to recruit participants. Some of our best outreach has been done through house meetings.”

“Our experience has been similar to yours,” remarked Joyce. “And, small groups that meet over an extended period of time are good vehicles for empowering people and for developing support groups.”

“That's the direction I think we need to take,” said Hans, daring to look beyond the immediate event. “We need a long term strategy through which we can work for peace.”

“Are we going to respond to that attack from the conservative religious groups?” asked Father Welsh. It sounded like he had been waiting impatiently for a chance to bring that up.

“I wasn't going to,” replied Hans. “Do you think we should?”

“We can hardly let their charges go unanswered,” stated the Father with some heat.

“What we have to say is hardly going to affect people's thinking about that,” said Naomi. She had merely snorted and shook her head when Hans had brought the article to her attention. “Let's just continue with our organizing, and let our actions speak for themselves.”

Several minutes of discussion followed her remark. Hans did not have any strong sense of direction to take with the issue, and listened without comment as the group finally came to the position of ignoring the accusations.

“We were hit by that one blast, and that's been it,” said Alice, summarizing the majority opinion. “That's the advantage of having taken the high ground. We're demonstrating for peace, and unity, and in a way, for a restoration of love as the central tenet of our lives. They can hardly criticize us for that and remain true to their own faith at the same time.”

As she said that, a thought that occurred to Hans was, “We were criticized for being communist dupes. What do peacemaking and expressing love for each other have to do with the distribution and

control of resources?” It was a thought that did not have space for development as the meeting continued.

“There are now fifty other countries from which citizens will be coming,” announced Roger, letting them know that his efforts were bearing fruit.

“Are any of them communist countries?” asked Father Walsh.

“No, we haven't gotten any responses from them yet,” answered Roger. With a touch of irritation, he added, “At the last meeting, you were the one who said they should be included.”

“I still think they should be included,” replied Father Walsh. “I just don't like the insinuation that I am a communist.”

Not wanting to see them get hung up on that again, Hans asked, “Is there any further action needed on our part to pursue participation by additional countries?”

“Nothing that I know of,” answered Roger. “We'll continue our follow-ups, but I think they just have to decide what they want to do.”

“Can we let our next meeting go until March then?” asked Hans. “It is pretty clear that the task before us is registering more participants, especially those who will take positions in Arizona and New Mexico.”

Waiting until March for the next meeting was satisfactory to the others, and without further ado, they adjourned the meeting. It seemed like everyone was anxious to get to work on the registrations.

Turning towards Naomi, Hans asked, “What do you think?”

She stood up and stretched and said, “What impressed me was the way they accepted your suggestion for organizing through house meetings. From the tone of their voices, it sounds like they are beginning to look at you as a leader. You got them started on something, and they are willing to follow you the rest of the way.”

Hans reacted to her observation with a mixture of pride and nervousness. “That's kind of scary,” he said. “When you're the leader, you don't have anyone else in front of you to show you which way to go. If I make the wrong decisions, other people might get hurt.”

“But you do have a leader,” Naomi reminded him. “Someone has already shown us the way.”

He gripped the arms of his chair. Yes, he had that assurance. All he had to do was keep locked on that.

* * * * *

February arrived, and winter still held them in its icy clutches. Hans was considering how many people Naomi and he had invited to their house meeting would actually come as he shoveled snow off the sidewalk for the second time that day. The total accumulation since it had begun to fall last night was no more than six inches, but he wondered if they should try to reschedule the meeting.

It helped that the snow had almost stopped; just a few final flakes continued to drop gently to the ground, and while he was out with the shovel, he cleared the sidewalks of their neighbors on either side.

“We might as well go ahead with the meeting and see what happens. They all live within a couple of miles,” he thought as he finished and headed back inside. “Kind of late to change now, anyway.”

Naomi was arranging chairs in the front room, and said, “The Thompsons called and asked if they could bring anything.

“Are they still coming?”

“It sounded like it. I told them just to bring themselves.”

“Good.” He counted the chairs. With the space on the sofa, they were ready for ten people. They had invited fifteen, and eight had said they would come. Harold and Lois were going to stay in the back of the house and watch the children; having already registered to participate, they had decided to pass on attending the meeting.

“Mom gave us a 'first call' for supper a few minutes ago,” said Naomi.

“Well, I guess we can go on back and get ready to eat,” said Hans. “This looks pretty good.”

After supper, he set the coffee urn on a large serving tray and carried it into the front room. They were just going to use the urn to heat water, and had instant coffee, tea, and hot chocolate mix to go with it. Naomi had baked a cake, which she placed by the urn with saucers and napkins, and that was the extent of the preparations that needed to be made.

Amazingly, the format followed the format Hans, Victor, and Joyce had worked out, after the last teleconference, almost without flaw. While one couple that had said they would attend did not show, two other neighbors who had given them an indefinite answer came after all, so they ended up with eight guests. Following introductions and a few minutes to become acquainted with each other and to get comfortable, they spent close to an hour discussing the arms race, relations with the Soviets, and the purpose of the human chain.

As they started talking about the part each of them might play in the demonstration, it struck Hans that, although every one of their guests approved of what they were doing, and had been aware of it for some time, none of them had gone out of their way to register for a place in the line. They seemed to share a “Let someone else take care of it, why should I bother?” attitude. It seemed that peacemaking just wasn't something for which they felt personally responsible.

“You say the closest place in the line that you need people is twenty miles away?” asked one of their guests, as he got up and helped himself to a cup of coffee. This was a counselor at one of the high schools.

“Yes, it's first come first served, and enough people have been assigned to the route close to the city that it might be twenty miles before there are gaps,” said Hans, and he thought, “Heck, that's not

far. That's within biking range.”

“How will we know where we are supposed to go?” asked a friend who had come at Naomi's request.

“You'll get a letter a couple of weeks before the event that tells the specific mile to which you are assigned. It will describe an intersection, a highway marker, or some definite spot at which to assemble.” Hans continued to a different concern, “We are also hoping that some of you will be willing to host a meeting like this in your homes, to encourage more people to participate.”

As some of them looked like they might have misgivings about hosting a meeting, Naomi said, “There are volunteers who are trained and willing to lead the discussion so your role as host does not need to be more than offering your home as a place to meet, and inviting your friends and neighbors to attend.”

“My house is a mess,” confessed Naomi's friend, brushing her hair back from her face. “I would rather take a sign-up sheet to the supermarket and register people as they come to shop.”

“I won't say you can't do that,” responded Hans, but everyone who registers has to understand that they are committing themselves to be at a certain place at a certain time, and as soon as a few days from now, the locations to which people will be assigned will probably be more than twenty miles away.”

It looked like she was having second thoughts about carrying through with her idea, which was good. Hans didn't want to squelch her initiative, but he did want her and the rest of them to take it seriously.

“I think I would feel more comfortable if someone else led the meeting,” said another of their guests. This was an older man, a member of their church. “I don't have all the facts and figures at my fingertips like some of you who work with it all of the time.”

“Being informed is important, but it's remarkable how much of what we do does not depend on what we know, as on the way we feel,” said Naomi. “Two people presented with the same information can interpret it entirely differently depending on their perspectives and their feelings.”

“That's true,” said the counselor. “I see students who are thinking about the military in terms of career opportunities. I also see students who are concerned about draft registration and who want to learn how to apply for conscientious objector status.”

“Eighteen or nineteen is a rough age to have to make those kinds of decisions,” said another neighbor. He and his wife lived a couple of blocks away, and had a small business repairing and recycling old stoves and refrigerators. “I'm embarrassed to admit that when I graduated from high school, if I had been called up and someone had told me, 'Say, we have this war going on over here,' I probably would have said, 'Yeah, sure, give me a gun. Who do you want me to kill?' You know, real macho.” He shook his head at the thought as if disgusted with himself.

Reaching over from her place beside him, his wife put her hand on his knee, and there was a moment of silence.

Hans was impressed with their neighbor's openness. "Of course," he reminded himself, "not everyone goes to war with that attitude."

The counselor said, "I don't feel like judging you as much as to be grateful for the experiences that we have had that lead us beyond that way of thinking."

"Amen to that," said Hans.

There seemed to be little left to discuss after those remarks, and the sign-up sheet was circulated around the room. Six of the eight guests that evening registered to participate, and two additional house meetings were scheduled.

As they cleaned up afterwards, Hans remarked, "I'm pleased. That went really well."

"Yes," agreed Naomi. "If this is what is happening all across the country, we should multiply our registrations in no time."

"I hope so," thought Hans. "If we register six people per house meeting, how many meetings will it take to register four million people?"

"Plus, it was an enjoyable evening," he said. "Why don't we try it again with people who live even closer to us?"

"I'm game," she replied. "This was little enough work to prepare. It's mostly just getting set in mind to do it." She placed the cake plate on the tray with the coffee urn and the cups, and picked up the entire load.

Closing the valve on the radiator, and turning out the lights, Hans shut the door tightly behind them.

* * * * *

Fortunately, by late February, the worst of the winter was past. At the same time there was a shortage of housing, in some low income neighborhoods a growing percentage of buildings stood vacant because the occupants were unable to afford their utilities. They had been forced to move in with relatives, or neighbors. Some families were even broken up if there were too many of them to move into one home, and they were the lucky ones. The emergency shelters were not able to absorb the number of homeless people, those who had no place to go. That's when life was simply a matter of surviving, and sometimes not even that.

Hans thought of the man he had seen sitting in the doorway of the boarded up building last summer. How was he faring? Had he ever gotten a decent pair of shoes? Was he still alive?

Such ruminations did not last long, as the numbers displayed on the screen of his computer reclaimed his attention. They indicated that the peace movement was stirring. Well over a million people were registered, and at the rate they were coming in, they might have two million by the end of the month.

The second Spiegel house meeting was to take place that evening, and he checked the

distribution going west from St. Louis. It looked like anyone who signed-up now would be assigned to a position fifty miles away.

“That's another reason for registering people at house meetings,” he thought. “We can organize ride sharing at the same time. There is no way we will have enough room for the cars on the side of the road if we have people going just one or two per car.”

In a way, inviting neighbors who lived on their block to the second house meeting had been more difficult than inviting friends and associates had been for the first. Instead of being brought together by similarities in interests, age, or beliefs, they and others who lived on the block simply happened to live close to each other. It seemed more like imposing to ask them to participate in a demonstration. Hans had finally worked himself to sit at the phone and make his contacts by deciding that if they did not want to participate, or even to come over to talk about it, they could say so. It didn't hurt to ask.

Of course, some of their neighbors, like Gary's parents, were already registered, so they had not been invited to the meeting. In a way, Hans regretted that because he had a sense that these house meetings were important for more reasons than recruiting participants for the human chain. Building for the future through base support communities seemed like a necessary step towards strengthening their society.

A clatter of blocks caused him to turn from his computer. He had put a pad and carpet on the floor of his office to create a play area for Mara, and the baby had just demolished a tower of blocks.

Rolling his chair to the edge of the carpet, he said, “That must have been a big one. How many blocks was it? Five? Six?”

She gave him some well thought out gobbledygook for an answer, and leaning forward, she wacked the rest of the blocks and sent them flying. One of them clinked against the bottom of his chair, and he bent over and picked it up. Now she had him, hooked into the game.

“If you want it, you have to come get it,” he said, and held the block out to her.

She crawled to him and reached up. Holding out his other hand, he said, “Can you stand up and take it?”

Oh, a new game. She looked at him, face filled with a total expression of delight, and let out a baby laugh. Grabbing hold of his thumb, she pulled herself up and stood unsteadily, almost forgetting about the block in the excitement of her daring achievement. Then, maintaining her grip on his thumb, she claimed her prize.

“Well, tell me young lady, having attained this elevated position in your life, what do you think about the future?” he asked. “Are you planning on becoming an engineer, or a doctor, or maybe an astronaut, like your brother?”

Now she gave him a serious look.

“Ah, yes, those are weight considerations,” he continued. “Let's see if you're ready for your first big step.” Backing away a couple of feet, he disengaged his thumb, and said, “Can you walk to

me?”

She stood wobbling at the knees for a moment before plopping down on her seat, and not looking quite so happy as she had before.

“Say, 'You're rushing me, Daddy,’” he told her, and rolling forward, he put her back on her feet and supported her like that. “Say, 'I'm just a baby, and being a baby is important work.””

She smiled at him again, and he said, “Well, you are precious. Do you know that? You sure are precious.”

He checked the time, and thought, “Why not?” He picked her, and then leaned forward to grab one of her board books off the floor. He could do one of the things he most liked to do; hold her on his lap, and talk about the pictures while she turned the thick pages back and forth.

After she had turned the pages back and forth several times he put her back on the floor. With his assistance, she walked to the center of the carpet, where he let her go to construct another tower.

That evening, they ended up with as many guests as they had had at the first house meeting; however, once they got past the introductions, it quickly became plain that a much broader range of opinions and perspectives was in play than at the earlier one. Feeling that his role should be to facilitate the discussion, rather than to take a stand himself, Hans tried to refrain from making too many comments. His greatest difficulty in restraining himself was when statements were made to the effect that the Soviets could not be trusted, as if they were some separate species of being. As much as Naomi and others of their guests tried to refute that, there was always an example of Soviet aggression that could be cited to prove the deceitful, malicious character of the communists.

“What do you suppose the Soviets think about the United States?” asked Hans, trying to change the focus of their debate.

One, who was a federal employee and who had been particularly critical of the Soviets said, “They're afraid of us. They know we won't stand for their tyranny.”

“What does that mean, if we don't trust the Soviets, and they are afraid of the United States?” asked Hans. In his mind, it meant trouble, a powder keg world.

The young woman responded, “I doubt if the Soviets trust us, either. How many times has the United states broken treaties? If you talk with some of the Indians who live on reservations, you'll find out why they say, 'White man speak with forked tongue.' It's just 101 years ago that 200 Indian men, women, and children were massacred at Wounded Knee by United States troops. We are good at expressing high ideals, but our hands have not always been clean.”

The federal employee gave her a look of disgust, and said, “You don't have to go back a hundred years to find worse crimes that have been committed by the Soviets.”

“We could spend all night trying to prove whose hands are cleaner, and whose are dirtier,” said Naomi, giving Hans a look that he read as, “Don't you think we should be wrapping this up?”

Before asking their guests if they wanted to participate in the demonstration, in an effort to end

the discussion on a more positive note, Hans decided to tell them a story. "I know someone who traveled to the Soviet Union a few years ago. At a reception with some of the Soviet people, one came to him and asked, 'How is crime on the streets in the United States'? To that he responded, 'Fine. How is crime on the streets here'? He was told, 'Oh, we don't have crime on the streets in the Soviet Union. Our crime is in the Party.'"

That brought smiles around the room,. The story was humorous, and it revealed something about both sides. In the following minutes, Hans and Naomi described again how Hands Across the Nation would take place.

The neighbors who had the strong feelings about the Soviets still declined to participate. Giving them a pitying look, the federal employee even warned them, "It's when you show the enemy any signs of weakness that you're inviting an attack."

Four of the others must have decided to take that risk because they added their names to the sign-up sheets; however, they expressed little interest in hosting house meetings of their own, and Hans could not tell in every case whether it was their desire to demonstrate for peace, or to be involved in the 3,000 mile human chain that convinced them to register.

* * * * *

The date of the March teleconference finally arrived. This meeting was distinguished by expressions both of excitement and weariness. They had already been working at it for nine long months.

Joyce let out a cheer that caused the voice box to buzz when Hans announced that the count was more than two million registrants. That was not even half their goal, but it far exceeded the number than had participated in any previous peace demonstration. Hundreds of miles of the route now had enough people assigned, and Arizona and New Mexico did not look nearly as blank as they had a couple of months ago.

"We must be doing something right," Claire echoed Joyce's hearty response.

"The house meetings probably account for most of that," said Victor.

"Oh, I don't know" objected Alice. "We've been filling a lot of registration forms at our churches."

"So have we," stated Father Welsh. "We asked all of our priests to devote a mass last month to the issue of peace."

"Why don't we give an award to the organization that recruits the most participants," said Willy sarcastically, and Hans thought, "Sounds like Willy's feeling his oats this morning."

"Maybe we had better not count our chickens too soon," said Omar. "Names entered in the computer may not always mean people who will assemble in the line."

"That's right," agreed Roger. He had already mentioned that possibility at their last meeting. "Too many people have access to our computer database. Validating the names that have already been

entered should be a top priority.”

“Gee, you've got a suspicious mind,” thought Hans.

“How would we do that?” asked Naomi.

“Send each of our known contacts and supporters a list of the registrants from their area and ask them to check it over to make sure the entries are legitimate,” replied Roger.

Hans was among those who felt that was an awful lot of additional work, but Roger and Omar convinced them that it was necessary.

“I've been thinking about the distances some of the participants assigned to Arizona and New Mexico have to travel,” said Alec, turning their thoughts in another direction. “They may have to leave for their positions on Saturday in order to make it on time. It would be nice if there was something we could do to make the trip easier for them.”

“We could do a mailing to the participants who live close to the route and ask them if they would be willing to have someone spend the night,” suggested Joyce. “Maybe the long distance travelers could camp out in their back yards.”

“That's a good idea,” said Father Welsh, “although a lot of those who come the greatest distances will travel and sleep on chartered buses. What's the latest on representatives from other countries?”

“We've received official notifications that citizens of seventy nine other nations will participate,” replied Roger. “But, we still have no responses from any of the communist countries.”

“That's a shame. Why do you suppose that is?” asked Alice.

“I don't know what their problem is,” he rumbled. “Each communist nation may have its own reasons. For the Soviets, it may be the on again-off again course of the arms negotiations. They may just consider this more talk that has little hope for action.”

“If that's what they think, they may be right,” said Willy.

“Time to bring this meeting to a close,” thought Hans. “We are getting tired.” After the upbeat beginning, he had the sense that they were in danger of falling into one of those depressing discourses on how apathetic, selfish, and ignorant people could be. Even if they left those thoughts unspoken, it was debilitating to think that way in the first place.

“I'm sure you're doing everything you can to include them, Roger,” he said. “Perhaps we'll have more positive word by our next meeting. How does the second Tuesday in May, same time, sound?”

As soon as they agreed on that, and adjourned, Hans said to Naomi, “I can hardly wait for the next three months to pass.”

“I know how you feel, but I don't know of anyone who ever figured out how to speed up the clock,” she responded bluntly.

As it was, it seemed that the opposite was true. The days crept by. After mailing the lists of registrants to the more than one thousand local chapters and contact people, he then had to wait for them to verify the names and to respond. His daily routine of checking the registrations made the days seem to drag even more.

Mara's first birthday was a nice break in that routine. Naomi baked a birthday cake for her, with Joshua serving as a willing assistant, especially when it came to licking the icing spoon and bowl. Helping Mara blow out her candle and open her presents were two other chores for which the boy cheerfully volunteered.

Another highlight happened a week later while Hans was upstairs watching it rain through the family room windows, enjoying the bright yellow jonquils which had blossomed, and noticing the buds which were beginning to show on some of the trees. Suddenly the phone rang in the basement. He ran down the steps, got it on the third ring, and recognized Roger's voice.

“We got China and North Korea,” roared his friend.

“That's great,” said Hans, thinking, “Will wonders never cease?”

“The Chinese will actually send a couple of representatives while North Korea will just ask diplomats who are already in the US to join in,” elaborated Roger.

“Oh, well. That's just as good,” said Hans. “Do you think the media would do a story now?”

“If they don't, something is wrong. We have ninety two foreign countries which will be represented. If that isn't news, I don't know what is.”

Following Roger's call, Hans started looking for something in the newspapers that would give an account of the international participation in their demonstration. It was only a week afterwards that the papers carried the story, which made him hope that the media was past any possible reluctance in covering the upcoming event. They also had the current count on registrations; by mid-April, it was up to three million people.

Other bits of uplifting news were the reports coming from the local chapters and contact people which indicated that, for the most part, the names on the lists were valid, as far as they could tell. If people who were not really intending to participate were registering, that did not appear to be happening in any systematic way that could seriously disrupt the chain.

As the weather started to turn nice, Hans was able to spend more time outside, which helped the days pass. While he turned the ground over in their garden, Mara practiced her first steps. With a little effort, when he wasn't tied up with the multitudinous details of the event, he managed to find a few more outdoor chores on which he could work. The chimney needed tuckpointing; in fact, so much mortar had fallen out in some spots that he wondered how they had managed not to lose any bricks during the heavy winter winds. His bicycle needed a good tuneup, too, allowing him to take it outside and spend the better part of a morning cleaning it, checking the spokes and wheels, and adjusting the brakes. While he was at it, he mounted the children's seat over the rear wheel. Mara was just about big enough to ride with him.

* * * * *

Early May and the day for what might be the last teleconference arrived. Slowly but surely, the date of the event was approaching, and there were a number of final decisions that needed to be made.

“I wish I was as calm as she looks,” thought Hans, watching his wife. He could not see her inner agitation, but if he had asked, she would have told him it was there.

Hans suspected that everyone already knew what the count was, but he gave it to them anyway. “As of this moment, we're just short of four million registrants,” he said, and wondered, “Does my voice sound as tense to them as it does to me?”

Joyce was quick with her positive remark again “That's fantastic, and the third Sunday in June is still more than a month away. A lot of people will wait until the last week, some until the last day, to decide if they're going to participate.”

“They may not help us very much if we can't get them assigned where they are needed,” said Victor. He sounded edgy, too. “I don't think we can wait more than a couple of weeks before sending the letters notifying everyone of their position.”

“I agree, even though there are still gaps in the chain,” said Hans. “We are using a third class mailing, and those may take two weeks to be delivered. That will only give us a two week margin if something gets fouled up.

“In terms of the total numbers registered we have enough right now to complete a more than 3,000 mile chain. At least we would if our distribution was 100 percent efficient, but unfortunately, it isn't. There are sections of the route in Arizona and New Mexico that don't even have 1,000 people per mile. We'll be forced to do some adjusting, taking people from sections that are filled to make sure we have something like 1,200 per mile where we presently are short.”

Dr. Foster said, “When you reassign people, you should take them from sections as close to where they are needed as possible. It would be difficult to get people to travel from Los Angeles to New Mexico if they had been expecting a position within an hour or two from their homes.”

“We could assign more people to those positions if we sent the instructions to everyone who registers within one month of the event by first class mail,” suggested Naomi. She had pulled her chair forward, and was sitting right beside her husband.

“Yes, let's not get tight fisted now,” said Joyce in support of the more expensive mailing.

“What will we do if too many people show up?” asked Willy.

“Huh?” grunted Hans, thinking he had not heard correctly.

“What will we do if so many people come to one spot in the line that they can't all fit, and they start fighting to get in?” Willy rephrased his question.

Hans did not know whether to laugh or to swear. That would be the height of absurdity, people fighting to participate in a demonstration for peace.

“I guess it could happen,” said Claire, “not the fighting, but having too many people at one spot. It’s something we should make the monitors aware of.”

“Maybe we can have a secondary chain if that happens,” suggested Alice. “Someone can put their hand on the hands of two people who are in the main line, and start another chain that can reconnect farther away.”

“Either that, or just have extra people put a hand on the shoulder of someone who is in the main line,” said Omar. “Making contact of some sort is what matters.”

“Let’s try to fit everybody in one line first, and do something like that only if we really have a mass of people show up at one spot,” said Victor.

“Is that alright with everybody?” asked Hans. “Those were some good suggestions.

“We have had variable success with our publicity so far,” he continued. “Does anyone have ideas about the kind of coverage we would like the day of Hands?”

“I expect every TV station in the country will be out when we line up,” said Alec.

“Let’s ask each of the stations along the route to cover the event from their own community,” said Roger. “They can interview participants from their own locales. Maybe they would interview the foreign representatives assigned to their communities, too.”

“There should be a way to tie it together at the national level,” added Joyce. “You ought to be available for interviews, Hans.”

Several voices expressed agreement.

“I can do that,” he responded. “There should also be spokespeople for the Interfaith Task Force, and for the national peace organizations.”

The familiar baritone rumbled, “We can give the media the list of co-sponsoring organizations and of the Interfaith Task Force members, but I think we should narrow it for them by recognizing your role as the instigator and the main organizer for the event.” Eleven months ago, Hans would never have expected that from Roger.

