S-LC Alumni “Kickin’ at the Darkness”

By Jeffrey Bouman, S-LC Director

There’s a verse from a Bruce Cockburn song that has been rattling around in my soul for years. Lately, the tempo has picked up and I find myself in the middle of a choir of souls for whom Bruce’s incisive line makes meaning out of life. These are the lines:

“When you’re lovers in a dangerous time/ Sometimes you’re made to feel as if your love’s a crime/ Nothing worth having comes without some kind of fight/ Got to kick at the darkness till it bleeds daylight.”

I recently had the opportunity to reflect extensively on the lives of recent Calvin graduates – where they are and what they are doing. Not just any Calvin alumni, but former student leaders in the Service-Learning Center. On February 8th, 2007, I presented a brief PowerPoint slideshow to Calvin’s Board of Trustees and a large portion of the faculty highlighting photos and brief updates from graduates since 2002. My presentation showcased the faces and dreams of students who worked as student coordinators, activists, educators and administrators in training while they were undergraduates, and who now inhabit places as diverse as China, Zambia, Bangladesh, Philadelphia, Loyola University medical school, New Mexico, Minnesota, even Grand Rapids and Calvin Seminary.

At the annual Fall Conference in September 2006, new Provost Claudia Beversluis alluded to a helpful metaphor for our students – that of emissaries. She encouraged the Calvin community to bear in mind that even when we can’t ourselves go to the ends of the earth to do the work of renewal and redemption, our students can. She said, “We can send young men and women out into this world equipped to be God’s servants and witnesses. Our biggest contribution will be through these students. They will be the teachers, pastors, artists, singers, poets, soldiers, cancer researchers, nurses, explorers, and the therapists. They will have to confront the possible horrific challenges that are coming our way. They will have to provide the beauty that the world will long for. They will have to teach the world to worship, and they will have to know the skills of reconciliation. They will have to stand for Jesus Christ.”

In many ways it is indeed a dangerous time for lovers of Christ in our world, and my recent reminder is that these former student leaders are doing their part to “kick at the darkness” in places all around the globe, waiting and working for daylight to bleed through.

S-LC Experience Contributes to Graduate’s

By Heidi Pfnister, S-LC 2005 Alumna

Working at the Service-Learning Center probably became the most formative experience I had at Calvin College aside from the courses I took within my social work major. My time there equipped me for life in many ways. While working there, I was always encouraged to take on new and challenging responsibilities. That gave me much needed confidence in the workplace. I also learned how to effectively work within a group that encompassed a variety of personalities, working styles, and worldviews. The most valuable part of my Service-Learning Center experience was the conversations I had with my supervisors and fellow staff members.

These conversations challenged me everyday to look at the world differently and try to make sense of the world through the eyes of my faith. It also challenged me to examine how my faith calls me to act in every situation. My work as a social worker is never easy; it is rewarding but sometimes painful. All of life is like that, too. My entire experience at Calvin and especially through the Service-Learning Center has given me the tools to think through what I’m facing in work and life. It has also introduced me to friends I can always turn to—friends who keep me thinking about my place and purpose in this world, redemption, and shalom.

After graduating with a Bachelor of Social Work, I went to Wayne State University and received a Masters in Social Work: Community Development and Community Organizing. I now work for an Early Childhood Development program in Gallup, New Mexico as a social worker.
Movie Review: *Blood Diamond*

By Kaitlyn Bohlin, Communications Coordinator

When I tell people I recently watched the Warner Brothers film *Blood Diamond*, they always ask, “How was it?” Unlike most movies, one word—“good” or “bad”—does not do justice or accurately capture my response to the film. It was “good” and “bad.” This movie, which explores the corrupt blood diamond industry in Sierra Leone during the chaos of 1990’s civil wars, is terrible in that it captures on various levels—systemic, individual, political, and emotional—the evils and miseries of a region in Africa that, as character Danny Archer (played by Leonardo DiCaprio) expresses, it seems “God left a long time ago.” Yet, at the same time, its glimmers of hope are simultaneously breathtaking, powerful, and beautiful.