“This thing is going to be so big,” said Willy, and he was speaking in his serious tone of voice. “I’m having a hard time imagining how I can feel it in its entirety while the only part with which I have direct contact is a few miles of the total.”

“I’ve been thinking that same thing,” agreed Alice. “We need some way to get across to the people who are holding hands the scope of the demonstration.”

For a moment, there was silence, as each of them considered that question.

“That may go back to our local coverage,” said Joyce in her slow, careful manner. “A simultaneous broadcast that is carried by all of the radio stations along the route might do the job.”

“Sure,” stated Victor, “enough people have transistor radios that if they brought them along, we could have a continuous speaker system.”

“Yes, but let's not subject ourselves to any speeches,” requested Hans. “Our time in that line is going to be too valuable for that.”

“How about a five to ten second greeting from a representative of each of the countries participating in the chain?” suggested Roger. “It wouldn't take more than fifteen to twenty minutes to hear from each of them.”

“That's a brilliant idea,” declared Omar.

“Yes,” agreed Naomi enthusiastically, “that's exactly the thing to do,” but as she spoke, her words were lost in the cacophony transmitted by their voice box as everyone else joined in support of Roger's idea. That clatter was replaced by a moment of hilarious laughter as each of them realized that none of them could be heard.

After waiting, for the group to settle down, Hans said, “Thanks everyone. Talk about ending on a high note,” and he paused once more as further expressions of mirth were made. “I don't know if we need to meet anymore before the event. We'll wait a couple more weeks before sending the bulk mailing. As additional registrations come in after that, up to a couple of days before Hands, they will be assigned a place in the line and will be sent the information they need by first class mail. Who's going to contact the radio stations to arrange the coordinated broadcast?”

“I will,” offered Joyce.

“Okay, good. Beyond that, there is not much more that we can do. It will be up to each of the millions of people who have registered to follow through themselves. We'll just hope that whatever details we've missed won't mess us up too much.”

“Do we have enough monitors?” asked Dr. Foster, back to serious business.

“We have a monitor for every tenth of a mile,” said Hans.

“How about transportation? Are we going to be able to move everyone into position?” asked Claire.

“It is up to the local chapters to line up the buses they need. They were told to ask if they want help paying for them. A lot of people will be car pooling; though, if they are too far to walk, or to bicycle.

“If it looks like there is a reason to call us together for another meeting, we can do that,” concluded Hans.

“It's too bad we are all so far apart from each other,” said Joyce. “We ought to have a party when this is over.”

It seemed like everybody had little comments and well wishes to express before saying

goodbye, and after hanging up the phone, Hans looked at Naomi and said, “We’re on the home stretch.”

“You know, a party sounds like a good idea,” she replied.

* * * * *

The first thing Hans did after the meeting was to get together with the computer programmer to work out a way to identify each mile that had less than 1,200 registrants, and to reassign people to it from the closest mile that had more than that. That left them with a smaller margin for error than they had wanted, but that was the way it had worked out.

Two weeks after the last teleconference, the mailing to the 4,038,262 individuals registered by that time was prepared. Hans was glad they had a service with an automated letter folder and envelope stuffer, and he breathed a sigh of relief as the letters went to the post office. That was one more hurdle cleared.

The local organizations still wanted to hold some kind of ceremony at the Arch before the time to step in line occurred, so Hans met with them and a group of local church leaders to plan an outdoors interfaith service, with music to fill the time until 3:30 pm. He was back in his office contemplating the phrasing of the final press releases when the telephone rang.

“Hi, Hans.” It was Roger and he sounded excited. “You know after we got the word from the Chinese that they would participate, I contacted the Soviets and the other communist countries again. The Soviets have sent word that someone from their embassy in Washington DC will get in line with us. We just phoned the embassies of the Eastern European countries, and they have decided to participate, too. We will even have some representatives from Cuba. That puts us at more than 120 countries.

“I don’t know what to say, Roger. That’s fantastic.” Hans had been feeling the lack of something. Without Soviet participation, in even the smallest way, their action would have lost some of its meaning. This would make it complete.

“I’m working on a press release right now,” added Hans. “Is that definite enough that I can include it?”

“I think that would be safe,” replied Roger. “Go ahead.”

“Alright. We’re less than three weeks away. So far, it’s all systems go.” Hans heard his voice go up half an octave. He almost felt giddy. “Hold onto your hat,” he said to himself. “We’re not there yet.”

Roger told him about the plans that were underway for a local celebration on the west coast. They were figuring on doing something later in the afternoon because the demonstration there was scheduled to happen at 1:30 pm.

After saying goodbye to Roger, Hans was too wound up to stay inside, so he took Mara for a bike ride in the park. She got a thrill when a small gray squirrel darted across their path, sprang high onto the trunk of a tree, and disappeared into the branches. Joshua was in his last week at school, but next week he would be able to ride with them. Maybe they would pay a surprise visit to Naomi at the

church.

The newspapers began carrying stories about Hands Across the Nation several days later. They were getting plenty of attention now, so much so that Hans could see that what Willy had suggested might happen. In some of the urban areas along the route, there might be masses who would want to join in the line.

Then people from the magazines started calling, almost as if they were trying to outdo the newspapers in their coverage. “We would like to do a story about you, Mr. Spiegel. Can we send a reporter and a photographer? We want to include your family. Tell us how all of this got started,” they said.

He talked it over with Naomi and his parents first. They had some concerns about the loss of privacy, but wanted to give full expression to the genesis of the event, so he consented to doing the interviews at their home. Hans tried to keep the focus off his family and himself, and more on the idea, the hopes, and the dreams behind their action, but that did not keep his picture and pictures of his family from appearing on the covers of several magazines that appeared the week before the demonstration.

* * * * *

Hans awoke. “This is the day,” flashed through his mind. Instantly alert, he looked at the illuminated face of the timepiece beside their bed, read five o'clock, and began a mental inventory of the things he needed to do; get up in another couple of hours, exercise, shower, get Joshua started, eat, and relax before the two of them started for downtown. That was it.

Naomi still had to lead the worship service at their church, and Harold and Lois had agreed to take Mara to church with them. All of them would join Joshua and him under the Arch after their respective services. When Lois has asked if they should bring lunches, he advised her that there would be a number of vendors selling ethnic foods in the area, which might be easier and more fun.

Allowing his thoughts to drift, they soon came crashing back. This is it. Suddenly they had arrived. An entire year had been spent preparing for this day, and in less than twelve hours it would be over. They might have enough people in the right places, and they might not. Either way, time would continue to march on, on, on.

At least the weather was decent. The forecast in St. Louis was for a few clouds, but little chance of precipitation. They might get some showers east of the Appalachians, while to the southwest, all the way to Los Angeles, it should be dry as a bone.

He wished that he could be at all places at one time, just to see what would happen. People who were coming from Denver and Salt Lake City might already be on the road, if they hadn't left yesterday. They had as much as a nine hour drive to reach their positions.

The room was becoming lighter, and the hands on the clock could be plainly seen without their own illumination, but he could lie there a while longer.

Naomi shifted position. She was facing away from him, and he succumbed to an urge to rub her back. By the way her shoulders relaxed, he could tell that she liked that. She turned around to snuggle

close to him, and as he traced the curve from her hip to her waist, they kissed.

“I love you,” he said.

She kissed him again, and said, “I wish I could have asked the congregation to move our worship service to the Arch this morning.”

“You could have.”

“Not really. Some of them would have been very offended. The demonstration is still too political, and they prefer to leave national security matters in the hands of the government.”

“I know,” said Hans, a bit put out. “Of course, we the people, constitute the government. They represent us. That doesn't say much for us, does it? I mean, we actually take pride in being the richest, most powerful country in the world.”

“By whose standards?” asked Naomi. “Maybe if you measure wealth in material possessions, and power in weapons,” she answered her own question.

They laid silent for a moment, lost in their own thoughts. Neither of them liked throwing darts at their own country, and actually recognized that, relative to others, the United States was a land of many blessings. Their trouble was that they tended to compare it with their vision of the Heavenly Kingdom instead of with other nations.

Getting up and stretching, Hans commented, “Oh well, this is a new day.”

Naomi slid out from under the sheet, looked at Mara, and asked, “Are you ready to take your shower?”

“No, go ahead. I'm going to exercise first,” he answered, and began his morning routine.

On his way to the bathroom, he was surprised to find that Joshua had gotten up on his own already, because it was even earlier than they rose on a usual Sunday morning. They were ready to leave by quarter after eight, and Joshua got out his bicycle while Hans checked signals with Naomi and his parents on where they would meet. Then, he got out his bicycle, and making sure the basement door was secure, they started off.

He let his son lead the way. The boy was well instructed in following the rules of the road, and there was very little traffic. One intersection along their route was blessed with several large trees, and the birds sang a welcome as they rode by. After crossing that intersection, Hans asked Joshua to slow down. The worship service under the Arch was not scheduled to begin for more than an hour, and Hans had no part in leading it. He had just wanted to get there early so he wouldn't miss anything.

There was hardly anyone at the Arch when they arrived, except a few vendors setting up their booths. They found a light post to which they could chain their bicycles, and walked around the grounds. Since not much else was happening, they went to the edge of the river, sat on the cobblestones, and watched the water flow past.

“That water is dirty,” said Joshua.

“Yep, that's the muddy Mississippi for you,” replied his father. As far back as he could remember, the river had been brown. Tons of soil were on their way to the delta past New Orleans.

“When fields are plowed and trees are cut upstream,” said Hans, “it increases the runoff of water and soil when it rains. The ground does not have as much time to soak it up. That increases the rate of erosion and the likelihood of flooding downstream.”

“Do you mean like last year?”

“Yes, twenty five years ago, the amount of rain we had last spring might not have produced that flooding.”

“Then we should stop cutting trees,” said the boy.

“You would think we could be more careful about that, Josh. A lot of times we act without thinking about the consequences of our behavior.” He paused, then said, “Everything is connected.”

They sat and watched the river. After a while, Joshua asked “Hey, Dad, do you think living next to a river makes people different from living next to the ocean, or to a mountain?”

“Where does the boy come up with this stuff?” wondered his father, and he responded, “You've got me, Josh. Why do you ask?”

“I don't know,” said his son, and the boy started tossing pebbles and small pieces of driftwood into the slow moving water. He had another question, “Do you think living in space would make people different?”

Hans had to chew on that for a while, then he answered, “In some ways it might. People who live in space for a long time might get taller; I think I read that somewhere once, but in our hearts, or in our spirits, I think we'll still be the same.” Not knowing what else to say, and feeling that it might be getting close to ten o'clock, the time at which the service was scheduled to begin, he said, “Let's see how many more people are here, Josh.”

They walked up the hill, and found a small crowd gathering at the designated spot, near the north leg of the Arch.

“Good morning, Hans.”

“Good morning. Peace be with you.”

He shook hands and hugged some of them who he knew. Joshua tagged along for a bit, then he headed towards a group of children, some of whom looked about his age.

“Any idea how it's shaping up other places?” he was asked.

Shaking his head, Hans said, “No, it's still too early.”

Those who were leading the worship service asked everyone to gather together, and standing

next to Joshua, Hans counted close to a hundred people. Someone had set up a small battery powered amplification system which made it a lot easier to hear; although, the guitarist who led them in singing, “Lord, make a means of your peace,” had to make do with just one microphone.

Hans felt that there was a very good spirit among the group. The excitement about the coming event had been replaced by a mood of thankfulness that they could be there. Even the arrival of a TV crew did not shake them from that spirit.

The rabbi who had led them in the call to worship took the microphone again and read from Isaiah 2:2-4, then one of the women read a New Testament passage, the Beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount. Following the lead of some of the others, Hans and Joshua sat on the grass. There was a bit of a breeze, and the sun had been up long enough that the ground was dry.

The priest who delivered the message talked about peace in relation to righteous living, defining a righteous life as one that is ruled by love. Hans was moved by the quiet, thoughtful manner with which the elderly priest spoke.

The story he told to illustrate his point was of a soldier who had been captured during a battle. Two enemy soldiers were taking him to the rear when a shell exploded nearby and seriously injured both of the captors. By the rules of warfare, that is when the prisoner, who was unharmed, should have made good his escape. Instead, in a rare act of compassion, he stayed and bandaged the bleeding wounds of the two who had been leading him towards captivity. With words that were scarcely more than a whisper, the priest said, “I might have died that day if the man we captured had not turned his life over to the rule of love. It was at that moment that I decided to do the same.”

With blurred vision, Hans watched the priest hand the microphone to the Muslim who offered the closing prayer. He asked that all of them might accept that same rule of love in their lives; lives which were a gift from the One God. After the service, Hans went to the priest and thanked him for sharing that part of his life with them.

The old man said, “Thank you for giving me the chance to share it.”

The Muslim came over and joined in their conversation.

It was just past eleven o'clock when Hans checked back with Joshua. Sitting on the ground a short distance away, the fellow with the guitar had started playing again, and was singing some songs. Joshua elected to move closer to listen, while Hans looked for other acquaintances with whom he could visit.

More people were beginning to arrive, but it was still hours early to be gathering for the human chain. Some of the newcomers might just be sightseers who were visiting the riverfront. Recognizing several people he knew, Hans engaged them in conversation for a while. As on previous occasions, talking with friends helped release some of the nervous energy that was building inside him.

The grounds under and around the Arch were pretty expansive. Crowds of hundreds of thousands had gathered there for concerts during some of the Fourth of July celebrations; however, they were not looking for anything close to those numbers today. The line would come east from downtown, under the Arch, and then north towards the Eads bridge, a distance of less than one mile. A thousand people would be plenty to continue the chain in the immediate area.

Several hundred were already there by noon, and Hans went back to sit with Joshua. Two more guitarists had joined the first, and they were collecting a bit of an audience. Enjoying the singing, he and Joshua were still sitting when Naomi, Mara, Harold, and Lois found them, and they got up and moved to the back of the crowd so they could talk without disturbing those who were listening to the music.

“There was an announcement on TV before we left home,” said Harold. “They had a short clip of the worship service that took place here this morning.”

“Did you see us?” asked Joshua, looking up and shading his eyes with his hand.

“I thought I did,” answered his grandfather. “Standing together near the front.”

“We asked the participants to be at their positions at least one hour before the time, which is still three hours away,” Hans reminded them, thinking, “Which is 180 minutes, which is 10,800 seconds. Ouch, that sounds worse.”

“Did you get anything to eat yet?” asked Lois, and they answered that they had not.

“And I'm hungry,” claimed Joshua.

“I'm not surprised, as long as it has been since you ate breakfast,” said Nomi. “It looks like there is a good variety of food from which to choose.”

They walked to the area where the vendors were selling food. When Joshua took the handle of the stroller from his mother, Mara turned in her seat and looked at her brother from under the cover.

“You two might want to get out of the sun for a while,” said Lois with a look of concern.

Hans could feel it. He was not used to being in the sun this long. Joshua's face was red, and he imagined his was about the same. Noticing that one of the vendors, a small Asian woman, had a stack of straw hats for sale, Hans altered course and asked how much they cost.

“Five dollars,” she answered.

He called his son, and said, “See if you can find one ethat fits.” They both enjoyed reasonable success, and rejoined the others sporting new hats.

“How about falafels?” asked Naomi, reading the menu of one of the booths.

“Lebanese food? It sounds good to me,” said Hans.

They stopped and got their lunch. Harold held out for rice and vegetables from another booth, and Lois and Joshua got burritos. A lemonade stand was the last stop before they headed for the trees that flanked the Arch, and sat in a shady spot to eat.

The preparations that were underway for the next Fourth of July were prominent, centered around a large, permanent stage that had been built six or seven years ago.

“Do you have a speakers platform?” asked Lois.

“No one's giving any speeches, Mom. There will be words of greetings broadcast on the radio from the representatives from the other countries. In our letter to the participants, we just suggested that as we join hands each person might think about how many of us it took to complete the chain, and that no one person is more important than anyone else in making it complete. Some people may want to say a silent prayer.”

“You could use the radio broadcast to help make the meaning of the event clear,” she said.

“We decided to let each of the participants derive his, or her, own meaning from the event, to let it speak directly to their hearts. By this time, I don't think I need to explain what it's all about.”

She shrugged as if to say, “Go ahead and do it your way, but it seems strange not to have a speaker.”

They finished eating, and Harold said, “Well, we still have two and a half hours to wait. It's been years since I visited the museum under the Arch. Does anyone feel like going with me?”

Lois and Joshua went along, while Hans and Naomi stayed in the shade of the trees. “We'll wait for you here,” called Naomi.

Harold turned around and waved to show that he had heard.

Stretching out beside his wife, who was leaning against the trunk of a tree, Hans used her thigh for a pillow and said “This might be a good time for a nap.”

“It looks like Mara is ahead of you.”

The little girl's chin was resting on her chest. She was asleep.

“How do you feel?” he asked.

“Oh, I'm fine,” said Naomi. “The service this morning was about the same as usual.”

Hans described what had happened at the outdoors service, and repeated the story the priest had told.

“That's amazing,” she said. “What a conversion. I wonder what happened to the other soldier who was bandaged. Was he grateful? Did it change his life?”

“Who knows? Who knows how much of a change will be created by joining hands across the nation?” said Hans.

“Yes, as dramatic an event as this is,” said Naomi, “I would hardly put it in a class with having one's life saved by an 'enemy.'”

“You're right. There has to be more to it.” Hans suddenly had an awful feeling that for all of

their work, they might only be putting on a show, and that people's hearts might not really be touched. "We have to follow this with a longer term effort that reaches into people's daily lives. If we take the good feelings that result from Hands back home without changing our pattern of living, we won't have accomplished much.

"The world is farther in a pit now than it was a year ago. More people are suffering, the gap between the wealthy and the poor is wider, our demand for natural resources is growing while the destruction of the environment reduces its ability to meet the demands, and we are still possessed by the pursuit of a military solution. We put our faith and trust in missiles, bombs, and whatever else the Pentagon says we need."

Naomi put her hand on his forehead. "In what do you put your faith and trust?" she asked.

Hans closed his eyes. "That feels good," he said, letting his mind go back to zero. When it was emptied of everything else, the Spirit could enter.

He opened his eyes to the sound of Mara crying. She had woken up and wanted out of the stroller. Sitting up slowly, he leaned forward and unfastened the restraint.

"Stay close, Mara," he said, as she climbed out of her seat.

That was like telling the clouds to stop raining.

Naomi got up and shook her leg, trying to restart the circulation.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Just about two o'clock. Did you have a good nap?"

"I must have. I don't remember it."

Naomi headed off Mara about twenty feet away, and directed her back towards Hans.

"She'd get herself lost in a hurry if we didn't watch her," he remarked. "Any sign of Joshua and Mom and Dad?"

"No, but they should be coming soon."

Hans looked towards the spot where the worship service had been held. The crowd had grown. It looked like there were more than a thousand people there already, and he thought he saw a few who were wearing green armbands. Those would be the monitors.

"We shouldn't have any problems here. I wonder how it's going everywhere else," he thought, regretting that he had not asked his father to leave the radio with them.

Taking one of Mara's toys from the bag hanging on the back of her stroller, he coaxed her to play with him.

A few minutes later, Naomi said, "Here they come."

Joshua ran ahead of his grandparents, bursting to tell them what he had seen. For a small museum, it was extremely well designed. The objects on display were arranged in concentric semicircles, creating an effect like walking back through time.

“And, the buffalo's head is about as big as half the rest of its body,” the boy concluded.

Hans nodded. That was only a slight exaggeration. The stuffed buffalo did have a big head.

His parents came up and sat down, ready to rest for a few minutes. They visited there until it was close to two-thirty, then Hans said “What do you say we join the crowd?”

Putting Mara back in the stroller, they walked towards the gathering place. People were walking up from every direction now, reinforcing the earlier arrivals who were already way more than were needed to complete this part of the chain.

Hans worked his way through the fringes of the crowd till he found one of the people with the green armbands, and said, “Hi, I'm Hans Spiegel.”

“I'm Walt Jenkins.” The monitor held out his hand, and Hans shook it.

“Well, Walt, do you think we should start forming some sort of a line?”

“We were just about to do that,” answered the monitor, testily.

Walt talked to one of the other armband wearers, and said something. She looked at her watch, looked at the crowd, and nodded her head. Several others who were wearing the armbands moved towards them and conferred quickly.

Glancing around the gathering site, Hans counted the armbands and saw that there were ten all together. “Very good,” he thought. Refraining from making any more suggestions, he stayed back and let them do their work.

There was a considerable amount of noise with people standing around in small groups, talking; and, as more people arrived, it added to the clamor. Taking a cue from the woman with whom Walt had spoken, one of the monitors stepped a short distance away from the crowd, raised his voice, and called for attention. The portable loud speaker system had already been put away, so it took several tries before enough people quieted that he could be heard.

“We have almost an hour to go,” he announced, “but we would like to start forming a line so we'll be in place by 3:30. I would like for all of you,” he motioned towards part of the crowd, “to go with me. The other people who are wearing the green armbands, “he pointed towards some of them, and they raised their hands, “will show the rest of you where to go.”

With that, he walked to the part of the crowd he had carved out with his hands, and got them to follow him towards the Eads Bridge. As soon as they had gotten started, another of the monitors stepped back, and called for attention. She had to quiet the crowd all over again, and once people had stopped talking enough for her to be heard, she made a similar announcement, indicated which part of the crowd she was taking, and led them in the same direction as the previous group.

A moment later, and a third monitor repeated the process with another part of the crowd. It wasn't long before half of them were gone, then Walt stepped back, motioned which people would go with him, and started in the other direction, towards downtown. Hans looked at the intersection where the route was to cross, and saw that there was already a small cluster waiting on the other side of the street. Some of the people in the group with Walt waved to them.

The remaining monitors took turns signaling for the rest of the crowd to accompany them to their positions, the entire process having taken less than twenty minutes. Walt and his group arrived at the near side of the intersection, where they would wait until 3:30, to avoid blocking the traffic any longer than was necessary.

Now that they were stretched out in a line, it was easier to distribute the newcomers who were continuing to arrive, and the space surrounding the Arch was large enough that the line could zigzag to accommodate the extra participants. No more than 1,500 of those who had registered to participate would have been assigned to this section of the route. Since this was a convenient spot, it looked like several times that many who had not registered had decided to join in at the last minute. That was fine as far as Hans was concerned. They could make room.

Having about a half hour yet to wait, the line lost some of its character as some people sat down and others pulled together in small groups again. Quite a few of them were listening to radios. Harold took his out of his pocket, and adjusted the tuning until he had a clear signal from the station that was carrying the demonstration. The announcer was saying something about the cars that were lined up along a highway.

Moving closer to his father, Hans asked where the announcer was, and in a moment they discovered it was a reporter on a helicopter about fifteen miles west of St. Louis. The helicopter was coming their direction, and to the eyes of the reporter, the line was shaping up along that part of the route.

Turning down the volume, Harold said, "They were giving reports from different parts of the country when we left the museum. There are thousands of people on the beach in Los Angeles to complete that part of the chain, and the White House and the Capital building have been surrounded."

Those were other urban areas. "How about New Mexico and Arizona?" asked Hans.

"They didn't say anything about that."

"At least we know things are happening at both ends of the country as well as here in the middle," said Naomi, swinging the stroller around until Mara was parked right in front of her.

"Isn't that interesting that the line is going to circle the White House and the Capital building?" remarked Lois.

"Yeah, I don't know if I really care for that," stated Hans. "It's too easy to make scapegoats of our elected officials. I think the focus needs to be on the American people."

Naomi looked at him and nodded her agreement. "The American people, and people in other countries. Each of us should take responsibility for our own actions," she added.

“If the eastern end of the line had been New York, and we really wanted to capture the attention of the 'powers that be' the line could have been routed down Wall Street,” said Hans' father.

They discussed the accountability of the American public, and examples of organizing at the grass roots level that had challenged the structure of power, then Joshua shouted, “Hey, here comes a helicopter.”

Lifting their eyes, sure enough, coming towards them over the tall buildings downtown, they saw a small whirlybird. Harold turned the volume back up and they heard the reporter describing the scene in which they were standing. The helicopter approached, passed overhead, blades whirring, and continued quickly to the east.

It was getting close to the time, maybe five more minutes, and people started getting up and reassembling along the line. It was kind of scrunched, so the monitors asked people to make the line zigzag more to enable everyone to fit. Harold put the radio back in his pocket, from which the muffled voice of the reporter continued.

Looking again at the intersection connecting them to downtown, Hans saw that a police car was blocking the street. “Oh good,” he thought. “The police officers are helping stop the traffic there.”

Joshua was on his left, with Naomi, holding Mara on her hip, on Joshua's other side. Lois was at Hans' right hand with Harold next to her. Excited chatter filled the air. “Is it time?” he heard people asking. Some of them were already starting to hold hands.

Looking at Naomi, Hans blurted, “Let's do it.”

She put Mara down, and holding one little hand, she turned to the person on her left and took the hand which was offered.

Joshua said, “Let me hold your hand, Mara.” Reaching down, he took it, and the little girl smiled at her brother like she thought he was playing a game.

Hans was holding Joshua and Lois' hands. All along the line people were holding hands. Gradually, the talking died down, and once again, the voice of the reporter could be heard. He was saying, “This is incredible. We've flown more than thirty miles and there were people gathered all along the way. They have formed their line now, and there are people holding hands in a human chain that stretches as far as we can see. It doesn't stop. It just doesn't stop.”

The description of the chain was interrupted then with the announcement, “We are now taking you to the west coast where the first of 132 foreign representatives is waiting to send his greetings.”

The hush along the line deepened, and the radio also became silent as the connections to bring the message of friendship were made. Then it began, “The people of the Philippines wish you peace. This is Luis Alvarez in Los Angeles.”

“Ilse Wozniak, at Pomona, California, greetings and peace from Poland.”

“Peace from the people of Egypt. This is Mustafa Khetab, in Edgemont, California, and the

chain here is complete.”

Hans shivered with excitement. In less than half a minute the words of their guests had carried them close to one hundred miles from the coast. The words continued, each statement phrased differently, in magnificent foreign accents. Sometimes the greetings were spoken in their native languages, and then the only words he could recognize were the names of the towns. Twenty nine Palms and Rice, California; Parker, Kingman, and Seligman, Arizona; Gallup, Grants, and Albuquerque, New Mexico.

There were occasional brief pauses as the visitors sometimes missed their cues, and the messages started becoming repetitious as more of them gave their statements, but Hans did not tire of it. He could have listened to that forever, “Peace. Peace be with you. We wish you peace.”

When Tricia Keriakis said, “The citizens of Greece wish peace for all people, and the chain is complete in St. Louis, Missouri,” there were cheers along the line below the Arch. Reminding himself that this was no time for clapping, Hans joined in the cheers. Mara was starting to fidget by this time, so Naomi picked her up, and held the baby on her hip. Joshua took hold of his mother's arm.

The roll call had almost left Illinois by the time Hans could hear the radio again. As the names of the towns and of the countries continued, He began to wonder when the Soviet representative would speak. When they had gotten as far as Indala Mbuti from Zaire in Fellowsville, and Suna Mularto from Indonesia in Mt. Storm, West Virginia he hoped that Roger had not left the Soviets out of the list of greeters. Then it was Hanging Rock, West Virginia, and across the border to Hayfield and then Middleburg, Virginia; then, Washington DC. Surely there, but no, there was still no spokesperson from the Soviet Union.

“Come on, Roger, what did you do with them,” thought Hans. “This is getting ridiculous.” There were only two, or three more to go.

“This is Richard Braswell from Canada, wishing peace to our neighbors to the south. The chain is complete in Queenstown, Maryland.”

“Maria Velasquez, in Linkwood, Maryland,” wishing peace and happiness from Argentina.”

“From Ocean City, Maryland, the chain is complete.” Hans strained his ears; that accent, could it be? “This is Dmitri Cherchekov, we the people of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics wish you peace.” Roger, that rascal, had saved them for the very end.

For one blessed second, there was an awesome quiet, then the voices of a radio announcer was heard giving them an analysis of the demonstration. Freeing his hand momentarily, Harold reached to his pocket, found the switch, and turned it off.

“Really,” thought Hans. “We're in it. We don't want to hear about it now.”

He closed his eyes and tried to feel the millions of hands that were joined in the chain. Was it complete? There was a lot of space between the towns from which the foreign guests had spoken that was unaccounted for. Maybe they would know later. That almost didn't matter now, not as much as the spirit that had brought them together. His mother squeezed his hand, and he passed it on to Joshua. If they could continue that at the rate of one squeeze per second for each person along the line, it would

take more than three weeks to reach Los Angeles.

The words of a song came to his mind, “We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord. We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord. And we pray that all unity will one day be restored. They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

“And, if they don't believe it,” he thought, “we'll blow them to hell. Right? What better way to show our love. And, let us not forgive them their trespasses because we don't like the color of their skin, or the slant of their eyes, or the words that they speak. Unless they say 'friend' in my tongue they are no friend of mine.

“Besides they're all greedy and have no respect for life, or freedom. I can't share what I have, and don't say it was given to me. I worked and earned it, and there might not be enough to go around, and then I would be as depraved and deprived as they are. You wouldn't want that would you Lord?

“What? You say I have to give freely. You say I have to forgive my enemies, those who do me wrong, and I have to return good for evil? Surely you don't mean that. They'll take advantage of me. Like, I believe in you, God, but don't ask me to do that.”

Hans stopped there. Were those his thoughts, or were those the thoughts of others? He opened his eyes and looked to his left and to his right. They were there, as far as he could see. Some were looking at the ground, some were looking around, and some had their eyes closed. Occasionally, one turned to a neighbor and said a few words, but most were standing, holding hands, in silence.

All of a sudden, Hans felt small., He felt so little, so tiny. He was just one of millions in this line, and billions in the world. Each of them had to find their own way, to come to grips with the terms of their own lives. They were adrift in the universe, and the universe within was as infinite as the one to which their entire galaxy was the merest speck.

“Help us, Lord. Pour out your Spirit upon us,” he thought. “Give us the wisdom and the strength to do your will.”

Their time was up. Those who had been holding hands across the intersection were on their way back to the curb, and the line under the Arch started to break apart. Taking a deep breath, Hans looked at Joshua and Lois, and let go of their hands.

“Listen to that,” said Naomi.

“It sounds like waves lapping the shore of the ocean,” said Lois. “Or, leaves rustling in the breeze.”

A soft murmur flowed along the line as those who a moment earlier had been holding hands turned to each other and started talking, relating their feelings and sensations.

“We're part of that, too,” said Harold. “Our words are mixing in the air along with everyone else's. It's like the after effect of the event.”

“The first after effect,” Naomi amended his statement. “We hope this has enough impact to move us beyond this day.”

"I was thinking about Gary," said Joshua. "His family was assigned to mile eight in the County. Then I wondered if any of our satellites were taking pictures of us. Do you think they were?"

"I don't know," answered Hans. "We never thought to ask NASA to do that."

"You did really well, Mara," said Naomi, giving the baby a kiss on the cheek. "That was a long time to be still, wasn't it."

"Especially when you don't know what it's all about," said Lois.

Mara knew she was the center of attention. It was not an uncommon occurrence for her, and she started babbling a series of syllables.

"She may know as well as any of the rest of us," stated Naomi. "Except, she can't say it in words."

None of them were in a rush to depart, but small groups of people were gradually leaving the Arch grounds.

"Well, is there anything else planned?" asked Harold.

"Not in St. Louis," replied Hans. "That was it for us."

They stood there for a moment longer, then Harold said, "We're parked about a half mile from here."

"Okay. I guess Joshua and I will meet you back home," responded Hans.

My Son, My Son

The Spiegels gathered around the TV to watch the evening news which opened with Hands Across the Nation as the lead story. As the commentator read the account of the demonstration, film clips showed what had happened at several locations along the route. Some had been filmed from the ground, while others had been taken from the air.

“Hey, they're standing in water!” exclaimed Joshua.

The film showed people standing in line, holding hands, right into the water at what must have been Ocean City on the Atlantic coast.

“Listen to what he's saying,” Naomi quieted him.

“In excess of five million people are estimated to have participated in the largest peace demonstration ever organized in the United States,” stated the commentator. “As far as observers along the route have been able to determine, a human chain that spanned the continent was successfully completed.”

Hans did a drum roll on his knees with his fists as scenes from the demonstration continued to be displayed. There were people along what looked like the main street of a small town. That was followed by an urban setting, similar to the decrepit neighborhood through which Hans had biked last year, but in a different city. Then there was a scene of an isolated stretch of highway. That was the most impressive. In the middle of nowhere, with cars parked almost bumper to bumper by the side of the road, the line continued unbroken.

“The demonstration was unusual in that no demands were placed on the government by the demonstrators.” Suddenly a scene of the circle around the White House was replaced with one of a reporter interviewing Hans. It was a file tape that had been filmed the day before. Joshua started to say something and Lois, too, wanted to make a remark. Harold shushed them both, and Naomi reached for the volume control to turn up the sound.

Hans sat absolutely still; he almost stopped breathing. There was the question again. “Why had they done it”?

“We are one. Whatever we do to each other, or to the planet, we do to ourselves. Joining hands in an unbroken chain that spans this continent, joined by people from most of the countries in the world, may help us experience that, and hopefully then, to act that way.”

His expression was earnest, serious, and his words were clear, concise, and to the point. It was a question to which he had given much thought. Was his answer really different from what which any of the participants might have given? Even those who had chosen not to participate, who had criticized the event, deep down inside, weren't they all the same? Did they not have the same needs?

The tape of the interview ended, and the commentator's face returned to the screen. His final statement about the human chain was that citizens from 132 countries had been involved. Then, the next item of news had to do with the latest efforts to deal with a toxic waste problem in Alabama.

Turning the volume back down, Naomi said with an expression of wonder, “It looks like we did

it.”

“Yes, unless somebody comes along and says it was incomplete somewhere,” replied Hans. “There hasn’t been enough time to know for sure.”

“Is there any way to know?” asked Lois.

“We had more than 30,000 monitors along the route. They should be able to verify whether the chain was complete, or not,” answered her son.

“Is that what you’re going to do now?” asked Harold. “Verify that the chain was complete?”

“I’m not going to do anything for the next couple of weeks,” said Hans. “It’s time for me to take a break.”

“Maybe your wife would like a break, too,” said the older man. “You’ve had a whole year to do what you wanted to do while she has stuck to her job. How long do you plan on going without an income?”

It sounded to Hans like he was being accused of mooching off his wife, like he was not accepting his responsibility as an adult to provide for his family. Feeling insulted, he thought, “What kind of a question is that to ask at a time like this?” Out loud, he shot back, “Don’t you think that’s for Naomi and me to decide?” and, in spite of himself, added, “Or, are you about to raise our rent?”

“That’s not fair, Hans,” said his mother, looking at him with deer’s eyes. “Why are you getting so angry?”

“Who’s getting angry?” he thought. “A man works it out with his wife that they will live on her income while he does something both of them feel is important, why should anyone interrogate him about that and spoil everything?” Inside himself, he knew his father had hardly been interrogating him. If working without pay was a sore spot for Hans, it was because the spurs that had made him sensitive to it were mainly on his own boots.

Looking around the room, he saw his dad sitting on the couch next to his mother, carefully refraining from further speech; Naomi gazing at the ceiling in the corner, letting Hans work this out with his parents by himself; Joshua looking brightly back and forth between his father and his grandfather; and, Mara, standing still, with an unhappy look on her face.

“Let’s go camping,” said Joshua.

The boy had said just the right thing to melt the ice. Coming unstuck, Hans looked at Naomi. She said, “That sounds like a good idea. Mara is big enough. I think it would be good for all of us.”

It sounded great to Hans. He could see it already; the trees, the clean air, the sense of freedom, and they spent the rest of the evening planning the trip. Naomi thought she should give the church more notice if she was going to take off Sunday, so they decided to return on Saturday. Harold and Lois said they could get by without the car for a week if the kids wanted to use it, which simplified matters considerably.

The next day, while Naomi put her affairs in order at the church, Hans took Mara shopping for food items and ice with which to stock the cooler. Joshua accepted responsibility for finding each of the items on a list of camping equipment; things like their sleeping bags, toilet articles, first aid kit, utensils, and insect repellent. When Hans and Mara returned, Joshua had most of the equipment stacked in the front hallway, and they started loading it into the car.

Their efforts at preparation were interrupted several times by the phone ringing in Hans' office. One call was from a man who wanted to make an appointment to see Hans, and who made it sound so urgent that Hans agreed to meet him the next week, but after that, he let his answering machine take all of the calls.

Naomi was amazed to find that they had the car packed by the time she got home, early in the afternoon. Taking just thirty minutes more for her to get ready, they started without further delay for a state park that was a couple of hours drive away, and that had swimming, hiking trails, and lots of trees.

When they arrived, Hans and Joshua took care of setting up the tent while Naomi kept an eye on Mara. The one thing about which they had to be careful was keeping her close by. She did like to toddle away from the campsite, but at least she was becoming more selective about what she would put into her mouth. It was a good thing, because there were a lot of baby frogs in the area. There were not many other campers in the park, probably because it was a weekday and early in the summer. That suited Hans just fine, and he could feel himself start to unwind as they went about the basic tasks of starting a campfire, cooking a meal, and taking a quick, exploratory hike, Mara riding on his back.

The one thought that disrupted his playful mood concerned the interchange about his "employment" that he had had with his father the previous evening. It occurred to him that he should have said at the time, "Heck, Dad, if you resent the freedom I have with my work, say so, but don't put it like I'm not doing right by my wife and children."

It was still on his mind after sundown, as he and Joshua went in the men's side of the restroom where they encountered several other people. One short, balding man with hairy legs who was leaving the latrine looked at Hans, stopped, came back and said, "Say, weren't you on TV talking about that human chain?"

Hans stood there with his toothbrush, soap, and washrag, and considered what kind of response he should make. "Yes, that was me," he replied.

The man held out his hand and said, "My wife and I were camping out here last weekend. We should have gotten in on that. It would have been easy for us to get over to where they were lining up."

Hans shook the man's hand and listened to what he had to say, but as soon as he could politely do so, he got away and entered the restroom. Joining Joshua at the row of sinks, he started brushing his teeth; then, looking at himself in the mirror, he wondered, 'Now, why was I so antsy to stop talking with that guy. He was very nice.' Then he reflected, "Why didn't they participate?" As that question went through his mind he thought, "Oh, so that's it, Hans. People who don't help gather the wheat and grind the flour don't get to eat any of the bread. Well, my goodness, if you're going to hold a grudge against all the Johnny-come-latelys, you might as well hang it up."

Over the next few days, Hans started to get used to total strangers staring at him, and sometimes walking over and introducing themselves. It even got to where he was expecting to be recognized.

Then he had to laugh at himself for being disappointed when he wasn't.

It was an enjoyable week for all of them, getting back to nature. There was a heavy storm one night, but their tent proved itself to be waterproof, and the sun came through the clouds the next morning. The next night the sky was clear, and away from the lights of the city, they could see the stars much more distinctly. Joshua pointed to the Big Dipper and several other constellations. The boy knew more about the stars than either of his parents, and if the ground had not still been soaked, he might have talked them into letting him sleep outside the tent.

Hans would have been glad for another week of it, but Naomi had to get back for Sunday, and he had made the appointment to meet with the urgent man. Actually, as they packed their belongings into the car, his thought was that after another week he might start to get itchy and eager to return to work. That resurrected the sore feelings from his father's question. They were not hurting financially because of the lack of his income. They had been lucky to stay healthy last year, and had even managed to add to their savings on Naomi's salary alone. After a while, he just felt like he needed to be doing something.

Back at home, Saturday evening, neither he nor Harold brought up the matter again; although, he suspected it was still on his father's mind as well.

"Letting sleeping dogs lie," was the way Hans thought of it.

His feelings were soothed by the reception some of the members of their church extended on Sunday morning. In their subdued way it was a near equivalent to a hero's welcome. The demonstration had come across in a very positive light, and no reports of gaps in the chain had emerged during the week. Even some of the members who had held aloof during the organizing came up after the service to say they thought he had done a good job.

While he appreciated their congratulations, in the back of his mind was a note of caution, "Yes, big deal, so we have done a wonderful thing. What are we going to do today and tomorrow to make peace a reality?"

As they rode their bikes home after the service, along one quiet stretch on which there was no traffic, Hans sped up and passed Joshua to ride beside Naomi. "Well, I'll say one thing," he spoke loudly to be heard over the motor of her moped. "If I have to wait till I'm dead to know peace, I'll be awfully disappointed. Something else needs to be done."

"Like what?" she hollered.

"Beats me. Guess we have to pray to find out."

He dropped back as they approached an intersection. Mara was in the seat behind him. She had a little helmet to wear, but he was still twice as cautious when she was with him as when he rode alone.

* * * * *

Two days later, Hans flipped through the mail that had just been delivered. Naomi was at church, Joshua was watching Mara in the back yard, and his parents were at work. After sorting out the mail for the others, he sat on the couch in the family room and began opening the sizable stack that was

addressed to him. He had barely gotten started when he heard a knock at the front door.

“That must be the fellow who insisted he had to see me,” he thought as he walked through the front hall.

“Mr. Spiegel? “ asked his visitor when Hans opened the door.

“Yes.”

“I'm William Geld. Thanks so much for taking the time to meet with me.”

As Hans led the way to the family room, Mr. Geld made several appreciative remarks about their house, raving in particular about the woodwork, especially the front stairway. Looking at his visitor more closely once they had sat down, Hans saw a young man, approximately his own age, early thirties. Mr. Geld was well groomed, and displayed a confident, smiling face. Hans noticed his shoes; new, shiny, and very stylish.

“Excuse me,” said Hans. I'm kind of on vacation.” He was referring to his own clothes; T-shirt, baggy shorts, and tennis shoes.

Mr. Geld picked up his meaning and replied, “Oh, that's okay. It's your house,” and he declined Hans' offer of a glass of water.

“Let me explain why I wanted to meet you,” he started his presentation. “I'm with the public relations firm of Wright, Hanson, and Burr. We do promotional work for a variety of companies, and we were extremely impressed with the feat you just pulled off. I started keeping track of your activities more than a month ago. 'Here's someone who's going to make a name for himself,' I said when the media started giving your demonstration some attention.”

Hans sat quietly and looked steadily at his visitor. Mr. Geld continued, “You must be aware that you are a national celebrity. Probably more people would recognize you on the sidewalk than the Vice-President of the United States.” He smiled at his own wit.

Hans allowed himself to smile back. They were getting close to the punch line. Pulling his sleek attache' case closer, and releasing the latches with a couple of crisp clicks, the public relations agent presented Hans with a legal looking document.

“I've spoken with Mr. Burr and with several of the firms we represent, and I'm here to offer you a way you can continue the work that you have begun,. We have a list of five companies that would like for you to endorse their products. Now my feeling is that we should not dilute your impact by asking you to endorse too many, so we chose two that we thought were most suitable, and for which we are prepared to offer you a \$600,000 contract.”

So that was it, and it was no joke. They would pay him six hundred thousand dollars to endorse two products.

Seeking in vain for some kind of reaction, Mr. Geld explained further, “We have a campaign planned and ready to go. I understand that you will probably want to consult with a lawyer before signing any contracts, but it is important to us to get the campaign started while your appeal is at its

highest.”

Hans still did not speak, and Mr. Geld looked like he was feeling a bit warm; although, the windows on the porch were wide open to get the breeze.

“I’m sure you can imagine what you could do for the peace movement with \$600,000,” he said, not looking so confident now as Hans remained silent, though the smile was still there.

Yes, Hans could imagine. They could buy an ungodly amount of brochures and fliers with that. They might even have money left over with which they could feed some hungry people.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Geld. I can you give you an answer now. That’s not the way this movement is going to support itself. Your companies will have to some some other way to sell their products.”

The smile vanished, and small beads of perspiration appeared on his forehead. “You haven’t even heard what the products are. Think how much good you can do with that money,” he protested.

“If the products are worthwhile, they can be sold without my endorsement. If peace and justice are valued in the eyes of those companies, they can contribute their money to the movement. My endorsement is not for sale.

“I appreciate the time and effort you have already put into this campaign, Mr. Geld,” he continued, handing back the document. “The best of everything to you in your future efforts.”

Hans got up and showed his visitor to the door. As he watched Mr. geld descend the front steps and get into this car, Hans thought, “Too bad.” Going downstairs, he called Naomi, and described what had just happened. “Maybe I should have asked for some time, and talked it over with your first,” he said.

“I’m glad you went ahead and gave him your answer,” she responded. “You gave him a good one. Thanks for calling to tell me about it.”

“How do you suppose they came up with the figure of \$600,000?” asked Hans. He was beginning to appreciate how much money he had turned down.

“Who knows?” answered his wife,. “That’s about what it costs to buy thirty seconds on prime time TV for commercials. They figured they would make it back in sales, that’s for sure.”

“It’s funny how a chunk of money like that can seem like so much and so little at the same time.”

They talked for a little while longer, then Hans went upstairs and resumed opening his mail. One envelope did not have an return address. “What’s this?” he thought as he extracted the contents. “Some group asking for a contribution that’s so radical they don’t want to let you know who they are?”

It was not an appeal for a contribution. It was a letter that had just one sentence. It said, “You don’t have long to live.”

His guts knotted up, and he felt like he had been struck. That was all it said. He turned it over,

but it was blank on the back. The envelope was plain, too, except for a Centralia, Illinois postmark. "I don't know anyone who lives in Centralia," he thought. "It must be some crackpot." Crumpling the letter into a tight, little wad, he got right up and threw it away. Then, "Well, well, well. Two threats on my life in one day. I wonder which was most serious."

That evening, they were joined for supper by Keith, who wanted to hear about their camping trip. Joshua told a story about the lizard he had caught. "But, Mom wouldn't let me keep it," he said with reproach.

"It's happier in the woods where it belongs," she said, distracted by Mara who was dropping her crinkle cut carrots on the floor, one by one. Besides, she was squeamish about lizards, and did not want one in the house, for which Hans did not blame her. The little reptiles made his skin crawl, too.

"Yeah, dogs make better pets," said Keith.

"But, someone has to take care of them," added Lois. The Spiegels had been through that before. They had told Joshua that if he got a dog, it would be his responsibility. The boy had not wanted one strongly enough to accept that condition; he was more interested in his books and models.

When Hans told them about the offer he had gotten from Mr. Geld and what his response had been, Keith exclaimed, "Are you nuts? That's a lot of money! You would probably have had to do a few commercials, and that's all."

"I don't think people should buy something because I, or anyone else, gets paid to endorse it," replied Hans.

"That's the way it's done," said Keith. "don't you know that with that kind of money involved, they're just going to find someone else to do it?"

"Oh sure, if a person is willing to be used, making money is no trick. Prostitutes make good money," said Hans, glancing at his father. The gray haired senior had his eyes to his plate, but it looked like his ears were turned to the conversation.

"Nuts, to that, too," said Keith. "It's not a matter of being used. It's a matter of being practical. Wake up to the real world, Hans."

"Are you so certain you know what's real?" asked Naomi. "The things of this world will pass away, but there is another Being that is eternal. While we live in this world, it's good to be able to see the light that lies beyond it."

"No offense, Naomi, but did it ever occur to you that you're seeing something that isn't there?"

"Yes, that thought has occurred to me, but it hasn't shaken my faith of what the ultimate reality is."

"Great," thought Hans. "Let him have it."

Naomi had the gift of being able to express her convictions without being overbearing about it. It simply poured out, quietly, yet with tremendous force.

“Well,” said Keith, after a moment's silence. “I'm glad if it makes you happy.”

Hans waited until after supper, when he and his brother were in the front hall by themselves, to mention the letter he had received.

“Did you call the police?” asked Keith.

“No, not for that. I don't want to make a stink and worry Naomi, or Mom and Dad. I'll bet the people you have to be afraid of anyway are not the ones who write the letters, but the ones who covertly work themselves into a state of mind to act out their anger.”

“Maybe,” said Keith dubiously. “If you get any more threatening letters, Hans, you need to call the police. They might see a pattern in them, and find out who's sending them.”

Struck by how seriously his brother was taking this, Hans nodded, and said, “I will.”

* * * * *

A couple of days later, Hans was sitting in the family room listening to music, and Mara was playing on the floor with a toy horse when the phone rang. It was Ray Lawton, the Democratic committeeman from Hans' ward.