The devastation from one scene to the next leaves the viewer overwhelmed, devastated, and deeply convicted. As I watched children with semi-automatic weapons kill defenseless women and men, the questions, “How can this happen?” and “How can I appropriately respond?” pierced my heart and left me feeling helpless. On more than one occasion, the film scolds Westerners for their ambivalence and inaction, and while I agree that immobility is a crude and inappropriate response to the truths of the film, I was left wondering, “What now?” without much confidence in knowing how to appropriately (or adequately) react.

This film’s honest look at the complicated nature of corrupt and chaotic systems presents an opportunity for Westerners to seriously grapple with how their seemingly removed demands (i.e. the perfect engagement ring) personally affect the lives of struggling workers, refugees, and political structures in regions such as Sierra Leone. I would recommend this film to anyone who is willing to face the harsh realities of a complicated and broken world of which we are all citizens, responsible for one another’s welfare.

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Students Participate in Local Radon Testing

By Colin McWhortor, ABSL Coordinator

The Service-Learning Center has recently teamed-up with the newly formed Healthy Homes Coalition to bring unique opportunities to students. The Nursing Department at Calvin has worked in previous years with a program called Get the Lead Out!, now under the Healthy Homes Coalition of West Michigan. Paul Haan, project coordinator of Healthy Homes Coalition, is a Calvin graduate and was part of Get the Lead Out! for many years before continuing that work with the Healthy Homes Coalition.

This academic year, two more departments have started working with Haan and the Healthy Homes Coalition. Psychology and Social Work classes have been involved with home testing for lead and radon respectively. Over thirty students have been involved with testing this year.

Students in Professor Sergio da Silva’s Health Psychology class have received training from Haan on testing homes for lead poisoning. Students then visited low-income homes in Grand Rapids and instructed homeowners on how to test their own homes. Students then assisted families in retrieving results and learning more about possible abatement procedures. In all, students spent nearly twenty hours of service-learning time in the community.

Haan also had thirteen students from Professor Rick Chamiec-Case’s Organizations and Communities Social Work class working with radon testing. Students identified and contacted homeowners in certain areas of Grand Rapids to perform a test in their home. Radon, which Haan calls “an equal opportunity carcinogenic,” is a naturally occurring gas that can be hazardous if concealed in large amounts inside a home.

“We are just starting to touch the radon issue,” said Haan. “We’ve been able to start to get the word out there that it is important to test your home.”

Partnering with classes from Calvin has helped the Healthy Homes Coalition reach more families who are potentially at risk in Grand Rapids. “For us,” said Haan, “we don’t have the hours in the day to do all the leg-work for these projects. Partnering with Calvin allows us to get so much more done. It’s been amazing, too, the ripple effect that it has had at the school; we are getting more and more participation.”

Haan has also appreciated Calvin’s understanding of the work needed in his field. “We are a brand new organization,” he said, “and people at Calvin have been aware of our limitations and the realities that can come from being a grass-roots movement. The school understands that we have to worry about our own survival much of the time.”

Both professors da Silva and Chamiec-Case plan to continue their work with the Healthy Homes Coalition, something Haan encourages. “There will always be more to do, especially as we get further into the radon issue,” he said. “I hope Calvin’s leadership with us will spread throughout the community and we can build many more partners.”
Agencies in the LOOP Partner Together

By Grace Miguel, ABSL Coordinator

Having worked at the Service-Learning Center as a student worker for the last three years, I have always since marveled at the number of community agencies with which we interact, partner, and cooperate. Surprisingly, it has only been recently that I have discovered the intricate way in which some of these agencies interact with each other. While coordinating a meeting last fall for both Calvin students studying Spanish and agencies that serve Spanish-speaking communities, I began to see how theses agencies were associated with one another through a larger network of relationships. After talking with some of the community agency partners I distinguished the big overarching connection: the LOOP after school program.