“Do you have some time, Hans? There is someone I would like for you to meet, Jack Flinch. He's the chairman of the Democratic organization in our congressional district.”

“I'm free all day tomorrow. Do you want to come here?”

“Yeah, that would be good. How about 9:30 am?”

“Okay,” said Hans. “I'll look for you then.”

The two men arrived at the appointed hour the next day, and Hans showed them to seats in the front room. It was a little cooler there, on the north side of the house.

Hans knew Ray from ward meetings over the years. He was a friendly person, and Hans thought a capable one. Mr. Flinch he did not know, and did not care for on first impression. No sooner had they sat down than Mr. Flinch pulled out a pack of cigarettes and asked if they minded if he smoked.

“We don't really care for it,” said Hans, “but, if you'll feel uncomfortable without it, go ahead. It's not so bad now as in the winter when the house smells for days afterwards.”

The cigarettes went back in his pocket, with reluctance. It looked like a smoke filled room was Mr. Flinch's element.

Ray smoothed the awkward silence, “What are you doing these days, Hans, taking some time off?”

Hans answered that that was exactly what he was doing.

“Well, you deserve it,” said Ray. “You must have had a lot on your mind the last year. It sure turned out well, didn't it? I was assigned to a position by Washington University. That's one day I don't think I'll ever forget.”

“Yes, the demonstration turned out well,” said Hans. “Now I'm trying to figure out what to do next.”

Mr. Flinch leaved forward, putting his thick hands on his knees, and said, “That's why we wanted to talk with you. As you know, next year is an election year, and the incumbent in this congressional district is filing for US Senate. That will leave an opening for his seat in Congress.

“Now, the redistricting that resulted from last year's census put a lot more Republicans into this district, and we need a strong candidate to hold onto this seat. You may not have previous experience in politics, Hans, but you are certainly well known, and with the support of the organization, I'm certain you can win.”

It was something to think about. Entering the political arena was a possibility Hans had considered when he had been younger, and gaining the support of the political organization had seemed like a big step towards getting through the gate. Now that was being offered to him.

There was more to what Mr. Flinch had to say, “There are a number of important people who are interested in seeing you run. You won't have to worry about support for your campaign.”

There it was already. Politics was the art of compromise, one interest versus another, and here were some interests already waiting in the wings. That was not the only pitfall in Hans' mind. Even if it was possible to steer clear of the special interests, and to be a true servant of the people, where would that leave him, saying the things that people wanted to hear instead of the things that needed to be said?

“Thank you for thinking of me,” replied Hans, “but, I don't believe this is what I want to do.”

Both men were set back by that. Ray said, “Are you sure, Hans? You would be in a position of power to help the peace movement.”

“There is another path for me to take,” said Hans

“Have you already agreed to run on the Republican ticket?” Mr. Flinch's voice was laced with suspicion, and his eyes squinted.

“No, and I would tell them the same thing if they asked,” said Hans. “There are people in public office who I'm sure are dedicated, industrious champions of the people, and who really serve the general welfare. I don't believe that being successful in politics necessarily means being bought out by the system. When I say there is another path for me, I mean that speaking to people's hearts is what I feel called to do, not to work at passing laws.”

Ray had another viewpoint. “Passing laws isn't the only thing legislators do, Hans. Sometimes they erase laws.”

“That's an interesting idea, Ray. What does a legislator do to fill the void that is created when a law is erased?”

Ray did not have an answer to that question, and Mr. Flinch, with his sour expression, did not look like he was interested in finding an answer.

Hans got up and said, “I'm sorry you made the trip for nothing.”

As he and Mr. Flinch stood and started for the door, Ray said, “That's okay, Hans. Do you know how to fill that void?”

“I'm not sure. I just know, now, that it can't be done in one day.”

He shook their hands and let them out the door. Turning around, Hans looked back into the empty room. “I hope it comes soon,” he thought. He still did not have a plan for how to proceed.

* * * * *

After putting Mara to bed that evening, and Harold and Lois had followed Joshua upstairs, Hans and Naomi sat on the couch in the family room talking about the possibility of Hans running for office.

“I suppose it is a blessing that there are legislators who do pass good laws,” he said. “Things might be in an even bigger mess than they are if we didn't have laws.”

“How much power would you really have if you were elected?” asked Naomi. “There are more than 400 representatives in Congress, and each of them have their own ideas of what their constituents want.”

“Yeah, and the name of that game is usually 'bringing home the bacon.' There are strong constituencies that are satisfied just by the government contracts that are delivered. Who cares what they are for? It could be nuclear reactors, weapons production, you name it, as long as it's money and jobs, there are votes. And, like you say, even if someone who disavows all of that is elected, he, or she, still has to contend with the other representatives.”

“In other words, one who represents others is not likely to act as a change agent, unless that's what the people already want. That still leaves us looking for an effective way to bring about changes.”

“Uh huh, and not to end up being a 'voice crying in the wilderness,' especially since it has all been said before. Do you feel all right, honey?”

Naomi was grimacing as if she felt uncomfortable.

“I started feeling sick about an hour ago,” she said. “It might be something I ate, or I'm coming down with the flu.”

“Do you feel nauseated?”

She nodded. Her face was flushed, and she had pressed her lips tightly together.

“Maybe you ought to lie down,” he suggested.

Suddenly, she got up and moved quickly towards the bathroom. No sooner had she gotten through the bathroom door than Hans heard her vomit, and the sounds of her retching were about enough to make him gag. He got up and looked to see how she was doing. Thankfully, she had made it to the toilet just in time.

“Are you all right?” he asked.

She spit several times, flushed the toilet, and looking up weakly, said, “I feel better already.”

“That's usually the way it goes,” he responded. “I don't know what we had for supper that could have caused it. We all ate the same thing.”

She got up and rinsed out her mouth at the sink. Leaning on the counter she said, “I think it's the flu. Several people from church had it last week. You might want to sleep on the couch tonight.”

“Yeah, I think I will. Is there anything I can do for you?”

She shook her head, “No, I'm just going to get under the covers.”

“Maybe we won't go to that conference on peacemaking in Columbia this Saturday after all,” said Hans. “That's just three days away.”

“I'll see how I feel. But, you can go either way. They will be disappointed if you don't show.”

The University of Missouri had started organizing the conference almost a year ago, before Hands Across the Nation had really taken shape. Hans had not been asked to give any talks, or to head any of the workshops, but the conference organizers had written and requested him to be present.

He spent the next two nights on the couch when it turned out that her flu was more than the twenty four hour variety. By Friday, however, she began to feel better.

“I've stopped throwing up and my temperature is almost back to normal,” she said, “but now it's coming out liquid from the other end. I feel like staying close to home, but I still think you should go to the conference. You'll meet people and you may get some fresh ideas.”

Hans, who was really in the mood to get out, did not argue. He kissed Naomi on the cheek and said, “You're something else.”

The conference did not begin until Saturday morning, but a resident of Columbia had invited a number of people to come Friday evening for a party. A couple of friends going from St. Louis had offered to pick up Hans and Naomi at 6:00 pm, to make it for the party, and that was only an hour away, so Hans started to get himself ready. He ate a quick supper and changed, asked Joshua to take good care of his mother, and said goodbye to Mara and his parents. When the ride pulled up in front, he said goodbye one more time to Naomi, then ran out the door with his overnight kit.

As he got into the car, Janice asked, “Where's Naomi?”

“She's not feeling well, and decided to stay behind.”

Taking that as a signal that they were ready to leave, Ed put the car into gear, and they started away. Janice and Ed were members of the local chapter of CALC, and both of them had recently been arrested for acts of civil disobedience at the General Dynamics headquarters in St. Louis.

“It's a shame she can't go,” said Janice, turning her head to speak to Hans who was sitting in the back seat. “There are going to be a lot of good people at this conference.”

“And, at the party tonight,” added Ed.

“Well, she's had a pretty bad case of the flu, and isn't back to full strength yet.”

“It's been going around,” said Janice. “That's the best thing to do; though, stay at home and get plenty of rest.”

“What's new with the two of you? Are any more actions being planned at General Dynamics?”

“Mostly just the weekly vigils,” replied Ed. “There are still people waiting for their court dates since the last action. We both got off easy. We were put on probation since it was the first time either of us had ever been charged with anything. Some of the others are going to serve time in jail.”

“Betty was given six months for contempt of court this time,” said Janice. “If she's not careful, she's going to spend the rest of her life in jail.”

“I haven't seen very much about it in the newspapers,” said Hans.

“No, that's because they haven't been printing much about it.”

“Raising the awareness of the public is difficult when they don't get the news of what's going on,” sympathized Hans, “although, the way it gets reported sometimes doesn't do us any good, either.”

“That's why civil disobedience, for me, was just something I felt I had to do for myself,” said Janice, “to express my opposition to the weapons that are being manufactured. That was the strongest way I could witness to my faith.”

Hans enjoyed the ride. Janice and Ed had a lot to share about their experiences in the movement, and part of the trip was pleasantly passed quietly watching the miles roll by. The sun had almost set by the time they arrived in Columbia. Pulling into a gas station when they exited from the highway, they found that the price of gasoline was a little higher here than in St. Louis, \$1.85 per gallon.

“Put that away,” said Ed when Hans got out his wallet.

“No, I insist. It helps me appreciate the value of what we're burning.” Hans reached forward and put a \$20.00 bill on the dashboard.

Ed shrugged, picked up the money, and said with a grin, “Well, I won't fight you about it.”

The party was at a small house near the campus, and it was fairly dark outside as they parked a short distance away.

“Hey, look who's here,” called someone when Hans entered behind Ed and Janice.

The speaker, whom Hans assumed was the host, came to the door, greeted the others, and introduced himself, “My name is Chester Knowles. Glad you could make it, Hans.” Chester looked behind him and asked, “What, are you here by yourself?”

“Naomi wasn't feeling well. She stayed behind.”

“Aw, that's too bad. Well, come on in and meet some people. You probably know a lot of them already, at least their names. I bet everybody here was in line for the demonstration a couple of weeks ago. There's a keg in the kitchen, and wine, and mixed drinks. Help yourself to whatever.”

Hans thanked him and looked around. They had entered into a large combined living and dining room. A fair number of people were standing in twos and threes, talking; although, it did not look like the party had peaked yet. There was still a lot of space, and the snacks and dip on the table at the other end of the room looked like they had hardly been touched. Wandering towards the kitchen, he nodded and smiled at the faces that were turned towards him, none of which were familiar. Passing into the kitchen, he found a small group standing around a keg.

“What will you have, Hans?” Ed was getting drinks for Janice and himself.

“Oh, I guess I'll have a beer.”

“You're Hans Spiegel,” spoke a young woman with long hair and a short skirt from the other side of the keg. She looked like a student, and announced proudly, “We organized twelve bus loads from Mizzou to help fill the chain near Joplin.”

“What's your name?” asked Hans.

“Diane Elder.”

Hans got the names of everyone in the room, and it seemed like each of them had a story to tell about their involvement in the human chain. One fellow recounted how his bus had broken down, and the more than forty passengers had had to hitchhike to reach their positions. Most of them had made it to the assigned mile, and all of them had taken part in the chain, regardless of where they had ended up. Several other snafus had occurred, but most of them had been overcome one way, or another, and their recounting was worth more than a few laughs now that it was over.

Hans stayed in the kitchen till, gradually, as more and more people came in, it became too close for comfort. Going back to the door to the front room, he saw that it was even more crowded than the kitchen. He turned around and noticed some people going out the back door into a yard. That was the path of least resistance, and he took it.

It was nice outside, cooler than indoors, and the air was fresher than in St. Louis. He recognized some people he knew, counselors in the Columbia school system who had been among the earliest participants in the sex education program, and walked over and joined them.

“Hi, Hans. Chester said Naomi didn't make the trip.”

“No, she's got a bit of a flu bug. I think she's over the worst of it, though.”

“Do you need a place to stay? We have room at our house.”

“Thanks,” said Hans. “Ed and Janice, the people I came with, have friends who said they would put us up.”

“Well, if that doesn't work out, you know where we live. You can come by anytime.”

As they talked in the back yard, more people came outside. “Equalizing the pressure,” thought Hans, and his friends introduced him to several other people that they knew. He had been nursing his first beer for almost an hour, and it looked like things might have cleared enough that he ventured to go inside again. After refilling his cup at the keg, he finally made it back to the front room, where Chester came over and asked how he was doing.

“Just fine,” answered Hans. “I'm meeting a lot of good people.”

“Good.” Chester looked like he was enjoying his own party. “There's more of them in here,” and Hans let himself be led and introduced to a small group that was standing by the front door.

As it approached 10:30, he finished his second drink and went back to the kitchen. The party had thinned a little, but from what he could see, it was far from over, and he thought about checking with Ed and Janice to find out how long they wanted to stay. This time he filled his cup with water, and feeling a little hungry, he decided to try the snacks before leaving.

As he was standing next to the table, loading a paper saucer with carrot sticks, cheese and crackers, he looked up and saw an exceptionally attractive woman approaching the table from the other side. He had noticed her earlier, but had not spoken with her. She was wearing a light brown dress that was cut in such a way that it emphasized her slender waist and large, full breasts. Hans looked away before he started staring, then looked back and met her eyes.

She stopped directly opposite from him and asked, “When are we going to do hands around the world?”

He smiled back at her, and she came around the end of the table to stand at his side.

“I think we're ready to something more on the substantive side,” he said.

“My name is Felicia Towers.” She held out her hand.

Hans shook it and thought, “Hmm, sounds like Alice Powers. I've never met Alice, though. I don't know what she looks like.”

“What do you do, Felicia?” She looked too old to be a student.

“I teach in the Anthropology Department. By the way, I've read your book on the loss of

indigenous cultures. I thought it was a brilliant work. You blended the information about the encroachment on their habitats with a powerful plea for compassion and justice.”

“I imagine the encroaching is still going on.” That took him back a few years. Somehow that concern had gotten washed over by other events.

“Yes, it's hard to stop progress, and progress always needs more raw materials.”

Felicia told him about her own area of study, and as they talked, the subject started coming back to him. He had been fascinated by his early courses; the study of different people, their social structures, and their religions. The sounds of the party faded from his mind till it seemed as if the two of them were alone in the room. She was standing close to him, and Hans caught the scent of perfume. Leaning forward, he breathed deeply. Yes, it was hers. He liked it, very faint, just enough to let him know it was there.

The memory of a play he had seen on TV when he was a small boy flashed across his mind. It had been a play about Socrates, and in one scene, the wife of Socrates had been giving advice to a young Athenian woman on how to attract men. The older woman had told her how to apply perfume, “A touch behind the ears, a dab on the back of the neck, and a touch between the breasts.”

The breasts. Hans forced himself to look away again. He looked back, and Felicia met his eyes and smiled again. There was something else in her attentive regard.

“How come you're so good?” she asked.

Hans thought about that. If the way he was behaving was good, what kind of behavior did she usually encounter?

“I don't know that I'm that good,” he replied. “It just that I have a vision of something that's better.”

“I knew that was the kind of answer you would give,” she said.

Hans did not know what to say.

Felicia's voice lowered a shade, “I live by myself in an apartment nearby. When you're ready to leave, I would like to continue the conversation.”

He felt like a stallion that had just been put into a pasture with a mare that was in heat. “Whoa, Hans,” he thought. “Maybe her suggestion is more innocent than what you're thinking.”

“Actually”, he said, “I had been thinking about finding the people with whom I came. They have some friends who offered to put us up for the night.”

Looking him square in the face and leaning forward until they almost touched, she said, “I'd like for you to come to my place.”

If he had not already been standing on his two hind legs, he might have reared up and whinnied. He felt hot, there were so many people in the room giving off body heat.

Her eyes were still locked on his. "I know you're married," she said.

"Oh, she knows," he thought. He had just been debating if he should say something to that effect, in case she didn't.

Felicia continued, "And, I know you must love her a lot, but you have so much love in you, you can give some to someone else, and still have more than enough."

With desperate strength, he thought about his wife. Naomi had not been at her best the last couple of days, and it had had an effect on him. She was part of him.

His beliefs with respect to sex had not been fully developed during his early adulthood, yet he had remained celibate until he had married, and he had not sampled of forbidden fruit since then. The way he had come to look upon it was partly based on an analogy with the moment of fertilization. As soon, as the sperm penetrated the membrane of the ovum, a change occurred that prevented the entry of any other sperm cells. That alteration in the ovum cell membrane was one of the fastest biological reactions known.

It was almost as if the ovum knew that the introduction of additional genetic material would cause confusion, would disrupt the process of growth. When man and woman were joined as husband and wife, they were complete. Confusion would result from the introduction of intimate relations outside that union. What existed as Naomi and Hans might die.

Felicia was nodding her head as if she already knew his answer. Her eyes were wide and moist.

"I'm sorry," said Hans. Then, wanting to make her feel better, he added, "Will you be at the conference tomorrow?"

"Yes, of course."

"Maybe I'll see you there. I'm glad to have met you."

After saying that, still a bit befuddled, he went in search of Janice and Ed. Finding them in the back yard, he mentioned that he would be ready to leave anytime, and was relieved that they were agreeable to leaving right then. It was after 11:00, and the main reason they had come was for the conference.

* * * * *

One of the conference organizers, a rushed looking man with a red ID badge, approached Hans the next morning as he was standing in the registration line with Janice and Ed.

"Mr. Spiegel?"

"Yes?"

I'm Dr. Charles Worthing in the Social Science Department here at Mizzou. It's good to see you. We regret not having you on the program, and would like to introduce you following the keynote

address. If you have any remarks you would like to share, please take five or ten minutes at that time to do so.”

“Thanks very much, Dr. Worthing, but I don't know if there's anything I have to say right now.” Hans gulped and carried on, “It looks like the turnout for your conference is good.”

“To tell you the truth, Hans, the registrations were coming in kind of slowly until a couple of weeks ago, I think the demonstration and forming the human chain has rekindled a lot of interest. Well, we'll call you up after our keynote speaker, and you can do whatever feels comfortable to you.”

“What would feel comfortable would be to stay in my seat,” thought Hans as Dr. Worthing strode away. As many times as he had spoken to groups, and even though he knew he was an effective public speaker, it still did not come easily to him. There were moments when he wished he could pack his sense of duty and ship it somewhere far, far away, where it would not get him into these predicaments.

They finally reached the registration table, gave their names, and accepted their conference materials. Hans talked with Janice and Ed for a few minutes, trying to conceal his jitters, then declared he was ready to find a seat.

Passing into the auditorium, he chose a seat on the aisle near the front, and opening his packet of materials, tried to study the list of workshops. The two on World Community and Building Support Groups looked most interesting to him. As the audio-visual personnel finished their check of the sound system and left the stage, Hans had to get up one more time to allow someone to pass, which filled their row. The platform party entered and took their seats on the stage, and after a few more minutes to give the latecomers time to find seats, the conference was begun.

The president of the university made some opening remarks, welcoming them to the campus, and Hans took that moment to consider what he might like to say to the assembly. The Chairperson of the Social Sciences Department, who was serving as the moderator, then took the microphone and gave a quick review of the schedule for the day. Completing the overview of the conference, she proceeded to introduce the keynote speaker, the Director of the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change.

For a moment, Hans was able to forget his own upcoming remarks as the speaker gave an impassioned address on the continuing struggle for justice in America, declaring that discrimination in housing and employment were still facts of life for many black Americans. One phrase that particularly struck Hans was, “We have a class of Third World citizens right here in this country.”

In his mind, he heard the kind of responses that many people would make to that. “This is the land of opportunity. If someone is suffering, or poor, in the United States, it's their own fault.”

The final remark of the speaker was that if we did not work for justice, there could be no peace. Strong applause filled the room after his speech, and again as he reclaimed his seat after answering several questions.

Anticipating his call to the stage, Hans felt his stomach churn as the moderator stepped again to the microphone.

“We are going to make a brief departure from our schedule for the day. Two weeks ago, the largest peace demonstration in the history of the United States took place. It did not happen at any one location, but literally occurred all across the country. Many of you were among the more than five million people who completed a chain that stretched from coast to coast.

“The person who initiated and led in organizing that demonstration is with us here today. I would like to introduce Hans Spiegel.”

Getting up and walking down the aisle to the front of the auditorium, Hans heard thunderous applause erupt behind him. He climbed the steps to the stage, shook hands with the moderator, and turning to the microphone, saw the auditorium full of people on their feet, giving him a standing ovation. Clearing his throat, and feeling the adrenalin surging into his blood, he thought, “Keep still, and let it come. Let it come.” His emotions threatened to betray him as much as his nerves. Holding up his hands, the crowd slowly settled down and resumed their seats.

“Thank you for that. There's nothing like standing before a supportive audience.”

That brought a round of laughter, and gave him a chance to take a deep breath. Smiling eager faces looked up at him.

“I'm glad we're all here today, to continue the struggle for peace. Two weeks ago we had an opportunity to demonstrate our unity, and we were joined by citizens from most of the other countries in the world so we can know that, truly, we are one. We also know that no single demonstration can create the peace we seek. It requires a lifelong commitment and a demonstration, each day, to be real.

“I appreciate so much the remarks that were made by our keynote speaker. We have to respond to the cry for justice if our efforts for peace are to mean anything. What makes it difficult is that our own complacency is one of our biggest enemies. We get used to the injustices that surround us, and from which we sometimes benefit, and we resent having to change to correct them.”

Hans paused. He wanted to bring that point home, to illustrate it in a way that would challenge each of them. “You may be familiar with the data that has been published over the last two decades by the Worldwatch Institute. Some people may dispute their findings; however, based on studies of our depletion of forests, of farmland and of grazing lands, of non-renewable energy resources, and even of the fisheries in the oceans, they have concluded that the demands placed by our society on the environment can not be sustained.

“But, that raises the question, 'What is our society'? If our society is one in which the response of those who 'Have' is to separate themselves from those who 'Have Not,' if our society is one in which wealth in the midst of poverty is accepted, if our society is one in which love for one's neighbors is secondary to satisfying one's self-interests, then perhaps our society is a sustainable one. Perhaps as resources become more scarce, there will simply be fewer Haves and the ranks of the Have Nots will be swelled. It appears that that is what is taking place. Our society is sustaining itself instead of changing to be more just, more caring, more peaceful.

“It does relate back to peacemaking. How many weapons do the Haves need to maintain their control over a disproportionate share of the world's resources? And, of course, compared to the rest of the world, we live in a Have society. How do we need to change so that we can live in peace and in justice with the Third World citizens in our own and in other countries?”

He stepped away from the microphone. It had not been an inspiring speech, but more of an unburdening of concerns. Serious expression had replaced many of the smiles among the audience, and some of the eyes, now, were downcast. The moderator asked if he would answer questions, and he nodded and stepped back to the microphone. She called on the first person who raised a hand.

“What kind of changes do you think need to be made?”

Hans gave a wry smile, “That’s exactly the question with which I have been wrestling for the last two weeks. I can’t say I have any definite answer, but it seems to me, one thing that needs to be changed is the American Dream. By that I mean the goal that so many of us have of a single family, detached home, a car in the garage, or maybe two cars, and maybe one or two more once the kids are old enough to drive.

“A teacher of a class I took years ago asked each of us what our Dream was. At that time, I even had a swimming pool on the list of things I wanted to have. Is that a dream, or is it a nightmare? There aren’t enough resources in the world for everyone to have those things. If one person, or one nation, consumes more than their share of the resources, then other people have to live with less than their share.”

Another hand went up. Hans nodded in the direction of the person to whom it belonged.

“Are you advocating socialism?”

“There was a time in my life when I was interested in socialism. I lost interest when I began to see that the way socialism was usually practiced was through another hierarchy; a few people at the top making decisions for everyone else. Still, even today, I would be as ready to vote for a candidate on a Socialist ticket as I would for a Democrat or a Republican.

“But, as I was saying, what I think needs to be changed is our dream, that which we are striving to attain. That is a matter of people’s hearts and minds, not necessarily what can be imposed from the outside. It’s a matter, in part, of education, and not just of education in words, but in deeds. It means education by example.”

Several other hands went up, and the moderator said, “We have time for one more.”

Hans pointed to someone in the back of the room.

“You said something about some people having to live with less than their share of the resources when others consume more than their share. What is one person’s share of the world’s resources?”

There were a few snickers around the room, as if the person has asked a silly question.

“That’s a difficult one,” said Hans. “I certainly don’t feel prepared to give any kind of quantitative answer to it. But, I think that is the kind of question we need to be asking of ourselves.

“Some people would say, ‘My share is whatever I can get my hands on and hold as my own.’ Others might say, ‘First come, first served; every person for him, or herself; survival of the fittest, and

the weak can do without.' I think those kinds of answers cause problems. I believe there are enough resources in the world that everyone's needs can be satisfied, as long as we use those resources properly and share what we have.

“It might help if we saw this as an opportunity to develop other kinds of resources than material ones. We have a long way to go towards satisfying other needs than the physical ones. What we need the most is love. We need to love each other, even the least of our sisters and brothers, so that we want to share.”

Shaking hands with the moderator and the others of the platform party, Hans started back down the steps. They were all on their feet, clapping, again, and most of the smiles had returned. These, at least, were with him.

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“You're being mighty quiet back there,” remarked Ed from the passenger seat. Janice, who was driving for the return trip, glanced in the rear view mirror, but kept her attention on the road. Although they were still as much as twenty miles from St. Louis, an occasional factory or office building now appeared by the side of the highway.

“There's a lot on my mind from the conference,” said Hans. His thoughts were still on fire from the questions and comments that had been made during the day.

Ed half turned in his seat so he could look at Hans, and said, “I wanted to ask you some more about the kinds of changes you have in mind. We have to be specific if we want people to understand what we are saying.”

“What you see going on right next to the highway, all of this development, that's one example of something that needs to change,” replied Hans, glad for a chance to air his thoughts. “We lose about a million acres of good cropland each year to urban sprawl in the United States. That can't continue. We have to put the breaks on those things.

“But, stopping a new highway, or development, or weapons system before it gets started is relatively easy compared to changing the structure that already exists. The suburbs have already sprawled, we have already built miles of highway to connect them, and we have structured our cities in such a way that one can hardly get around without an automobile. All of those single family dwellings have been built. People are living in them, and they have mortgage payments that need to be made. We're locked in those ways; yet, some of that existing physical structure may need to be changed.

“There's another level of structure that has to do with the way people think. Our thoughts are represented by actual patterns of neural activity in our brains, and that learned structure is as real as anything. Sometimes it might be easier to move a mountain than to get someone to change their opinion.

“Another level of structure is the very substance by which we are made; from our brains, hormones, and glands, to our genetic material, our chromosomes. The molecules that compose our chromosomes are called nucleotides, and a sequence of three nucleotides is called a 'codon.' Each codon corresponds to a particular amino acid. Amino acids are the building blocks of protein, and protein molecules are the building blocks of our bodies.”

“I don't think genetic engineering is a good idea,” said Janice, breaking into Hans' train of words. “That is something that is best left in God's hands.”

“There are a lot of uncertainties involved,” replied Hans. “Maybe the best way to deal with it is to leave it alone, not to touch it. In tampering with someone's capacity to hate, or to be hostile, we may eliminate their ability to love, and their drive for live; not that our genetic research is directed at that sort of thing.

“The idea of creating people who don't need to be told right from wrong because they know it before they are born is just an idea. The real work with genetic engineering is being directed along the lines of disease control, improving our crops, and so on, which I think is an appropriate use of our knowledge. God gave us brains so that we can do those things.”

“The trouble is we use our brains for other purposes,” said Janice. “We don't always do what God wants us to do.”

“We've been given that choice, haven't we? Did I stray from your question, Ed? “You may have been looking for the more practical, everyday kinds of changes that need to be made.”

“Yeah, but I was interested to hear about codons. I didn't know that.”

Minutes later, and they were well within the structure of the city. Buildings abounded on every side, and the traffic thickened. “What are all of these people doing, driving around on a Saturday evening?” wondered Hans. Then he thought, “I'd better not look too hard at them. I'm part of it.”

* * * * *

Hans let himself in the front door and walked to the back of the house. The kitchen table had already been cleared of the supper dishes; although, a tantalizing odor of baked chicken was still in the air.

Coming through the door from the family room, Naomi said, “I thought I heard you come in.”

They hugged each other, and Hans asked, “How are you feeling?”

“Oh, much better. I'm going to preach in the morning.”

They stood for a moment, holding each other close. Feeling something pulling on his pants leg, Hans looked down, and found that Mara was letting him know that she wanted some snuggles, too.

He picked her up, and said, “Hello, sugar. Are going to give your daddy a kiss?” She did, a wet one on the cheek.

“Where's Joshua?”

“He's upstairs. Gary and he traded their comic book collections today, and he's got a lot of new Superman stories to read.”

“How about Mom and Dad?”

“They're visiting at the Thompsons. How was the conference?”

“Really good. It started with a keynote address on peace and justice.”

“Do you want something to eat?” asked Naomi, guessing that he might be hungry.

“As a matter of fact, yes. We left Columbia as soon as the conference ended, at five, and drove straight back.”

Hans finished telling Naomi about the conference as he ate leftover chicken and salad. “The one thing,” he summarized his thoughts, “while the conference ended with general agreement that changes need to be made, the specifics of what we need to do were not defined.”

“There must be a lot of things that can be done,” declared Naomi, with raised eyebrows that said, “They're staring us in the face.”

“Well, yes, and some of them were mentioned; things like simplifying lifestyles, strengthening local communities and neighborhoods, even recycling projects. Somehow that just doesn't seem to go far enough. We're not asking enough of ourselves.”

Joshua's footsteps could be heard coming down the stairs. He joined them in the kitchen, and said, “Hi, Dad.”

“Hi Josh. I hear you traded comic books with Gary.”

“Yeah, but not for keeps. He has more than I have, and he wants his back.” The boy sat at the table, and reached for a piece of the coffee cake that was in front of his father. Hans pushed it closer to his son.

“What would you do if you had more comics than Gary?” asked Naomi, sensing an opportunity for some moral instruction.

“I wouldn't have more comics. He gets a bigger allowance.”

It did not sound to Hans that Joshua was complaining. He was merely stating a fact. Gary had a bigger allowance, so Gary could buy more comic books.

“That's good coffee cake,” said Joshua, going on to more immediately pressing matters. “Do we have any milk?”

“It's in the refrigerator,” answered his mother. “You don't expect me to get it for you, do you?”

“No.” he replied, then with an elfish grin, he asked, “Will you?”

She stared at the boy, and gave him a, “You've got a lot of nerve,” look, but then she said, “Okay, I'll do that for you.”

As she got up and opened the refrigerator, Hans said, "I'll take a glass, too, honey," and excused himself, "Since you're already up."

Taking two glasses from the cabinet over the sink, she warned them, "Just don't expect me to do your dishes. I'm going to put Mara to bed, and review my sermon once more before I get to bed early myself."

"You must be past the contagious stage," said Hans. "I'll join you in a while."

Naomi picked up Mara, and left quickly before the toddler started to fuss. Washing down one last piece of coffee cake with the milk, Hans started cleaning his dishes.

"Do you want to see some comics?" asked Joshua as he set his glass on the counter.

"Sure. Do you have any Green Lanterns?"

* * * * *

The next day, Hans was sitting in the family room contemplating taking a nap. Strangely enough, as busy as he had been a few weeks earlier, while organizing the human chain, he had felt more energetic than he did now that it was over. Lacking a focus and a sense of direction was draining in its own way.

Hearing the phone in his office ring, he thought, "That's odd. Who would be calling on a Sunday afternoon?"

The fifth ring had just ended by the time he picked up the receiver. It was Willy Lee.

"Hi, Hans. I hope I'm not disturbing you."

"You're not disturbing me, Willy. I was doing about as close to nothing as I could. What's up?"

"I was just wondering what you're working on these days. Have you started anything since Hands?"

"No. Right afterwards, Naomi and I took our kids camping for a week. Then I got some offers from an advertising company and the political organization, but I haven't hit on anything that I liked, except there was a pretty good conference on peacemaking in Columbia yesterday."

Sounding like he was almost out of patience, the Ground Zero activist said, "I've about had it with conferences, Hans. We've been talking ourselves to death for years. We need to act."

Hans agreed; unfortunately, that was easier said than done. There had to be direction before they could act. There had to be a plan behind their action.

Something prompted him to ask, "How much money did you make last year, Willy?"

There was a moment of silence, then, "About \$8,000."

“Are you married?”

“No.”

“That's still not very much,” said Hans. “I don't doubt that you could find ways to make more than that if you wanted.”

“Yeah, well, I don't really want to. That's my method of tax resistance. I can't stand the government putting most of my taxes into the military. If you don't have it, they can't tax it.”

“Is that your only reason for accepting a life of voluntary poverty?”

“I don't consider it poverty, Hans. I share a house with three other people. It needs some work, but we're getting it together. It's a nice place to live, and we eat good. I'm not hurting for anything. Sometimes I feel almost guilty, like I'm still taking more than my share of the pie.”

“What's that?” thought Hans, and he said, “It's interesting that you used that phrase, Willy. We talked a little at the conference yesterday about our share of the world's resources.”

Hans thought for a moment. The seed of an idea was forming in his mind, something to sink his teeth into. Rather than keep his friend from Ground Zero hanging, Hans said, “What would you say to trying another teleconference to see if we can cooperate in another project?”

“Sure, as long as it does something. What do you have in mind?”

“Oh, it's hard to say right now, but it involves organizing a series of house meetings again. How's the fourth Tuesday of July at 10:30 am for a meeting for you?”

“It's clear,” said Willy. “That's a good time.”

“I'll get letters to the rest of the group, and ask them to be by their phones then. I'm really glad you called, Willy.”

“Thanks, Hans. Talk with you later.”

“Yeah. Bye.”

“All right,” thought Hans. He no longer felt like taking a nap. “Direction. We finally have direction.”

* * * * *

“Well, tell me what you think.” Having finished describing his idea to his wife, Hans leaned back and watched her intently.

Naomi did not answer immediately. Her eyebrows were drawn down and her forehead was furrowed by the depth of her concentration. She hesitated as she might be worried that what she would say would burst his balloon.

“Come on, tell me. If you don't like it, give it to me straight,” he prodded.

“I like the idea. I just don't see how it can be done,” she finally stated.

“Oh well, who would have thought we could build a human chain across the country, but we did that.”

“Yes, but asking people to voluntarily limit their incomes is asking for a sacrifice. Demonstrating our oneness and unity with the human chain was a mammoth organizing task, but it didn't really require much by way of individual commitments, not compared to a call to keep one's income below \$20,000 a year.”

“Okay, maybe it is asking for a sacrifice,” conceded Hans, and once again, almost at a sub-level of consciousness, he had the sensation of immense forces, locked in immortal conflict, except this time the battleground was inside himself. “Don't you think that's what we need to do to be peacemakers?”

She crossed her legs and folded her arms across her waist. “We might consider what we have sacrificed, Hans. My income may be below \$20,000, but we live with your parents, both of them have good incomes. Even though you worked without a salary last year, we managed to put money in the bank. Some people might say we've made sacrifices, but I don't feel that way. We may not have our own house, and we don't own a car, but we aren't really suffering, either.”

“Who's asking anyone to suffer? There's a difference between making sacrifices and accepting limits, with suffering. The point is that a lot of suffering could be eliminated if we shared what we have.”

Suddenly, the expression on Naomi's face changed. It looked like what filled her eyes was no longer the walls of his basement office. “Although, if we are called to suffer, we should not turn aside from that,” she said.

Feeling a little lost, and that she had surpassed his vision of what lay before them, he uttered a nervous laugh, and said, “Hopefully, that's not what we're called to do. I'm looking forward to living to a ripe old age and playing with my grandchildren.”

“Yes, honey. I'm hoping for that, also.”

* * * * *

“I feel like you're attacking me,” said Harold as he handed back a paper that advocated the voluntary acceptance of a limitation of incomes. Hans had approached his father as he was sitting in the family room, reading the newspaper. Lois was in the kitchen preparing dinner, the children were playing in the back yard, and Naomi was not yet home.

“Why do you say that?” asked Hans, surprised at his father's words and stern expression. He had expected to receive a complement for his bold, new initiative.

“Because you are blaming me, and your mother, and anyone else who has a decent salary for the troubles of the world. You trace the arms race, starvation in Africa, acid rain and just about everything else to our lifestyles, and you pass judgment that we're guilty.”

“That's not what I'm trying to say,” protested his son. “I don't want to blame anybody, or pass judgment on anybody for anything. What I'm trying to do is point to the opportunities before us in solving those problems, regardless of their causes, by redirecting our resources. That can be done by accepting limits on our incomes and our own consumption.”

“You're still attacking us,” charged the older man. “What you're advocating would mean changing our lies, and that's threatening. You can't be so naive that you don't see that.”

“I wonder if he thinks I'm trying to get back at him for questioning my lack of income,” reflected Hans. “Hmm, since the thought occurred to me, I guess it's a possibility.”

“Well, no one should feel like they're being attacked,” he said. “After all, it's strictly voluntary. No one has to do it, if they don't want to.”

“Don't you think you're putting a lot of pressure on me? What do you expect me to say when people ask how I could fail to join my own son?”

“So what do you want me to do? Forget the whole idea to avoid hurting your feelings?”

Hans regretted that remark as soon as he said it. “Dogs,” he thought, seeing the hurt in his father's eyes. “For a guy who's trying to bring peace to the world, I'm sure not doing very well with my own family.”

At the sounds of the front door opening, followed by Naomi's steps in the hallway, the two men looked at each other, and in mutual, unspoken assent, let the conversation drop. Harold got up and headed towards the kitchen, greeting Naomi as she passed him on her way to the family room.

“What's the matter?” she asked, taking note of the glum look on her husband's face.

“You married stink,” he said as he got up and put his arms around her.

“Oh, I could have done worse,” she said, giving him a hug that would have done credit to a grizzly bear.

There were few things Hans liked better than to stand in silent embrace with his wife, making contact with as many square centimeters of her at one moment as he could.

“Where are the kids?” she asked as they separated and he failed to offer anything concerning his reason for being upset.

“In the back yard,” he answered, not wanting to go into it while his parents were in the next room.

Naomi looked out the window, stiffened, and charged for the door, practically growling. Turning swiftly and peering outside, Hans was just in time to see Joshua letting fly at the garage across the alley with mud ball, while Mara dabbled in a puddle of mud beside the garden.

“What do you think you're doing?” yelled their mother from the back porch.

Joshua put his hands behind his back as if he would hide the muddy evidence. Stalking down the back steps, Naomi advanced on their son, and Hans followed, more slowly, behind her.

“Nothing,” said the boy.

“Nothing. You call that nothing?” exploded his mother, pointing at the pattern of mud balls on their neighbor’s garage.

“I was just throwing some mud darts.”

Hans was close enough now to see that, in fact, there was a small twig embedded in each of the balls of mud.

“They’ll wash off,” claimed the boy, sounding for all the world as if that was what he had been intending all along.

“Then you had better start washing.”

With an chastened expression, and without delay, he moved to the puddle in which Mara sat, picked up the hose which lay beside it, and stretched it as close to the alley as he could. Hans watched the proceedings, being careful to keep a serious face. It was only with difficulty that he could keep his laughter locked inside, as Joshua’s handiwork reminded him of certain times when he had been a child.

“And, just look at your sister.” Naomi wasn’t finished scolding. “Don’t you have any better sense than to let her sit in that mud?”

Joshua must have decided that no response was the best response, and having turned up the pressure on the hose, was meekly going about the business of spraying off the “darts.”

Standing over the baby, Naomi shook her head. Mara did not present many clean parts by which she could be picked up.

“Messy,” said the little girl, looking up at her mother. That was one of the first words she had added to her limited, but growing vocabulary.

“Yes, messy,” replied Naomi, with a softer tone of voice.

“I’ll get a bucket of warm water,” offered Hans, feeling that he should be doing something useful instead of standing there, gawking. He came back in a few minutes, and found that Naomi had talked Mara onto the grass, and was removing the baby’s clothes right there in the yard.

“Look at this. She’s even got mud in her shoes.”

Depositing the bucket beside his wife, Hans made the appropriate clucking noises in response. Joshua was having more success with the Anderson’s garage. The boy had adjusted the nozzle on the hose to get a heavy stream, and was knocking the mud balls off, almost like it was another game.

“Stand still, Mara, we’re almost finished.”

The little girl was resisting her mother's efforts to wipe her off. Being cleaned was nowhere near as much fun as getting dirty.

“That's good enough for now,” concluded Naomi, with another shake of her head. “I'll give her a bath to get the rest of it.”

She wrapped Mara in the towel Hans had brought, picked her up, and marched to the alley to examine the state of affairs there.

“See? You can't even tell where they were,” asserted Joshua.

True enough, the mud had been soft enough that it had readily washed off the garage door. Naomi; however, was still not satisfied, and added to the terms of his punishment.

“I want you to knock on the Anderson's door right now, and apologize for what you did. I'll talk with them later and ask if there's any chore they can give you to make up for the way you behaved.”

“Aw, that's too much,” the boy argued, and appealed to his father with his eyes.

“That sounds fair to me. Do as your mother says,” said Hans, backing up his wife. “And, you'd better stop looking like that, or we'll end up settling this in the bathroom.”

There were just a few occasions when he had resorted to spanking for some misbehavior on the part of their son. Joshua took him at his word; though, and amended his expression. Figuring it was best to go ahead and get it over with, the boy crossed the alley, opened their neighbor's back gate, and then, looking for all the world like he was going to his execution, started towards their door.

“I'm taking her inside,” said Naomi.

“Yeah, he can handle this part on his own.”

When the boy returned and reported that he had carried out his sentence, his mother reminded him that she was still going to call the Andersons, and request one final chore for him to do. He tried to pay them back by sulking at the dinner table, until Hans caught the boy's eye and Joshua read the warning look that was registered there.

It was left to Lois to carry the conversation by herself for a while. Both Harold and Hans were feeling uncomfortable as a result of their discussion before dinner, and Naomi had her hands full feeding Mara. Once the toddler was taken care of, and Naomi could start eating as well, she filled a silence by asking Hans, “So, have you told anybody else about your idea?”

The two men stiffened, and the silence that followed her question was of a heavy kind. Sensing that she had let the skunk out of the bag, Naomi was about to change the subject, when Joshua asked, “What idea?”

“Thanks, Josh,” thought his father, with an inner sigh. Out loud, he said, “The idea of asking people to limit their incomes as a way to help other people who don't have as much.”

“Are you serious?” asked Lois, her eyes wide with wonder. As his jaw tightened, she said, “You are serious. Well, do you think people are ready for that?”

“Yes, I wouldn't hold my breath,” said his father. “It's going to be a long time before you get a response to that.”

“You know what would take longer?” asked Joshua, as serenely as if he was walking in the eye of a hurricane. Waiting till he was certain he would be heard, the boy said, “Making a diamond. There was a show about it on TV this morning. Do you know how long it takes? Millions of years.” Repeating himself for emphasis, he rolled the words out, “Millions of years.”

“You're right,” responded Hans, speaking like one who was waking from a trance. “It takes nature, heat and pressure, and millions of years to turn coal into a diamond.” Looking at his father, he caught a wink.

The conversation during their dinner never did return to the subject of his new proposal. Lois began praising the programming on the public television station, and Harold told them how he was using a library of educational videotapes at the day care center.

* * * * *

Unaware that his eyes were closed, Hans gloried in the splendor of his vision. The Earth rotated before him; beautiful, blue, and cotton cloud enshrouded. The awesome majesty of their planet filled him with wonder and ecstasy that was disrupted only by a persistent pulling from the surface of the spinning orb.

Yielding to that pull, he descended until his view was beneath the covering clouds, covered by their ethereal substance. The scene that presented itself was an instant affront and an insult; foul fumes poisoned the air, the land was scarred and ravaged, the waters polluted and spotted with scum. Violence and fighting erupted, and were exceeded in the callousness of the atrocities committed only by the cries of desperate pleading from those with needs that went unheeded. Sickened by this assault on his senses, he fled, trembling and afraid, to his original celestial seat. There, to his horror, he discovered upon turning that the disastrous conditions, like a loathsome disease, were visible even from this distant plane.

Lamenting the loss of his earlier vision, he did not notice, until the gradual transformation was almost complete, that what was before him now was a gigantic, planet sized diamond; a gem of countless facets, flawless, and of indescribable purity. Then, before his astonished eyes, this gem was replaced by the Earth, healed of its disease, and again a place of beauty, capable of continued sustenance. Alternating from one to the other, the crystal and the planet appeared and reappeared until he was uncertain which was reality and which was only an apparition.

“Hans, you said you wanted to get up early.”

What rude disturbance was this? He tried to block out the sound, to keep the glittering, transformed planet within his sight.

“Well, stay in bed, then, but it's eight thirty.”

“Eight thirty. Oh, gee, I've overslept,” he thought. Opening his eyes, he looked up at Naomi and said, “This is the third time I've had that dream, the one where the world is all nasty and then turns into a diamond, except more beautiful than any gem could be.”

“Really? That's interesting.” She regarded him for a moment, then said, “Listen, I have some errands to run this morning, but I'll be back in time for the phone call. Mom's watching Mara upstairs, and Joshua said that he and Gary are going to ride their bikes to the park today, so you're clear if there are any things you need to do to get ready.”

There really was not much that remained to be done aside from waiting, again, for the appointed time. After completing his daily routine, he puttered around in his office, and then walked to the store to pick up a few groceries.

Naomi was true to her word, and returned by a quarter after ten. Joining him downstairs, she took her customary seat, and for a change, displayed some nervousness of her own. Her legs were crossed, and her free foot was bobbing up and down like a yo-yo. She noticed the movement, and looking at her foot, it bobbed briefly in a more exaggerated motion before settling at rest.

Hans smiled at her and said, “It is a touchy subject, isn't it?”

“No kidding. How much money someone makes is pretty personal. We've even avoided talking about it with your parents the last couple of weeks.”

“Yeah, this is one of the few times that has happened since we've been living together. We know we're all thinking about it, but no one is saying anything.”

“And, it can't go on like this for long.”

“No, it can't.” He looked at the clock, and said peevishly, “This is silly. Why do I sit here waiting for the exact second?”

Reaching for the phone, he dialed the operator, and initiated the teleconference. Hans was glad to find that everyone was present, and since the last time they had met had been before the demonstration, it took a while to greet each other.

“We did it!” exclaimed Joyce.

“Yes, we had an unbroken chain,” exulted Claire.

“There was never an report of gaps,” confirmed Father Welsh.

Several of them described how Hands had come off at their positions. All of them felt good about it, and there was some joking about the record that had been set.

Then Victor said, “Hans, you may even be nominated for a Nobel Peace Prize for this.”

“I still believe what we did was good,” said Hans. “It was a demonstration for peace that was complete; however, and I think each of you agrees, Hands Across the Nation was not the ends for which we are working. Really, it was more of a demonstration of a means, people taking time from

other pursuits to express our unity, our oneness.”

Leading up to his proposal, he continued, “Hopefully, that solidarity will continue. Hopefully, we will remember that it took all of us to make that chain complete, and that no one person in that line was more important than anyone else. Are we ready to show our love for each other? Are we ready to do more than talk about peace, and live our lives to make it happened?”

“Do you have something in mind?” asked Claire with a, “Come now, don't give us any speeches,” tone of voice.

“Well, it seems that a fundamental cause of conflict centers around control of resources, and with a growing population and a shrinking pie, the potential for conflict is increasing. Maybe technology will provide a way out, but another way to deal with it would be to ask people to limit their demand for resources. I was thinking that we might propose a specific step towards peace, namely that each of us accept a personal limit on our incomes, something on the order of \$20,000 per household per year.” Finishing his statement, Hans looked at the silent voice box and wondered what was happening at the other ends of the line.

Dr. Foster was the first to speak, her nasal twang sounding more pinched than usual, “There are other causes of violence than differences in wealth.”

“Yes, a lot of people think that we need our nuclear arsenal to prevent the Soviets from taking away our liberties,” grated Roger.

“What do we say we talk about what we think, instead of what other people think?” asked Hans, sighing inside, “Oh well. It was fun while it lasted.”

“I think it's a good idea,” said Willy. “People can talk about wanting to preserve our liberties, but what it boils down to is preserving our right to be filthy rich while other people are starving.”