According to the Department of Health and Human Services, children that spend no time in after school activities are 49% more likely to use drugs and 37% more likely to become teen parents than those who spend 1-4 hours per week in after school programs. In response to these predictions, the Expanded Learning Opportunities (ELO) in partnership with the Grand Rapids Public Schools developed the LOOP after school program in order to “connect the community with the social, emotional and academic needs of a child,” and provide “academic and enrichment opportunities designed to enhance the academic and personal success of children.” The Service-Learning Center partners with Campfire USA, one of the three major youth development providers for LOOP.

Several students from the Spanish classes I coordinate go to Burton Elementary and Middle School to work with the Campfire after school program. Most provide tutoring services or homework assistance. They became part of a network of 120 organizations in Grand Rapids that are committed to working in solidarity to enhance the personal and academic goals of children in Grand Rapids.

The LOOP’s role in Grand Rapids speaks to one of the core principles of the Service-Learning Center: by combining the unique gifts and strengths of a variety of partners, our collaborative service builds a foundation of creativity and learning that can ignite even more projects and possibilities. The LOOP is just one of many such multi-agency partnerships in Grand Rapids, and I look forward to encountering more in the future.

The Gift of Life: Calvin Staff Member Receives Liver Transplant

By Andrew De Vries, Director of Major Gifts

How do you pray for healing when you know someone else has to die for you to be healed?

After a long rehabilitation following a near fatal motorcycle accident, I heard my doctor tell me that I was having liver failure. The liver had been weak at my birth and anesthesia from the many surgeries following the accident had taken a toll. I took many trips to various surgical centers trying to find answers. After some time, I was included on the transplant list. Countless sick people were ahead of me in that line; it seemed hopeless. My community and I did not give up, though, but continued in prayer.

It seems easy to pray when it’s for yourself but when someone has to die for you to live, praying becomes very difficult. Lying in bed, reflecting on that thought, I started to wonder about the donor’s family, friends, co-workers, etc. What made me so special that my health took precedence over the donor’s life? I know the answer is that it’s all in God’s plan but that didn’t make the upcoming loss of life for a donor any easier.

In talking with volunteers from the organ donor registry Gift of Life, I found that most donors feel that if it’s time for their life to end, they prefer that their organs be used to prolong the lives of others. They make a plan so others can live temporarily. Reminds me of a plan God made for Christ. He died so we could live eternally.

My wife and I had to move to another state while we waited for a liver to become available. We had to be near the hospital so we could be there the instant an organ became available. After waiting two months, a donor in another state died. The plan was carried out as his organ was transported to my hospital so I—and others—could have another chance at life. I thank God daily for Gift of Life and the donor’s plan and I thank God daily for Christ’s gift of life for me and His plan. My family and I have accepted both plans; you can too.

Andrew De Vries is the Director of Major Gifts at Calvin College and a first hand witness to the importance of organ and tissue donations. This year, the Service-Learning Center partnered with Gift of Life during
Stories Build Relationships at Beacon Hill Retirement Home

By Katherine van Liere, Associate Professor of History

On a chilly morning this January, twenty-two Interim students traversed the frozen grounds of Beacon Hill retirement home (formerly Michigan Christian Home), heading for blind dates with twenty-two strangers old enough, in most cases, to be their great-grandparents. Most of this DCM class, “Writing the Christian Life,” was spent in a very traditional way, discussing books and ideas in a warm classroom. But this real-life biography project gave students a more personal encounter with “the Christian life.” With the help of the S-LC’s Carolina Martinez and Beacon Hill’s Joy Dornbos, our class visited Beacon Hill twice. On the first visit each student interviewed one resident, and subsequently wrote a three-to-four-page interpretation of the person’s life story. We then edited and printed an anthology of the stories, and returned for a second visit to present the residents with the texts. Although not a very tangible “service” project, this experience did create valuable bridges of understanding and empathy between two communities. Our interviewees, many in their late nineties, had lived through the Great Depression and the Second World War; served as missionaries, soldiers, teachers, nurses, and much more; and known love, loss, joy, grief, doubt, and faith in many different forms. The students demonstrated tact and skill, gleanin complex life stories in short interviews and turning them into graceful and sensitive portraits. In turn, the interviewees were gracious, generous, and appreciative of the students’ interest in their lives. Some students and their subjects formed lasting friendships. The student writers and the readers of their stories came away moved and inspired with a deeper appreciation for a generation that many of them had never known before.

The following piece is the interpretation of one of the interviews held between Calvin freshman Cameron Morse and Beacon Hill community member Edna Cook.

Edna often sits with those about to die. She often sits with strangers. She talks to them of heaven. "To me to see a Christian die is wonderful," she said. “They’re going home to be with the Lord." All her life she has believed that at the end she will be taken up to heaven. Perhaps this is part of why the staff calls on her at times to sit with those about to die. They see that she is strong enough to bear it. And she told them she was willing. “Some people can’t handle those things," she said. “But I can.”

Edna was raised religiously, which accounts for her beliefs, but her strength is a thing that also has to do with her father, Fred Leroy Barton. He worked the farm on which Edna was born in 1914, near Cedar Springs, Michigan. He worked roads. He worked delivering coal by wagons drawn by horses, and it was while delivering coal that he fell. Afterwards, he was never the same; his neck was crooked and his shoulders stooped so that to turn his neck he had to turn his body. "I only remember my dad like that," she said. "I never remembered him standing up straight.” Not many years later, he died of pneumonia brought on by the injury. Edna was twelve then, with three younger brothers. "I grew up in a hurry, being the oldest," she said. "I was Mother's mainstay.”

Edna often sits with those about to die, but there are more whom she is called on to talk with. One day it was a woman who would speak to no one. Edna stood a long time in her room before the woman asked her to sit, and then the woman said, “I am not a widow. I am not lonesome. And I’ve got everything I need.” “Praise the Lord,” Edna said with warmth. And from then on the woman spoke to her like a friend, and she asked when Edna left if she would come again.

In 1931, Edna married a farmer. His name was Howard Cook. Together they first lived in the city, where the conditions of the Depression were worst, but when Howard was laid off they left for the country. There, they lived the kind of life they knew as children, and they worked hard to keep hold of it. There was no question that that was where they would live their lives, until one night their baby lay awake crying. The windmill on top of their barn squeaked as it spun in a breeze and kept the child from sleep. So at noon the next day, after once trying to mount the windmill and finding it too windy, Howard climbed up a second time to secure the blades. From the bathroom Edna heard him fall to the ground, and ran out to find he had broken his back. After that he was never the same. “We went back to farming,” Edna said, “but it got to the point where his back wouldn’t take it anymore.”

Edna always liked the country best, but from then on it was the city they lived in. They bought a general store already coincidentally called Cook’s. For seventeen years they ran the store. “We had cards, we had stockings, we had pop, ice-cream, candy—everything you can think of,” she said. “We had quite a hardware department.” Edna learned to speak Spanish then, because of migrant workers who came to pick pickles in the fields. The first word she learned was the word for tax, because they would stare at the receipt and puzzle about the total.

Edna and Howard had four children, including a boy who lived to five but failed to develop...Dale was the only one of their children to die. Currently Edna has twelve grandchildren and thirty-one great-grandchildren of about every conceivable profession, from beautician to mortician. The wall in her room is only the cracks between the photographs.

“Perhaps this is part of why the staff calls on her at times to sit with those about to die...‘Some people can’t handle those things,’ she said. ‘But I can.’”

“The wall in her room is only the cracks between the photographs.”