“More than twenty thousand dollars a year is hardly filthy rich,” said Alice. “Where did that number come from anyway?”

“I don't want to get hung up on a particular dollar amount,” replied Hans. “That figure was offered just to get people to think about what their share of the wealth is. For any particular household, of course, it would vary depending on the number of people, where they live, and special needs. It's so someone who makes \$30,000 or \$40,000 a year doesn't come back and say, 'Hey, I'm barely making ends meet.' They might think how big their ends are.”

“Actually, there probably aren't enough resources for everyone in the world to consume as much as the average American household that has an income of \$20,000,” said Joyce, speaking at about half her usual deliberate speed.

“Oh, come now,” snapped Claire. “You can hardly equate what the average American consumes with what someone somewhere else might consume. Our economies are so different.”

“Fortunately, many people in the world do not want to imitate Americans,” said Omar. “They are appalled by our preoccupation with material things.”

“When you ask people to limit their incomes, you're not taking into account what they do with their money,” said Dr. Foster. There was a bee buzzing in her bonnet. “Someone who makes \$50,000 a year may be living on half that, and investing the rest, for example, in a company that manufactures medicine.”

“Is that what people do?” asked Joyce. “I think that most people who make \$50,000 a year have the house, and the cars, and the clothes, that show it.”

“Sometimes it's not practical to limit one's income,” argued Victor. “I read about a federal bureaucrat who thought his salary was too high, and who said so. Do you know what happened to him? He was fired.”

Hans spoke over the chortling and other noise that followed that remark, trying to contain his anger at Victor, “As absurd as that sounds, if it actually happened, it illustrates how difficult it is to challenge one's culture. It was difficult for civil rights demonstrators to stick with their non-violent actions when they were being abused and even sent to jail for doing what they believed was their right. That's why I'm not suggesting any hard and fast rules about this. People can invest in a business like Dr. Foster was saying, or contribute more to charities, if renegotiating their salaries is not practical, or will result in a greater sacrifice than they are prepared to make.”

“Would you want everyone to give to some central agency, and to set up a super fund to disburse the money?” asked Father Welsh.

“No, that's not what I'm thinking,” replied Hans. “This proposal isn't really about what we're giving as much as about what we're taking. Looking always for higher and higher incomes is about taking. We have a culture of taking.

“And, with respect to giving, asking people to give money still isn't asking enough. That can get to be like a parent who buys the children all kinds of toys, but doesn't spend any time with them. That's partly why I would like for this proposal to be made through house meetings. By working through small groups, we might gain a greater sensitivity to the needs, and be helped to take greater personal involvement in our peace making work.”

“The churches are already doing all of that,” claimed Alice.

“We are? Do we really challenge our members to limit their personal incomes and wealth?” disputed Naomi.

“if we do, it's a well kept secret,” agreed Hans. “People may still want to channel their increased giving through churches. “There's no point in setting up a whole new structure if it isn't needed, but I don't want to kid myself that accepting sacrifices, lowering our expectations, and limiting our incomes is going to be easy, or that it is going to happen tomorrow. That's another reason for proposing it through small groups. Together, giving support to each other, we may be able to do things that we might not attempt on our own, and that the institutional church won't risk proposing.”

“The issue is not income,” erupted Roger, cutting Hans short. “The threat to the world is nuclear armaments. We need to make people aware that extinction of the human race is just a hair's breadth away.” Pausing to take a breath, he continued like thunder, “I thought we would follow the human chain with a demand for nuclear disarmament. You're diverting us from our purpose. This has

nothing to do with the peace movement. When you're ready to talk about the real issue, let me know, but you can count me out on this.”

Hans was so shaken by Roger's outburst that he was unable to speak. Seeing his distress, Naomi remarked, “Differences in income may not be the only cause of violence, but the subject certainly has brought an end to our peace.”

“That's just what I was thinking,” said Willy. “Ground zero is going to continue direct actions for nuclear disarmament, but we're not going to ignore the disease at the same time that we are treating the symptom.”

“That's fine,” said Dr. Foster, her nasal twang softening as she tried to speak in a mollifying manner. “But, you won't get anywhere forming small groups on the basis that they are going to sit down and start out discussing how they are going to limit their incomes.”

“Really. That approach would fizzle right out,” concurred Victor.

Those were tactical considerations with which Hans could deal. “All right. Organizing the house meetings and building community is the first step. If some of the groups feel that nuclear disarmament is the central issue, they can work on that. But, I believe that people who seriously want to do something for peace will realize that limiting their consumption of resources is a necessary part of that. If they can find other ways of doing it than limiting their incomes, power to them, but eventually I think that is where we need to go.”

“I don't know, Hans,” differed Dr. Foster. “You'd better talk to an economist about that. There may be consequences, in terms of unemployment and loss of productivity, about which you may not be aware.”

“I'm aware that accepting limits is most difficult for those who do it first, but you must be aware of how many more people would be able to afford health care if the doctors, nurses, administrators, and investors were willing to lower their incomes. That might cause those people to change their lifestyles, and may cause people who make big cars and who build custom houses to look for other work, but it also might mean more jobs for people who make smaller cars and who build multi-family housing. It doesn't take an economist to tell us that.” He had spoken in the most nonjudgmental tone with which he was capable, but inside he felt like yelling, “Can't we see the difference between what we have and what other people have?”

“My concern is that we at least present the idea for discussion,” he continued, trying to bring them to closure. “It can even wait until the house meetings have been taking place for a while, and as just one option for people to consider, as long as it is presented.”

“This proposal will have to go before my Board again,” said Victor, with about as much enthusiasm as a limp handshake.

“Hans, you know the president of our denomination makes more than \$60,000 a year,” said Alice. “You don't think he's going to support this, do you?”

“I'm still less concerned about what other people are going to do than what each of us is going to do. I would be interested in knowing how willing each of us is to limit our incomes.”

Once more, there was a prolonged silence. Hans started to feel uncomfortable about it, but he resisted the urge to say anything further.

Finally Dr. Foster spoke, "I don't think I can say right now. I never seriously considered it before."

"Okay, that's an honest answer," replied Hans.

"However," continued Dr. Foster, "if I was to limit my income, I don't think it would be to \$20,000 per year. I have a son who is in college, and his tuition alone is \$6,000."

"It wouldn't be easy for us, either," said Alice. "My husband and I just bought a new house, and we did that figuring on a combined income of quite a bit more than what you're suggesting."

So it went around the group. Of those who were willing to speak, it turned out that the only ones who already made less than \$20,000 per year were Willy and Joyce.

"Like I said, it's not easy being first," repeated Hans.

"If that's all," stated Victor, distantly, "I can let you know what my Board says within a month."

"That would be good," said Hans. "That will put us into September to do our mailing, and the same thing goes, the more groups that are willing to endorse this, the greater our impact will be."

It was a subdued group of people who said their goodbyes. After hanging up, Hans remarked, "That did not exactly go the way I was hoping." He was especially hurt by Roger's response. After his blow-up, the representative from SANE hadn't said a word.

"No one likes to admit that they may be part of the problem," said Naomi. Her foot had started bobbing again. "We'll just see if enough people agree that this is a part of the solution."

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Hans liked September. The days weren't so hot, and the nights were cool. Once again, they could sleep more comfortably with the covers pulled over them. Even when it was very hot, he liked to sleep with at least a sheet. For some reason, the contact with the material was comforting.

Naomi had already gotten up, and was getting ready to leave for church, having some materials to prepare for her confirmation class. Now that he had the entire bed to himself, he stretched out to his fullest, then feeling a little chilly, he contracted back into a ball.

"Maybe I am nuts," he thought. "What would make me believe that anyone could actually be persuaded to impose a limit to their income. It's probably a good thing I didn't tell them about my other idea. If I'd said, 'Let's suggest that one way to be a peacemaker would be to think of who our worst enemies are, and then do something nice for them,' they might have said, 'Put him in a padded room before he hurts himself.'"

The responses from the national peace organizations had indicated less than enthusiasm for a

promotion of voluntary income limitation. Only Ground Zero and CALC had replied that they were considering endorsing it, and the others not even being willing to do that at this time. At least they had approved a coordinated campaign to organize small groups through house meetings, but that was on the basis that each group develop its own agenda for action, and at its own pace.

The more he thought about their responses; though, the more he saw the wisdom of giving each of the small groups the space to develop their own sense of being peacemakers. “There's no point in trying to feed someone more than they can swallow,” he concluded, and throwing off the covers, he bounced out of bed. His big task for the day was getting out the letters requesting those who had held house meetings earlier to invite their friends and neighbors over again. That would amount to a total mailing of about 180,000 pieces.

Going upstairs, he found Mara at her highchair at the kitchen table, banging on the tray to signify that she wanted down. Her brother was eating cereal at the table beside her, his back pack loaded with books at his feet. Having just finished in the bathroom, Naomi entered the kitchen with a rushed expression on her face.

“I can take care of Mara,” said Hans, with a twinge of guilt.

“Thanks. I need to leave.” She gave all three of them a kiss, and headed for the door.

Hans let Mara out of the highchair, then he fixed a bowl of cereal for himself.

“What's new at school with you, Josh?”

“Nothing much. I have to turn in a book report today.”

“Did you finish it?”

“Yes,” replied the boy indignantly. “I did it on Around the World in 80 Days.”

“Oh? What did you have to say about it?”

“I liked it, but it sure took them a long time just to go around the world.”

The boy put his bowl and spoon in the sink, then went downstairs and got out his bicycle. Coming through the kitchen again, he picked up his back pack.

“Have a good day,” said Hans.

Joshua nodded, and waved as he went out the door.

Hans finished his cereal and washed the dishes. The next step was to use the bathroom and get himself ready for the day. When he came out, Lois was waiting to use it. She did not have to be at the campus until 11:00 this morning.

“What are you doing today, Hans?” his mother asked.

“I have a mailing to get out,” he snapped, and paused, noticing how curt his tone of voice had

been. Sometimes he flipped into a little boy mode of thinking that his mother was getting ready to assign a chore when he had other plans. Regretting his shortness, he tried to cover it by saying, "This is for our follow-up to Hands. How about you?"

"I have a class this morning and another in the afternoon, and office hours, the usual." She had a bottle of hair coloring, and was evidently going to do something about the gray roots that were starting to show.

His mother went into the bathroom, and Hans took Mara downstairs. Giving the toddler some picture books and toys to play with, he called the company that specialized in mass mailings, and gave them the access code to the central computer from which they could get the addresses. They took the letter and the information sheets directly from his office computer through their modem.

Once he had completed the arrangements with the bulk mailing firm, Hans turned his attention to writing a press release. It took him about a half hour to get it worded the way he wanted; then, making one original, he got ready to take that to the local print shop to have a couple of hundred copies made, this being small enough of a mailing that he could handle it himself.

Mara's seat was already attached to his bicycle. All he had to do was to get it out, strap her in, and put on their helmets. It was a clear, crisp morning, absolutely perfect for a short bike ride. "Just what I need to clear out the cobwebs," he thought.

Although they were riding along the usual street, which was strictly residential and ordinarily had little traffic, in a moment, Hans was glad that he had been paying attention to the road. What caused the trouble was someone riding a bicycle the wrong way, against the traffic. Hans saw him coming, right in their path, which meant that someone had to swing away from the parked cars. A car approaching from the other direction made that a little tight, and taking a quick glance over his shoulder, Hans realized with alarm that another car was coming up behind them. There was no place to go.

Shifting his weight backwards, to avoid flying over the handlebars, Hans hit his brakes as did the other bicyclist, who had no place to go either. They both managed to stop, front tires only inches apart, as the cars passed.

"Don't you know you're supposed to ride with the traffic?" said Hans sharply. "You're on the wrong side of the road."

The other fellow, who was old enough to know better, just shrugged with an unabashed air, went around them, and continued, but at least he crossed to the other side of the street. Hans looked at Mara and was relieved to see that she was alright. He muttered, "That guy was just as happy as if he was in his right mind. He could have gotten someone killed."

The message on the threatening letter he had received several months ago flashed across his mind. He had thought at the time that if someone wanted to get him, all they had to do was smash him sometime when he was riding his bicycle. It would be so easy, and could be made to look like an accident.

"If someone really wants to get me," he thought, "they had better hurry up and do it, or with knuckleheads like that around, they might not get the chance."

* * * * *

A couple of weeks later, Hans was considering who he and Naomi might invite to their house meeting. They had gotten their letter in the mail several days earlier, which meant that most of the others would have been delivered by now as well. After consulting with Naomi, he ended up inviting seven households, all from their own block, plus Harold and Lois.

This is what his instincts had directed him to do, even months earlier, when they had been organizing the human chain. Not only was it a way to strengthen the peace movement, it was also a reaction to the depersonalization of their lives, increasing amounts of which were absorbed by the electronic media, people plugged into their radios, TVs, and computers. It was becoming more and more of an effort to interact with fellow human beings in person, and what better way to try to reverse that trend than with one's closest neighbors.

It was mid October, and the leaves on the trees were changing colors by the time the house meeting took place. It turned out that those who accepted the invitation, and who ended up coming represented a broad range of ages and incomes. There were an elderly woman who lived by herself, a lawyer and his wife who was a nurse, Gary's father who was an assembly line worker, a school teacher whose wife agreed to watch the children of the others at their home, a federal employee, and Harold, Lois, Naomi, and Hans. As they gathered in the front room, Hans did a quick mental survey and guessed that the combined incomes of the lawyer and the nurse were well over \$20,000, and he guessed that Gary's father and the federal employee each had incomes higher than that, also. The elderly woman and the teacher probably had incomes below that.

The conversation flowed along the lines of news about work, family, and items of general neighborhood interest as they got comfortable and relaxed with the drinks and snacks that had been set out. It was when Hans raised the issue of the peace movement that any snags were encountered.

“Say, Hans, do you really want to talk politics?” asked the teacher, as if to say, “Why rock the boat? We're enjoying ourselves just socializing.”

“I said, 'Maybe we could turn our thoughts to the issues of peace and justice.' That doesn't necessarily mean we are going to talk politics.”

“Talking politics is okay with me,” said the lawyer. “Just so we don't get into religion.” Whether he was serious, or joking was difficult for Hans to discern.”

“Well, peace and justice can include a lot of things,” Hans tried one more time to get the discussion started. “It can refer to the suffering of hungry, homeless people in St. Louis, to relations with Latin America, to the nuclear arms race, and more. Let me ask you this, what does it mean to each person here, when we talk about being peacemakers?” That did the trick. There was a roomful of thoughtful expressions for a moment, then a lively exchange began.

“I think it means helping to stop the arms race,” said the nurse.

“No, I'd have to say it's letting the Soviets know we're ready for anything they might try,” differed the federal employee. He was one who had attended an earlier house meeting, and had declined to participate in the human chain.

“What would mean peace for me would be to know how long my job is going to last,” said Gary's father, the assembly line worker. “They've been talking about automating and letting robots take it over, and now the word at the plant is that they're going to announce the conversion in a couple of weeks.”

“That's something,” said the teacher. “Probably the best peacemaking I could do would be to find a different job. We've had another increase in class sizes this year, and my fourth period is driving me up the wall.”

“Peacemaking requires honesty,” said Harold. “Holding back on feelings is a good way to cause trouble. “

“Although, one has to be able to share one's feelings in an unoffensive way,” added Lois.

“Being honest with oneself is important for inner peace,” said the older woman. “I don't think anyone can live a lie without it hurting them.”

“Yes, peacemaking can result in inner peace, too, especially when we do what we believe to be right,” said Naomi.

“Peace is a result of order. We could eliminate the threat of warfare if our international institutions were strong enough to regulate the affairs of nations,” stated the lawyer. Then he asked, “Aren't you going to tell us what peacemaking means to you, Hans?”

“Yes, but, you know, in some ways I could agree with each of you. It makes me realize there are a lot more ways of looking at it than what I've been thinking, which is that peacemaking means placing, or accepting limits on oneself in order to live in greater harmony with others.”

“Did you notice that several responses had to do with communications?” asked the nurse. “It would be interesting to see how much of our conflict is the result of misunderstanding.”

The conversation carried on for several minutes around that remark, and turned into a brainstorming session on ways to improve communications. Hans had been wanting to raise his idea about income limitations, but the evening had progressed so far that he was afraid that would be cramming it in at the point that some of their guests might start to leave. Instead he said, “I know I've learned a lot this evening, and I'm wondering if there is any interest in gathering some other time.”

“Yeah, I'd be up for that,” replied the teacher. “I'll bet the kids are having a great time playing with each other, too.”

“Only, we don't want your wife to have to miss out every time, if we continue meeting,” said Naomi, and she proposed, “We could hire a baby sitter, or we could take turns watching the kids ourselves.”

“If it was just once every five, or six times, I'd be willing to take a turn watching the kids,” said Hans. “That sounds like fun.”

“I'll ask my wife if she would be willing to take care of them the next time,” said Gary's father.

“She stayed home with our youngest this evening, anyway.”

“Maybe we can include the kids sometimes, too,” suggested Lois. “Instead of us adults just visiting each time, it might be nice on occasion to play games, something simple enough that the children could join in.”

Their elderly neighbor and the lawyer and nurse supported that idea as much as the guests who had children. Judging by the expressions on everyone else's faces, as the evening wound down, Hans felt that whatever the future might hold, at least they had all enjoyed themselves this time. Settling on a date two weeks distant, they agreed to gather at the Spiegels again; although, a couple of other offers to host were made.

* * * * *

Adding two additional requests for him to give talks to the stack on his desk, Hans thought, “It's about time I made some decisions about what to do with myself. If the house meetings are going to be self-directing, then I need to find something else to work on.” He had kept busy through the summer helping Naomi with a Bible study and recreation program for youth in the neighborhood around the church, and had been keeping touch with the peace organizations to make sure the house meetings got off to a good start, but the matter of his employment was still unresolved. Taking a piece of note paper, he began to list some of his options: contribute articles to various newsletters and magazines, accept some of the speaking engagements, look for a staff position with one of the peace and justice organizations, set up a small home repair business for elderly residents of the neighborhood.

Looking back at those items, he thought, “Writing is hardly very exciting, and like Willy said, it's time for action. Speaking would be a bit more active; at least it would involve contact with people, and even though it's stressful, it's rewarding, but I don't care much for the traveling that's involved. Hmm, I've gotten too used to doing my own thing to want a position someone else created in some other organization. There is a need for someone who is willing to do small home maintenance and repair items, and who won't charge an arm and a leg from older adults. That's a possibility. I need to talk with Naomi about doing that.”

The phone rang and he picked up the receiver, startling the caller when he was greeted on the first ring. It turned out to be a reporter with the local newspaper, who recovered quickly, and said, “We're doing a feature story on the house meetings that are taking place, and I wanted to ask you some questions.”

“Sure, go right ahead,” replied Hans, glad for the interruption.

“How many groups have formed so far?”

“Do you mean locally, or nationwide?”

“Both.”

“Nationwide, from a couple of days ago, when I last talked with someone who is tracking it, there are on the order of 10,000 groups. In the St. Louis area, there are close to 100 groups that have met at least once.”

“Do you belong to one?”

“Yes, we had the first meeting at my home two evenings ago. All of the people who came live right here on our block?”

“Do you think that's typical?”

“I really don't know.”

“Uh huh. Would you state, again, what the purpose of the house meetings is?”

“Yes, it's an effort to develop support groups, to get more people comfortable with the kinds of changes that may be necessary for peacemaking, so that action can result.”

“What kind of action will that be?”

“That is for each group to decide on their own, after they have discussed the issues to the point that they gain some sense of direction.”

“Uh huh. What actions is your group going to take?”

“We haven't met long enough to establish that.”

“What kind of action would you like for them to take?”

“Why not,” thought Hans. “I might as well be honest.”

“I'd like to see us accept a voluntary limitation on our incomes.”

“A what?”

“A voluntary limitation on our incomes. You know, something like \$20,000 per year per household as a rough average.”

“What does that have to do with peace?”

Hans almost laughed at the note of genuine surprise in the voice of the reporter. “Well, what are the reasons for fighting? Often, it's competition over resources. Voluntary income limitation would force us to simplify our lifestyles; to be less materialistic, consumption oriented; it would bring us more on a par with the rest of the world; and, by spending less on ourselves we would have more to contribute to improving the lives of others. From a religious sense, it could be seen as a way to try to 'love your neighbor as yourself.'”

It took several minutes more before Hans managed to explain his concept of peacemaking, and one of the points he made to illustrate the impact that income limitation could make was, “If just twenty million middle income households voluntarily cut their incomes by \$10,000 each, that would mean about \$200 billion that could be spent on charitable causes or on switching from burning fossil fuels to clean, renewable energy. Compare that \$200 billion with the \$92 billion that was the total amount of voluntary giving by individuals, corporations, and foundations in 1990.”

The final question that the reporter asked was, “Do you really expect twenty million American households to do this?”

“I don't know what to expect,” replied Hans. “It might only be a small percent of that who voluntarily limit their incomes, at least at first.”

He paused for a moment, then continued, “Think of the young black people who refused to leave their seats in an all-white restaurant. They were only a very small percent of the total population, but their refusal to respond to violence with violence helped put this nation on a different path. Sometimes great things can come from small beginnings.”

That conversation had almost faded from his thoughts several days later when the phone rang again, and he found himself talking with Victor Carter. The Freeze Campaign manager's voice was bristling with anger as he asked, “Have you seen today's paper?”

“No, it's probably lying in the front hall, unopened,” replied Hans, with an uncomfortable feeling. “What does it say?”

“You'd better look at it yourself. It's the feature story in the Everyday section.”

“If you want, I can look at it now, and call you right back.”

Victor assented to that, and Hans' discomfort increased as he hung up and climbed the steps to the first floor. He picked up the newspaper and carried it back to his office so Mara would not be left to herself. Turning to the Everyday section, he immediately saw the reason for Victor's ire. In bold print, the headline proclaimed, “\$200 BILLION GOAL SET FOR HOUSE MEETINGS.”

He whistled and heard his daughter attempt to repeat the sound. Putting down the newspaper, he looked at her and said, “Your daddy may be in a heap of trouble.”

She smiled up at him from her pile of toys, and said something that was a close approximation of, “Daddy, trouble.”

“That's right. Daddy's can get into trouble, too.”

Looking again at the paper, he was relieved to see that within the text of the article, the reporter had made it clear that income limitation and the \$200 billion were personal goals of Hans. At least that got him off the hook of betraying the trust of the peace organizations by attributing an action to them that they had rejected.

He was quick to point that out to Victor when he made his return call a few minutes later, and Victor had to admit that he had a right to speak his mind, but the Freeze director was still upset about the timing of the article.

“You may have killed the house meetings by a premature announcement of your plan,” he charged.

Hans could hardly argue with that, but he did defend himself to the extent by asking, “When

will we be ready for it?

There was little point in discussing it further then, which was the same conclusion he reached with Naomi when he talked it over with her that evening.

“It's just a matter of waiting to see what the reaction is,” she said. “You can't be blamed for expressing yourself, and the paper can't be blamed for printing it. It made for quite a story.”

His parents had overheard their conversation, but had not entered into it. Harold may have been thinking, “I told you so,” but he didn't say it. If he had, Hans would have accepted it. He had made his bed, and was ready to sleep on it.”

Later that evening, he was surprised when Harold brought it up as they were sitting together in the family room. “One of the points I appreciated the most in the article, Hans, was that you don't expect a lot of people to do this, at least in the near term.”

“I don't, Dad. Most of all, I don't expect you to do it just because I'm your son. Really, if you did it for some reason like that, where you felt compelled to, then it wouldn't really be voluntary income limitation. If ever you decide that this is a step you want to take, I hope it would only be because it made sense to you at the time.”

Harold nodded, and said, “Yes, that feels much better to me.”

That Sunday, the class wanted to talk about little else: one of the members had even brought the article to church with him. When some of them asked how he could even suggest that people impose that kind of limit on their incomes, he said, “This shouldn't be that difficult. When the rich young man asked Jesus what he had to do to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, Jesus told him to sell everything he owned, and to give the money to the poor. All I'm saying is 'Let's not take more than our share.’”

He had been a little surprised at how angry a few of them had become. It was as if he was proving he was a communist after all, and his statement that it was a voluntary limitation might just as well have fallen on deaf ears. There were some in the class who did express their approval of the proposal, and Hans hoped that the division did not occur as a consequence of the incomes of the people involved. More than poor people would have to think that income limitation was a good idea for it to mean anything.

A more serious sign that people were reacting to the article in the newspaper surfaced at the dinner table the next evening. Naomi noticed that Joshua was unusually quiet, and when she asked him what had happened at school that day, the boy answered, “I'm going to beat up Billy Rogers.”

“Oh?” she asked mildly. “He must have done something that you didn't like.”

“Yeah, he said Dad is a commie,” he replied, almost choking at the memory of the insult.

Conflicting emotions tore at Hans, the strongest feeling being that he would fail his son by not responding, and with a slight pause, hoping for some inspiration, he said, “Billy's probably just repeating something that he heard at his home. If that's what his parents think, then they are as wrong as he is. Do you think I should beat up Billy's dad because of that.”

Joshua looked at his plate, and for a moment Hans thought he would say, “Yeah, beat him up good.”

The boy looked back up, and with an expression, especially in the eyes, that reminded his father of Naomi, answered, “I thought you said it's not good to hurt anybody.”

That's when Hans practically choked, he was so proud. Instead of explaining that communism meant state ownership of property, and the absence of individual freedoms concerning income, he decided to reinforce Joshua and said, “That's right. Times when you've been spanked, it was because I wanted you to learn a lesson, not because I wanted to hurt you. I don't think I'm ever going to have to do that again.”

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Several evenings later, the Spiegels were gathered around the TV to watch a program on which Hans had been interviewed. Keith arrived just as the program began, and took a seat on the couch beside his parents. They had called him to let him know he could watch it with them.

It was on a religious station, and the director, who had read the article in the paper, had wanted to give Hans a chance to describe how he believed what he was doing was religiously based. When the call had come asking him to be on the program, he had asked Naomi if she might not be the person with whom they should speak, but she answered that he was the one who was tying their faith to a social movement. Besides, she had to meet with her confirmation class on Saturday morning when they wanted to tape the show.

There was Hans. He and the interviewer were sitting on a pair of comfortable looking chairs, and there was a small table in front of them, otherwise the set was bare. They sat without speaking while an announcer introduced the program, back ground music playing as he spoke. As soon as the announcer finished, the music stopped, and the camera zoomed in on the face of the interviewer. She repeated her name, and explained who she was interviewing and what they would be discussing. The picture changed and Hans' face filled the screen.

“Daddy,” said Mara.

Hans was almost as tense watching the show as he had been during the interview, and he thought, “I should have combed my hair better. My helmet always mashes my hair in weird shapes.”

When the program began, after a station break, the first question the interviewer posed was how Hans' faith influenced his work.

“The greatest commandment is that we are to love God more than anything else. This is because everything that we have was given to us by God.” he answered, his face filling the screen again. “The second commandment is to love our neighbor as much as ourselves. This is because we are all God's children. My faith tells me that I am to share what has been given to me with my neighbors, not only so their needs may be met, but also so they can better know the love which God has for them.”

“You didn't use the word 'Christian,' Hans, but those are the commandments that were given by Jesus, aren't they?”

“Yes, I didn't identify myself as a Christian, although I consider myself one, because I'm not always sure how helpful those labels are. To me, someone who is loving towards others, who may never have heard of Jesus, is closer to God than someone who calls him, or herself a Christian, but is not guided by love. I think that one of the parables told by Jesus, the one about the good Samaritan, makes the same point.”

Hans could feel Naomi turn her head and look at him. Without looking at her, he knew that her eyebrows were raised. He was glad that she gave him a reassuring squeeze on the arm.

The interviewer asked, “What would you say to someone who claims that they are guided by love? It's because they love their family that they support our defense program, or seek a higher salary.”

“When Jesus was crucified, was he the only one who was killed that day?”

The image on the TV screen showed both Hans and the interviewer now, and it was obvious that his question had surprised her. As he looked at her, and she realized he was waiting for her to reply, she answered, barely covering her flusteration, “Why, no. He was crucified between two thieves.”

“Yeah, I was lying in bed, imagining that a couple of nights ago, and it struck me how typical that was. All through his ministry, who did Jesus spend his time with?” This question he answered himself. “With the poor, the sick, the prostitutes, the tax collectors; all of the least desirable sorts of people, and there he was at the very end, hanging around with a couple of criminals.” It was unintentional, and he knew the pun sounded terrible, but he couldn't keep from smiling, so intense was his feeling of joy.

Rising of their own volition, his hands moved in the air, as if to paint a picture to help express what he was trying to say, “That's how much God loved us. That is how God loves us, always. Always, reaching out.” That's when Hans ran out of words. He couldn't just say it.

Looking at him carefully, to make sure he was finished, the interviewer asked, “Do you think people are capable of following the example of Jesus? Or, even if one person does, is it possible for a nation to be that selfless?”

“It's possible,” said Hans. “Anything is possible. I guess it's faith that makes us try.” Feeling the need to backtrack a bit, he added, “I should say that I recognize this as an ideal that I don't reach myself. There are plenty of times that I see dimly, and am blinded by my own prejudices. When I talk about income limitation, I realize that that is only one possible part of peacemaking, and that I don't have The Answer.”

In the remaining minutes, the interview turned to the more practical considerations that related to income limitation, and the program ended a half hour after it had begun. Once it was over, Harold turned off the TV.

“That was good,” Hans' father said with a thoughtful expression. “You managed to get out a lot of information based on a strong faith foundation, but the part I appreciated the most was when you admitted that you don't have all the answers.”

“The producer of the program thought it went well, too,” replied Hans. “They asked me to come back next Saturday to tape a second segment.”

“Can I go?” asked Joshua. “I’d like to see how they tape it.”

Hans looked at Naomi, and she did not voice any objections. “I don’t see why not,” he replied. “You wouldn’t be in the way, and I don’t think the station would mind.”

“The one thing you’re forgetting when you talk about each person’s share of the world’s resources is that we have more than just this world to develop,” said Keith. “You can’t operate on the assumption that we are limited to the wealth on planet Earth.”

“I’m not forgetting about wealth beyond this planet,” responded Hans. “But, I don’t think we should rely, or come to depend on the resources of outer space, or of new technology. Everything we need is here now, if we would just use it properly. We have to learn to share better, otherwise we can make all kinds of new and wonderful discoveries, and still have people starving while others have more than they need.

“There is a universe within that we need to remember. There is a God that we need to obey.”

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It was later that week that the second of the house meetings took place, and Hans was not sure if it was just him, or if the atmosphere was less relaxed than it had been at the first meeting. As they talked about the neighborhood, and Gary’s father announced that the conversion to automation at this plant had still not been confirmed by the management, it almost seemed like they were just going through the motions of carrying on a conversation.

Before he brought up the subject of the peace movement, the source of the tension surfaced when the federal employee said, “I think you just like telling other people how to run their lives, Hans. You tell people how to have sex, you want everybody to demonstrate for peace, and now you want us to accept a limit on what we earn. Who do you think you are?” The verbal attack continued, accompanied by an angry look, “You don’t even have the courage to take a stand on your own. If your parents didn’t make good money and let you live with them, where would you be?”

Fighting to keep from justifying himself, or from counter attacking, Hans said, “I do appreciate being able to live with my parents, and we don’t have to talk about income limitation if it’s going to be a cause for disagreement.”

“I thought that’s why you had the article in the newspaper, because you wanted people to talk about it,” said the teacher.

“Yes, but not if it’s going to stand in the way of a group’s developing a sense of cohesion.” He realized how different what he had just said was from the dare devil attitude he had when he had spoken with the reporter. Like with his father, there was no way to bring up the issue with his neighbors without some of them feeling like they were being attacked, at least initially. Now that the issue had been introduced, there was no way to put it back in the box.

The federal employee continued his attack, from a different angle, “Your idea of peacemaking is

so naive. If the Soviets came marching in, I'll bet you'd be waiting at the front door with a flower in your hand."

Hans was tempted to ask the federal employee if he believed any of the things he heard at church on Sunday mornings, but decided that would be like throwing fuel on the fire. Since the subject was in the open, he responded, "Why would they invade us if we were sharing our wealth?"

"Because they would consider that an act of weakness. They wouldn't bother about sharing with us, but would try to take it all."

"They would be making a mistake if that's what they thought. We're not weak. We're strong. And, we would be stronger if we weren't so defensive, if we didn't put so much of our resources into the military. We have so much more to give as friends, than they could take as enemies. That is if we would act like friends, if we were willing to share."

The conversation had devolved into a debate, and sensing that the others were sitting uncomfortably on the side, Hans said, "I don't want to turn this into a two way conversation."

"I think the Soviets would be glad to negotiate an end to the arms race," said the lawyer. "They have to spend a much higher percentage of their GNP to keep their military on par with ours."

That went on for some minutes, and they might have spent the rest of the evening arguing about the Soviet threat, and definitely not developing a sense of cohesion, if Harold had not spoken. "You criticized my son," he said to the federal employee, "for something over which he has no control, the income of his parents. That he and his family live here is just another sign of their concern for not using more than their share of the world's resources." The depth of Harold's emotion showed in the coarseness of his voice. "Lois and I have talked it over, and we are willing to try to do our share towards peacemaking in the sense that Hans suggested. We will contribute everything over \$20,000 a year that we earn to social justice and environmental causes, either on our own, or if others are willing to pool resources to attempt something larger than any of us could do on our own, we will be open to that. That's in the short term. The next time my Board meets to discuss the day care center budget, I will request that they lower my salary."

Inside himself, Hans was virtually in a state of shock. He had avoided talking with his parents about it any more because they lived so close, and he did not want to tell them how to run their lives. At the same time that he wondered what had caused the change on their part, he tried to imagine how the others were responding. They might be weighing the remark by the fact that it was his parents. They also might think that since Harold and Lois were close to retirement that limiting their incomes for a few years was less of a sacrifice than what others might have to make.

Harold continued since no one else spoke immediately. "Of course we own our home, and no longer have house payments to make. Our children are grown and able to take care of themselves, and Hans and Naomi contribute to cover our housing expenses. As long as we keep up our health insurance and don't have any major expenses, we can manage on less than we are making. It may not be like that for everyone."

Gary's father, Emmett, said, "That's right. I have a wife and children. You can't expect a family to live on \$20,000 a year, especially when they are not sure the job will even last through the year."

Hans was about to say they weren't expecting anything from anybody, but the teacher spoke first. "I have a wife and kids and I make less than \$20,000 a year. We just have to be careful how we spend our money."

"What worries me the most," said the elderly woman, venturing to enter the discussion, "are my utilities. My heating bills are getting so high, I don't know if I'll be able to stay in my house."

"That's because your house is so warm," accused Emmet. "You must keep your thermostat set at nearly eighty degrees."

"I still feel cold at that," she replied.

"You wouldn't have such high bills if your house was better insulated," said the teacher. "The snow melts off your roof faster than anyone else's on the block."

"I don't want to put much money into the house if I may not be there much longer," she said. "I can't afford it anyway."

"Again, I don't want to push this, if it isn't what we want to talk about right now," said Hans, "but, it's possible that for the households in this room, the cumulative excess in incomes that are above \$20,000 per year might be as much as \$70,000. We could help a lot of families insulate their homes with that amount of money. There are all kinds of ways we could improve the lives of other people."

"Maybe if my work week was cut, I could accept a lower salary," said Emmett, taking Hans' idea in another direction. "That would give me more time to do things around the house, and I'd save money on repair bills. Of course," he remembered, "if I'm laid off, I won't have to worry about fewer hours at the plant."

"A shorter work week sounds good to me," said the nurse. "We don't have any children, but I would like to spend more time at home. I'm usually so tired from work, I don't feel like doing the things I enjoy, like playing the clarinet."

"I didn't know you played the clarinet," said Lois. As well teaching music, she had written a few short pieces, some of which were for that instrument.

"Well, I haven't had much time for it the last few years, but I've always enjoyed it. I've even thought about playing with the amateur band that performs in the park during the summer, but the time just hasn't been there."

"I don't think I would want to lower my fees," said the lawyer, presenting yet another perspective. "A lot of people think they get what they pay for. But, I could accept more cases from indigent clients who can't afford my standard fee."

The federal employee was the only one who had not joined in the last part of the discussion. He must have felt the eyes of the others turning in his direction because he spoke, "I support a number of charitable causes already. If I contribute a larger share of my income, I'm going to decide it on my own."

"Nobody is eating the cookies," said Naomi. "We don't want to have them laying around the

house.”

Hans thought, “Good. She sensed just the right time to break the discussion.”

Rising and moving towards the door, Emmett said, “I told my wife I wouldn't stay out late, so I ought to be getting back home.”

“Oh, well, I'll be over soon to get my kids,” said the teacher. Emmett's wife had taken the children under her wings that evening.

“Don't rush. They're alright. Say, if you want, we could meet at my place next time.”

“That would be nice,” said Hans. He got up to walk to the door with Emmett. To make sure Gary's father really wanted them to meet at his home, he said, “I guess, two weeks, and we'll be at your place?”

“Yeah, we'll be ready.”

As Hans opened the door, their elderly neighbor, bent and shriveled, yet determinedly maintaining her home and independence, stood up and said, “I think I'll be on my way home now, too.” She lived next door to Emmett and could be sure of getting home safely by leaving at the same time.

“Will we see you at the next meeting?” asked Hans, as she slowly approached the door.

“I don't know,” she replied, with her eyes lowered. “I don't feel like I have anything to contribute. You might do better without me.”

“You have more to contribute than you think,” protested Hans. “We'd like for you to be there.”

“Heck, it's going to be at my place. All you have to do is come next door,” said Emmett.

“We'll see. Maybe I'll come.” she responded.

The two of them departed together, and Hans could hear Emmett saying, “I didn't mean nothing about where you have your thermostat set. You should see what some of our bills were last winter.”

They were still making their way down the steps when the federal employee came to the door, and looking closely at his neighbor's face, Hans said, “Thanks for coming.”

“It was an interesting meeting. I like to keep an open mind,” said the departing guest, with a stony expression.

“Will we see you the next time?”

“No, I don't think so. A lot of people will lose their jobs if we don't keep up the economy,” he said accusingly, “and the only way we can keep up the economy is to keep up spending.”

Hans did not feel like arguing. He could not see that there was any information he could present that would affect his neighbor's thinking anyway. After saying goodbye, Hans turned back to

the group that was gathered around the refreshment table. Lois and the nurse were talking about music, and the others were discussing the effect that a large movement to limit incomes would have on taxes and the city's ability to provide services.

“The schools are mainly supported by local property taxes. That wouldn't be affected by lower income tax revenues,” said the teacher.

“And the state gets a large part of its revenue from the sales tax. There's no doubt that the federal government depends more heavily on income taxes than do the state and local governments,” said the lawyer.

“You don't imagine that enough people will impose a limit on their incomes that it would affect the income of the federal government, do you?” asked Harold.

“Not on account of rich people,” said Naomi. “A lot of them hardly pay taxes as it is.”

“Not as a percentage of total tax revenues,” amended the lawyer. “Because there are so few rich people.”

“I doubt if rich people will place any limits on their incomes,” said the teacher. “They're too hooked on money to give it up.”

The conversation continued for a few minutes until the teacher said it was time for him to get his kids home.

“Would your wife want to join us the next time?” asked Hans. After Emmett's wife had agreed to watch the children, they had still missed her.

“Oh, she might. Her favorite program was on TV tonight. You know how that goes. I can see that your kids get in alright on my way home.”

“Thanks,” said Hans. “I'll take a turn watching them the next time since you'll be meeting at the Hardys.”

The lawyer asked his wife if she was ready to leave, but before they departed, she and Lois agreed to meet and to play some music sometime. After the last of their guests had left, Hans said, “Thanks, Dad. This might have been a wasted evening if you hadn't spoken up when you did.”

Harold radiated contentment. Graying hair notwithstanding, his face had a youthful expression. “Well, your mother and I felt this is what we wanted to do. Maybe we should have been doing more to help other people before now, but that's behind us.”

“We're just not used to thinking in terms of what our share is,” said Lois. “All of my life, the model was, 'Go for as much as you can get.' It's not easy to break out of that way of thinking.”

“Now you're helping to set a different example,” said Naomi. “Not that we're really starting anything new. This is not the first time that people have tried to put their faith into action.”

* * * * *

“I don't know, honey. Helping the older adults with their home repairs would be worthwhile work, but don't you think you would be limiting yourself, that you can do more than that?”

Hans and Naomi were lying in bed, and had been discussing the second television interview, which would be taped the next morning, when he had raised the subject of his next form of employment.

“A lot of people can do home repairs,” she continued, “but you have a special gift for communicating, for helping people to work together for the common good. It would be a shame not to exercise that gift. And, don't worry if it means traveling and being away from home to give some of those lectures. We can manage here, alright.”

“It's not just worrying about leaving all of you for a week or two at a time; I just don't care that much for traveling anymore. I like to be at home,” stated Hans, resisting the nudge to embark on a series of speaking engagements.

“Yeah, well, work is work. One does what one has to do.”

“You said you like to keep me close to home,” he protested in his mind, remembering an earlier conversation.

That incident must have crossed her mind at the same time because she rolled over to face him and asked, “Have you looked into the possibilities of giving any of your lectures by video. You may not actually have to travel to appear at all of them.”

That was a thought, and Hans began to reconsider the matter. He had felt a little dashed at first that Naomi was not immediately enthusiastic about his idea doing minor home repairs; he had already imagined himself setting up the little neighborhood business, but her remarks were raising his thoughts to another plane.

“You're going to have to decide for yourself what you need to do,” she pointed out, “but, I still think the groups that are starting to meet will need some direction. We can come together in these house meetings and get comfortable with each other, but we need someone to challenge us, to get us to think beyond our usual frame of reference.”

“Here's a case in point,” he thought, lying on his back, looking at the pipes that ran next to the ceiling. He could just about see it, an alternative future that really was a more logical step in the progression he had been following than cleaning gutters and fixing leaky faucets for their older neighbors. Maybe he had been too ready to take the easy way out.

“What do you suppose it was that caused Mom and Dad to decide to lower their incomes?” he asked, changing to another subject. “I sure didn't press them on it.”

“That's probably part of the reason. Generally, when you lean on people they don't have the space to grow.” She had discovered that through her years in the ministry. Harping on people to come to church was not the best way to cultivate their faith. “They were up late, talking, the night after you appeared on TV,” recalled Naomi. “I think that's when they made their decision.”

“I hope they didn't do it just because I'm their son.”

“You know that wasn't it,” she stated emphatically. “No, they listened to you, and realized there was something to what you were saying. I think their decision to live on less is a real expression of caring for other people; not to discount their love for you, either...” Her voice trailed off in such a way that he knew something else was coming. “Love is a force of its own; who can say what may, or may not, happen when love is operating,” she finished, and snuggled closer to him, her chin touching his shoulder.

Warmed by what she had said, and by her closeness, Hans felt good. He also felt a building pressure in his lower intestines, accompanied by a slight rumbling. He had gas. Releasing some of it, he felt immediate relief, but thought, “Oops,” as it was quite audible. Peeking at Naomi out of the corner of his eye, he saw that she was frowning.

“I heard that,” she said.

“Yeah, and in a minute you're going to smell it, too.”

Her eyebrows lifted, “That's okay. Just don't fluff the covers.”

They both laughed, being careful not to fluff the covers.

* * * * *

Joshua was already up, rinsing out his bowl at the sink, when Hans climbed the basement steps and entered the kitchen. The boy had gone to bed early so he would be ready to roll out in the morning. He had never been inside a TV studio before, and was making sure he did not get left behind.

“We don't have to leave for another couple of hours,” said Hans. “Did Mom ask you to do any chores this weekend?”

“Just to clean my room. It's already clean.”

“Maybe Grandma has a job for you.”

“Aw, Dad. They'll tell me if they want me to do something.”

His father almost said, “Sometimes it's nice to ask before you have to be told,” but he backed off. Joshua did really well for a nine, almost ten year old. Instead, he said, “There's really not much to see at the TV station. It's just a big room with a couple of chairs and a table on a little set. They have three cameras, and you can tell which one is on by a small red light.”

“If someone makes a mistake, do they do it over?”

“They can edit parts that don't come out very well, but I don't think they had to do that for the last interview. We talked for a half hour, minus the time for commercials, and that was the program.” His son had more questions than Hans had answers, and he suggested that Joshua ask the people at the station what he wanted to know.

Coming upstairs with Mara, Naomi asked, “Does anyone want to join me for an egg breakfast?”

“I already ate,” said Joshua.

“I’ll have a couple,” answered Hans, and turning to the boy, he said, “How about asking your grandparents if they want to eat breakfast with us?”

Joshua sighed, as if to say, “I always have to do everything.” Going upstairs, with his message, he came back shortly, and reported, “They’ll be down in a minute.”

The morning continued to unfold. Mara was put in the highchair and given her bottle filled with milk, and Harold and Lois joined then by the time the eggs were ready. Hans took a shower after breakfast, and coming upstairs after getting dressed, found Joshua in the family room reading the funnies section of the weekend newspaper. With more than a half hour before it would be time to leave, Hans picked up the news section and began to read.

“I’m going to get out my bike and ride around,” said Joshua as he finished the funnies. The boy was really primed to go.

“Okay,” said his father. “We’ll need to leave in about a half hour, so don’t go far.”

He was joined a few minutes later by his mother and Mara. Naomi had already left for the church to meet with her confirmation class. Mara prowled around the room, looking for something to get into, then climbed onto the couch next to Hans. He picked her up, and held her on his lap while he read, which was not easy to do. She wanted to help turn the pages before he was through.

Joshua returned in less than thirty minutes, but it was close enough that Hans got his bicycle out and prepared to leave. Opening the window to bid them farewell, Lois said, “I hope it goes well. You behave, Josh.”

“I will, Grandma,” promised the boy.

“We’ll be back for lunch,” said Hans as they left.

The TV station was downtown, and they followed the same route they had used the morning they had ridden down for Hans, Joshua taking the lead again. It was later in the morning this time, and the birds were silent as they rode past the intersection with the big trees.

On arrival, they chained their bicycles to a light post in front of the building in which the station was located, and had a short walk across the paved courtyard to the side entrance. It was a modern structure with a lot of glass and a wide corridor that led to the lobby. Giving his name to the security officer at the front desk, Hans signed in for both Joshua and himself. The security officer made a quick phone call, and a minute later a young woman wearing a vibrant pink sweater and corduroy slacks approached and greeted them.

“Hello, Mr. Spiegel. Thanks for coming back.”

“I’m glad to do it. This is my son, Joshua. He wanted to see how the program is taped. I called and spoke with someone who said it would be okay. I hope that’s all right.”

“Oh, surely.” She turned to the boy. “So you're interested in seeing the studio.”

Joshua nodded eagerly.

“The studio is downstairs so we have to go this way,” said the young woman. She led them to a stairway and they descended one floor. From an open space at the bottom of the steps, they turned into a long hallway. Windows along the walls permitted observation of what was taking place inside the rooms. The woman opened the second door on the left, and they entered the studio.

Joshua watched with wide eyes as the cameras were pushed into position. One was handled by a woman, and the others by men. They wore headsets with microphones so they could communicate with each other and with the director who was in a control room watching the activity through another large window. Spotting Hans, the director held up a hand in greeting, and Hans waved back.

As the station liked to have its guests present well in advance of camera time, they had a few minutes to wait before the taping would begin. The young woman had left them once she had brought them to the studio. Now another woman, the producer, approached, fiddling with the glasses that hung from a chain around her neck.

“Hello, Hans.” She held out her hand.

He shook it, and introduced his son.

“Hello, Joshua. It's a pleasure meeting you.” She looked back at Hans and said, “We've been getting a lot of letters in response to the last program. They were about 50-50 between very positive and very negative.”

“What were the negative reactions about?” he asked.

“That was interesting. They had less to do with your proposal for voluntary income limitation than with your remarks about the Christian faith.”

Hans thought it was interesting that people separated the two. Maybe that was what caused the negative reactions, that he had been connecting them.

“Why do you tape this on Saturdays?” asked Joshua.

“So young boys like you can visit without missing school” she smiled. “No, actually, we sometimes change the format of this show to have a panel discussion. We found that we were better able to accommodate our guests by taping on Saturday mornings. That is our regular schedule now.”

“Where would be the best place from which Josh can watch?” asked Hans.

“There's space in the control room,” she answered. “Would you like to watch from there, Josh?”

“Yes,” answered the boy, his face shining.

It was about time to begin, so Hans left them and walked to the small set. Sitting in the same chair he had used last week, he was assisted by one of the technicians in clipping the small microphone to the collar of his shirt. The interviewer joined him on the set, and asked him how he was. She had reddish hair, and was wearing a light green jacket with a matching skirt, and a large polka-dotted bow tie.

“Fine,” said Hans. “I want to let you know that we had a house meeting at my home since we taped the program last week. Some of what happened in our discussion of income limitation might be good to talk about this week.”

She asked him several questions, and indicated she would begin the interview by bringing up the subject of the house meetings.

A bodyless voice said, “Ready on the set.”

Hans sat back in his chair and waited, feeling a little more at ease than he had the last time, and a quick glance at the control room showed Joshua standing in the back, observing the procedure. The voice began the countdown. This was the lead time for the background music and the announcer's introduction of the show.

\ “Four, three, two, one.”

The interviewer went through the same opening she had used last week, except she acknowledged that this was the second part of a two part interview. After giving Hans a chance to explain why he had suggested that people voluntarily limit their incomes, she asked how they were getting their message across. That allowed him to say that in addition to the media, they were reaching out to people through house meetings, and that led to a discussion of that strategy and how it was working.

“What do you suppose it is that brings people to making a decision to do something like placing a limit on their incomes?”

Thinking that his parents might prefer not having their own case described on TV, he answered in general, “For many people, it may be a sense of caring and of religious commitment. But, even with a strong faith, few people decide to take an action like this on their own. Most often the decision to act in a way that is not the norm takes place in a small group in which the members support each other in their decisions. It usually happens after a long process of thinking, and discussing, and seeing other people, who are a little quicker, setting an example. Probably, it will take some time before significant numbers of households decide that income limitation is something they are willing to accept, and, of course, there are many people who will never go along with it.”

“It is asking people to accept some sacrifice, isn't it?” She kept her attention focused on him in a way that helped him forget about the cameras.

“Sure. Especially for people who have already structured their lives around high incomes. In those cases it will require a very strong commitment, some deep sense that income limitation is the right thing to do. It will require a lot of love. Because of that, I would rather see people start by trying to feel the Spirit, and what God calls us to do, than get hung-up on a given dollar amount of income, or wealth, that is one person's share.”

That was as close to theology as they got in this segment. The rest of the interview focused on the experience the Spiegels had had with their house meeting, and with the concerns people might have about living with reduced incomes. Hans was glad to talk about those things. By airing the concerns that had to be on people's minds and getting them into the open, some of the fears might be laid to rest. They talked about alternative means of transportation, scholarship programs for students, energy conservation, and the return to the extended family. Where sacrifices were involved, Hans tried not to hide them, but to show that they could be dealt with.

As the light on the camera went out, and the taping ended, the interviewer said, "I think that went very well."

"I think so, too. Thanks very much," he replied, and unfastening themselves from the microphones, they stepped off the set.

Joshua and the producer came out of the control room, and the boy said, "They have a whole row of TV screens in there, and I could watch you on them, or through the window." He was bubbling over with excitement.

Staying to talk for a few minutes with the producer, Hans asked if he could see some of the letters that came in response to the second segment as well as to the first. She told him to call, and he could come by to look at them later in the week. After thanking him again for coming the second time, she offered to show them the way back to the lobby.

"We can find our way," said Joshua.

She went with them as far as the door to the hallway, and then left them to climb the stairway back to the lobby on their own. There were two security officers at the front desk, talking with each other, as Hans marked their departure time in the book.

"It looks like you have some company," one remarked.

Outside, through the large windows, they could see a group of demonstrators. Some of them held signs, one of which read, "If You Like Russia So Much, Why Don't You Move There."

"That must be part of the fifty percent that reacted negatively to the previous program," thought Hans. This was a first for him. He had participated in plenty of demonstrations himself, but he had never before been the target for one.

"Those are your bicycles in front of the building, aren't they?" asked the other security officer. This was the one who had been at the desk when they had arrived.

Hans nodded.

"I'm going across the street to the diner," said the guard. "I can walk with you if you'd like."

"Oh, I don't think that's necessary," answered Hans, "but, we won't object if you're going that way." The demonstrators outside had the right to express their opinion, too. A few unpleasant remarks might be directed their way, but he couldn't imagine they would say anything that was really offensive.

“Are you going to talk with them?” asked Joshua.

“No, I don't think this is the time to talk,” said Hans. “They probably aren't in the listening mood. We'll just get on our bicycles and go home.”

They headed for the door with the security officer walking beside them. At the door, the guard paused and called to his partner, asking if he wanted a cup of coffee.

Hans and Joshua walked outside, the tall buildings of downtown serving as a backdrop for the crowd of demonstrators. They saw him, and gathered along the sidewalk where he and Joshua would have to pass. It looked like all they wanted to do was hold up their signs and make a few remarks as Hans walked by. The security guard was catching up with them from behind, and Hans almost felt silly to have him walking with them. He could see that some of the demonstrators had noticed that his son was by his side, and they were leaving plenty of room for them to get through. In a way, he felt a bond with them. They were demonstrating peacefully for what they believed. At another time, he would like to talk, and see if they might not find some mutual areas of agreement that could help close the gap between them.

“It's too bad there isn't a camera out here,” said Joshua. “This might make a good story.”

Hans looked down and met his son's eyes. “You'll have a lot to tell your friends at school Monday, won't you?”

The boy grinned and started describing how the director had instructed the people working the cameras to alternate between each other, and when to zoom in for a close-up.

Looking back at the demonstrators, who were just a few paces away, Hans tried to make eye contact with some of them, to recognize their presence. One fellow caught Hans' attention, something about the look on his face, oddly fixed and expressionless. The man had started in the back of the crowd, and had worked his way forward. He was to the left of where Hans and Joshua would pass, and just before they reached that spot, the man stepped to the front of the crowd.

It all happened so fast. Hans saw the man's hand come out from under his jacket with a gun. At the next instant as he pointed it at Hans, the demonstrator next to him made a gesture and bumped his arm. The gun fired, and Hans felt something tug at his right sleeve. That was the side on which Joshua was walking.

Hans turned towards the boy, but before he could do anything else, a second shot was fired. Joshua was looking up at his father with a startled expression on his face. Blood exploded from the back of his neck, and as the boy fell to the sidewalk, Hans felt himself struck from behind and knocked flat to the pavement.

Screams filled the air, and Hans screamed inside his head. He lay crushed to the sidewalk with a heavy weight across his back. Maddeningly, as he struggled to move, he found he was unable to dislodge the weight. His son was lying on his back with a small red dot on the front of his throat, blood spreading thickly on the concrete below his neck.

There was a furious commotion from the direction the man with the gun had been standing, but

no more shots were fired. The weight from his back lifted, and Hans dimly heard the voice of the security guard, "They have him."

Crawling to his son, Hans lifted the boy by his shoulders, and looked at the back of his neck. Oh God, the bullet had come through just below the skull, dead center. He cradled the limp body in his arms and started to sob. His shoulders shook uncontrollably, and he could barely breathe.

The commotion ceased entirely, and raising his head, Hans saw the gunman pinned to the ground just a few feet away. Several of the demonstrators were holding him. Hans looked up at the others, and they avoided his eyes.

Taking out this two-way radio, the security guard spoke into it, listened to the response, and said, "The ambulance is on the way."

Slowly, it soaked in. The ambulance was on its way. Hans looked at his son's motionless body, and thought, "It's too late. What can they do?" All of a sudden, Naomi's face came into his mind. Yes, take Joshua's body to the hospital and call Naomi from there. It would not seem as stark as lying out here on the sidewalk.

The guard said, "Your chin is bleeding. Sorry I knocked you down so hard."

Hans barely heard him.

The Rock of the Ages

Hans sat motionless, in the dark, and his thoughts went around the room. The illuminated face of the clock was turned the other direction, and he did not know how long he had been sitting. Naomi was lying on the bed, her outline barely visible. Unable to sleep, and rather than bother her with his tossing, he had gotten up and had sat in the chair beside their bed.

The thought pounded, "They have taken my son." It pounded and pounded, "They have taken my son."

For the hundredth time, he felt the jostling in the ambulance as they had sped to the hospital. For what? The pronouncement had been 'Dead on Arrival.' The cause of death had been a gunshot wound to the neck that had severed the spinal cord. Then the doctor had told Hans that if artificial respiration had been given they might have been able to save the boy. He would have been paralyzed from the neck down for the rest of his life, but he would not have died because he was no longer able to breathe.

Hans writhed inside his skin. He might have been able to save his son. While he had been holding the body in his arms, presuming his son was already dead, the boy was dying for lack of oxygen. He could have saved his son. Hans felt like tearing his flesh from his own body.

If only he had known. If only he had breathed for the boy until the ambulance had arrived. They could have put him on a respirator, and the doctors at the hospital might have been able to save him. It was too late now. He might as well say, if only he had left Joshua at home. If only he had kept his mouth shut, and let someone else worry about the problems of the world. He had known there were risks, but the terrible truth that had been hammered home was that one could not accept risks for oneself without also accepting them for one's family.

It had taken him a few minutes to get up the nerve to call Naomi, and when his mother had answered the phone, he had had a hard time keeping from breaking into tears as he had asked to speak with his wife. She had just returned from the church. As much as he had told Naomi by phone was that there had been a shooting, and he was alright, but Joshua had been hurt. Harold had been out shopping for groceries when he called, so Lois has stayed home with Mara, and Naomi had rushed to the hospital by herself.

Someone had called the media while he was giving an initial report to the police because by the time she had arrived there were already several reporters at the emergency room. When Hans had stepped out to meet Naomi, they had crowded around and had wanted to ask questions. Mercifully, there had been an empty doctor's office into which he could take her, and they could talk alone.

If his manner had not told her that the worst was true, his words soon had. He had told her everything, and thank God, she had not blamed him. Thank God she had not taken it out on him. Instead, she had come into his arms, and had held him and cried. They had cried together.

Once she was composed, she had wanted to look at the body, and Hans had told her that the doctors had asked about their donating organs such as the liver and the kidneys. In a way, that had helped settle her even more. It was a specific question around which she could collect her thoughts, and after she had seen the body; still wearing his clothes, but cold, gone, she had agreed to letting the hospital have the organs they needed, and they had signed the release forms without further delay.

The reporters had pressed forward again as Hans and Naomi had prepared to leave. Did Hans think the gunman had been trying to kill his son?

No, at least on this occasion, the attempt had been directed towards Hans' life. He had told them how the demonstrator had bumped the gunman's arm, and had showed them the bullet hole in his sleeve.

Did he know who the gunman was? Had he ever seen him before?

He saw the face of the man with the gun. It was no one he had ever met before, and Hans wondered what it was that had caused him to notice the man. Perhaps the rigid set to his face, a curiously expressionless face, except around the eyes. Maybe that was what had struck Hans. When he had looked into those eyes, he had seen he knew not what; a mixture of anger, hatred, fear, and something else that was hard to define. Of only one thing was Hans certain. What he had seen in the man's face and eyes was a look that was totally devoid of love.

As Hans sat, consumed by the day's tragedy, he still did not know who the man was. Perhaps by now the the police had the entire story of the gunman's life, but the Spiegels had not yet been told. It could be almost anyone. Maybe it was a devout churchgoer; someone who had been offended by Hans' remarks about Christianity and what Christians are called to do. Maybe it was a radical right winger; someone who was threatened by Hans' appeal for income limitation and love for all people, especially the Soviets; someone who considered Hans dangerous, a voice that needed to be silenced. Maybe it was a radical left winger; someone who believed that greed could only be overcome by violence, and who saw Hans' movement for conversion from within as an obstacle to the kind of change they wanted. Maybe it was someone who was simply disturbed, someone whose madness had come from an even deeper pit. Or, maybe it was a more mundane reason, to get one's name in the paper, to do something for which one would be remembered, even if it was in infamy.

The man would get his name in the papers. The reporters would find out who he was. Everyone was waiting to know, and Hans could almost see the special reports on the man's background, what made him tick, what had turned him into a killer.

They could devote all kinds of news time to it because it was such an isolated event. How often had it happened to nameless children in the past, an accidental shelling of a village, a misdirected bullet? Somewhere there was a connection, and Hans thought, "We train people to be killers. We order them into battle for the sake of the nation, for the sake of liberty, for the sake of our corporate interests. We are convinced, and the other side is convinced, that what we are doing is the right thing.

"Then off they go, mostly young men, to do battle and to kill each other, and innocent bystanders if they get too close to the line of fire. Today, all we have to do is push a few buttons, or maybe a computer will do the job for us. How many Joshuas and Maras and Harolds and Loises will be snuffed out?

"And, of course, we're all doing it for the right reasons. We all have to protect ourselves. Just like that man today. Maybe he thought he was protecting himself. Maybe in his mind what he was doing was the right thing as right could be. Maybe I am a threat to his way of thinking, or to his way of living, and he had to get me out of the way to protect himself.

“And now my son is dead.”

The image in Hans' mind changed to the funeral home. The funeral service would take place Monday morning. There would be a period before the service when the top of the casket would be raised for those who wanted to have one final look at the body. The casket would then be closed, and placed in the middle of the flowers at the front of the chapel.

This was one time he expected the entire family to be together. Paul and Cindy, Joshua's godparents, would certainly make it. Even Mary and Bill had done some quick checking, and had called back to say they had picked a flight from Denver that would get them to St. Louis on Sunday afternoon. Naomi's parents, Frank and Tonya and their children, and even some aunts, uncles, and cousins who were in the area were coming.

Joshua's teacher was among those who had called that evening to express their condolences. She had spoken with Naomi and had said she would take the day off to attend the service. Several of the parents of Joshua's classmates had called to find out what the arrangements for the funeral were, and to make sure it would be all right for them to attend. Hans had taken a couple of those calls himself, and had told them that if they thought it would help their children to deal with the loss of their friend, that they were welcome. He hoped it would help him to deal with the loss, that the gathering of so many friends and family, and the giving of their sympathy and love would help in the process of letting go and getting on with life.

He had spoken with Naomi about his having a chance to share some thoughts during the service. By speaking and participating actively in the eulogy, he thought he might give more complete release to his feelings. There were several memories he wanted to relate; the concern Joshua had expressed that Mara be made to feel accepted and wanted when they had brought her home, the dream Joshua had had of being an astronaut, and the time he had tried to learn Russian because he wanted to be able to offer assistance to Soviet cosmonauts.

Joshua had been cheated of his life, and they had been cheated of their son and friend. Hans' chest heaved, his throat tightened, and his eyes stung as he imagined standing over the coffin of his son. He ached in every part of his body. There was more he had to say; for himself, for his wife, and for their family and friends. They must not cheat themselves by harboring bitterness in their hearts. He did not want to become bitter. They had to look for God's plan through their grief and sorrow and anger. The concern and consideration and love for others that had been a part of Joshua could best be honored and remembered by being a part of their lives. That was what he wanted to say.

“That's what I want to say?” he thought, the words shrieking in his mind. “That's what I want to say? That's not what I want to say. I want tell them all to go to hell. Go to HELL! I'm already in hell.

“No, no, no, it can't have happened,” he thought for the thousandth time. “It can't have happened.”

For the thousandth time, he recalled again the blood bursting from the back of Joshua's neck and the boy falling to the ground. Looking at Naomi's outline, for a moment, he had an insane desire to wake her and demand that she tell him that he was just having a nightmare.

“This hurts too much to be a nightmare. I never had a nightmare that came close to feeling this bad. The blood, Joshua's limp body in my arms, that damn doctor telling me that artificial respiration

right after Joshua was shot might have saved him. What point was there in telling me that after the boy was dead? There was no hope of saving him then. For the rest of my life, I'll tear myself apart thinking, 'If only I had known. If only I had known. Damn him. Damn them all. God damn. I might just as well think, 'If only I had been able to teleport Joshua straight from the sidewalk to the hospital, maybe I could have saved him.' The one was as much out of my reach as the other."

He imagined himself meeting with the killer, surrounded by barren prison walls. An unbidden impulse to launch himself at the other's throat; to smash him, to crush him, and to tear him apart gripped him. His fists were clenched so tightly, his fingernails were digging into the palms of his hands.

"I feel so angry. I feel like shit. I feel like total shit. I feel," he searched for words that could express how he was feeling. "I feel exhausted."

He looked at the barely visible empty space on the bed beside Naomi, and wondered, "If I lie down now, will I be able to sleep? Nope. Don't think so. Still can't sleep. What am I going to do? What am I going to do?"

He saw again the face of the man who had killed his son, and behind that face, Hans saw many faces. The man who had pulled the trigger was a free agent. Each person was responsible for his, or her, own actions, but Hans knew how much people were shaped by their cultures and the conditions of their lives. That is why the thought that pounded was, "They have taken my son." At what point was killing justified? It happened every day; from a bullet, or from unmet needs. The entire human race was in a position to abort itself. Who cared?

Who cared enough about the other person to accept pain rather than to give it? The man who had pulled the trigger was just the tip of the iceberg. Society placed its controls on the individual to prevent the more blatant acts of aggression and greed, but society institutionalized injustices and was guilty of some of the worst crimes that could be committed. War was just the most obvious example. Millions of people died each year of neglect.

As much as he had been hurt, Hans could not hate the man who had killed his son, not without hating the whole human race and himself along with it. "We are all connected. We are one. No matter what happens, that is still true."

As tired as he was, at that thought, Hans felt a little burst of strength. "Is that true? Are we one? Really? All of us?"

"Josh is gone, but not really gone. Just like all of my ancestors, those who lived thousands of years ago, and millions ago, and even my single cell ancestors who lived billions of years ago, are gone, but not really gone. The past lives in the present. Every littlest thing, every littlest action is a part of everything else. It all is. And, it all is part of what will be. Nothing is lost. It all is."

He could feel it. He could feel the truth of it, the connectedness, the oneness. Still aching with an ache that he knew would never go away, and a hole in his life that could never be re-filled, in some mysterious way somewhere at the edge of his senses, or at the core of his being, he felt whole and complete. He could feel power and strength, enough and more than enough to carry him through this day and the next and the next. And, still exhausted.

Into his aching, weary brain came a glimmer of idea. Tired as he was, it almost slipped away, and then clinching his fists till his fingernails dug into his flesh again, he roused himself and grabbed hold of the idea to bring it back into view. It was a way to deal with the killer that did not involve seeking the man's death. It involved seeking his life. Hans decided that he would visit the gunman. He would meet with him and say, "You killed my son. Look at me. You killed my son, and hurt me more than anyone else has ever hurt me." The meeting would probably take place in the visiting room of a prison. The man might never again see the outside of a prison as a free man. That was not what Hans wanted either.

The words Hans wanted to say were, "I forgive you. I don't know what kind of life you have before you now that you are in prison, but I want you to have a better life than this. I want you to get turned around inside, to see some love in your eyes. I wish I could give that to you, for you to know love." He did not know how the man would respond to that. Maybe the man would spit in his face and gloat that his son was dead. That would not stop Hans. He knew what he had to do.

Hans clung to the presence and the sense of wholeness that he had felt. He could feel it. The presence was there; eternal, infinite, and unchanging. Like one who had gone without food for weeks, Hans fed on that Spirit. He could feel strength, and power, and peace. He could feel love.

"Don't let go," he thought. "Hold tight. Help me to hold tight." So tired.

Hans sighed.

Naomi moved and spoke, "Hans?"

"I'm here."

She got up, found her slippers, and put on her robe. Without turning on the light, she felt her way around the bed, past Mara's crib, to Hans' side.

"How are you doing?" she asked softly.

"I'll make it. How about you?"

"I feel like someone cut me open and emptied me out on the ground, but I'm still alive. I still have you and Mara." She put her arm around his shoulder and leaned against him. He buried his face against her side.

"Let's go upstairs," said Naomi urgently.

He stood and walked carefully with her to the steps. Climbing to the first floor, they entered the family room, and stood with arms around each other, looking out the window.

"Yes, we still have Mara," thought Hans. "Thank goodness she is so young she doesn't realize what happened. She knows something is wrong, but she doesn't understand it."

He looked at Naomi's face and saw an expression of pain. She had lost the only fruit of her womb. They had already seen to it that Joshua would be their only child. The possibility of adoption remained, but it was too soon to even consider that.

“Maybe I'm an unsuitable father,” thought Hans. “Suppose the same thing were to happen to another child. My work has really just begun. There may be other people who will feel threatened by the changes I'm trying to make, and I can't turn aside from my mission.”

Agony and anger flooded through him again. “My mission. What is my mission?” he argued to the silence. “Joshua was my son. I didn't want for him to die before me. That is not a sacrifice I wanted to make. I loved him. I wanted for him to grow and to have a full life, just as I want that for any child.” That was a source both of his suffering and of his comfort.

Naomi gave him a squeeze.

He looked at her again. She was gazing out the window, up towards the sky, and he followed the direction of her gaze. There were the stars, distant lights that had attracted Joshua, partly hidden by the trees, the buildings, and the lights of the city.

“It's funny how much more clearly one can see the stars from the desert,” reflected Hans, and his eyes filled with tears.

Slowly, the stars faded. The sky began to brighten with the light of the new day.

Afterword

Hands Across America actually took place in 1986, the year after this novel was written. The event was meant to raise awareness and funds to deal with hunger and homelessness in the United States. What has changed in the thirty years since then?

The problem of homelessness has not gone away, and there are still people who are unable to afford their own food.

The peak in the world's production of oil did not happen in 1990, and does not seem to have happened yet. Just because something has not yet happened does not mean that it will never happen. Now we know that in addition to conflict over oil, another reason to stop burning fossil fuels is the growing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Global warming is already having an impact, and the United States' military considers climate change to be a threat to national security.

What else has changed? The human population has grown from about 4.8 billion people in 1985 to about 7.3 billion people in 2015.

My perspective on the issue of abortion has changed in the decades since I wrote The Rock of the Ages. One way to express my viewpoint today would be to say that human beings have brains; zygotes do not have brains; zygotes are not human beings.

Of all the things that have changed in the world in the last thirty years, perhaps the most dramatic has been with the price and performance of information and communications technologies.

The computer I used to type the original manuscript, which cost \$1,000 in 1985, had only a single floppy disk drive, and no hard drive. I had to put the disk with MS-DOS into the drive when I turned on the computer in order to boot into DOS. Then I had to remove that disk, and replace it with the word processing application disk in order to type. After typing a few pages, I had to remove the application disk, and replace it with a storage disk in order to save what I had written. It took more than one floppy disk in order to save the entire manuscript. At that time, I considered that a huge advance over using a typewriter.

The refurbished laptop computer I am using now, which cost \$100 over the Internet a couple of years ago, has a 60 gigabyte hard drive. Subtracting several gigabytes for the Linux operating system and application software, this computer has enough storage to hold over 100,000 manuscripts the length of The Rock of the Ages. A terabyte capacity hard drive could store millions of manuscripts such as this.

Similar changes have happened with the speed of processors and the speed of networking. That computer I purchased in 1985 did not have any networking capabilities. I bought my first modem in 1986. It was a 1,200 bps modem. The speed with which I can receive data from the Internet today is 12 mbps. That is an increase of a factor of 10,000 within thirty years.

Where will the technology be within another five years, by the year 2020?

There is talk of autonomous cars, and autonomous businesses, and autonomous weapons. There are a number of people who think seriously about these things who are extremely alarmed about the prospect of autonomous weapons. So am I.

As a citizen of planet Earth approaching the end of the year 2015, and more fully experiencing my oneness and connectedness with the rest of humanity and with the ecosphere as a whole, instead of thinking about a human chain spanning the United States, my activist tendencies are directed more towards helping to organize the first global referendum. About half of humanity is already using the Internet, and that could be considered to be a global quorum.

The items that make the most sense to me to have on the ballot for this first global referendum are to ratify the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the Earth Charter, and in order to realize those principles, to approve a plan for worldwide demilitarization.

The technology exists to do it. Now it is a matter of consciousness.

John Kintree
October 24, 2015

The story continues at: ratificationthroughreferendum.org and globalreferendum2020.org