Perhaps this is part of why the staff calls on her at times to sit with those about to die...‘Some people can’t handle those things,’ she said. ‘But I can.’”
Service-Learning Poetry Class Teaches Imagination to All

By Debra Rienstra, Professor of English

“Think of a way to write in service to others.” This was the challenge I gave early in the semester to my creative writing students at Calvin College. Two students in the class independently suggested that we take what we knew about writing—though we weren’t even sure what that was—to an elementary school and put on a little workshop. With the help of the Service-Learning staff at Calvin, we contacted Heidi Zophy at Grand Rapids Montessori Public and, with her enthusiastic help, started scheming.

Each Calvin student worked with two or three fifth graders, guiding them through a few basic poetry exercises. The big people offered ideas and patterns and encouragement, and the smaller people offered their imaginations and willingness to try. Everyone came into this with at least a little uncertainty and fear. How everyone came out, I don’t know for sure. But we do have the poems before us, and they speak for themselves.

Students began with a variety of patterns: animal poems, I-wish poems, If-I-would poems, and others. Fifth graders are, fortunately, full of wishes—for superpowers, travel, riches, vengeance, affection, freedom, peace. In their minds, too, the most ordinary objects—salad or potatoes, for example—take on surprising attributes and abilities.

The surprises, whether silly or poignant, delighted us all. One college student wrote afterwards that working with young writers helped her recognize her own anxieties about writing. “Setting aside my own personal fears allowed me to see with heightened clarity that which I believe to be one of the most important goals of poetry—it should be something that brings joy to the reader and the poet.” Another student admired the freedom of the children’s imaginations: “Looking back, the only thing I taught them was that poetry really can be anything, which is a startling truth.” That exhilarating freedom—to say what you think can’t be said, either because it’s too crazy or not how you’re supposed to feel—is an important step toward poetry’s magic and power. We began the project hoping to be of service, but we came away impressed with possibility. We hope all the students we worked with are proud of what they accomplished in such a short time and challenged to rediscover the magic of words again and again.

Dear Mr. President

Dear Mr. President, I have to talk to you. Dear Mr. President, why can’t kids drive? Dear Mr. President, when I get into office I will rule the world. Dear Mr. President, soon it will be Mrs. President. Dear Mr. President, can I get a call? Halla, Mr. President, Halla to all. 3 weeks later
Dear Mr. President, why didn’t you write me back?

If Poem

If I were a mouse Who lived in a blue house I would gladly sneak some cheese. I’d be chased by the cat And saved by the bat And fly away happy. And if I was a mouse I would Take a bath in the kitty’s bowl Then hide in my little black hole With my friend the mole! Sleep all day party all night I think that sounds about right!

My Poem

If I was a sky so I can shine. I wish I was a singer so I can make the people be proud. I wish I was a good double dutch player so I can jump fast and do so many tricks like pop-ups. I wish I was a space so I can see the world so beautiful. I wish I was a swimmer so I can swim with the dolphins in Hawaii. I wish I was a president so I can tell people what to do that is right. I wish I was a giant so I can be so tall and big.

Untitled

by Tupac Williams

I am a mad floor cause everybody gets to step on me. I am now an evil floor so if you step on me you will go in my floor board. I am a yellow chef trash can. I am the best cook ever. I became a chef because you give lots of food that can be refined into dirty omelet. It hurts to be a glowing basketball because you always get bounced on your face, but if a human got bounced on their head it will explode.
Think Spring. That’s what the several dozens of students who signed up for the Service-Learning Center’s spring break trips decided to do—in a slightly unconventional way. We hope you enjoy this montage of their experiences in places as various as Houma, Chalmette, Bogalusa (all Louisiana), Boston, and Gallup, New Mexico.
By Eric Geerlings, Spring Break Trip Leader

Our service-learning trip to Boston was an exhausting yet fun-filled week. We worked for Boston Projects Ministries Inc. Their primary ministry is to serve as extra hands, feet, eyes, ears, and mouths for organizations, ministries, and individuals in need in the Boston area. Each member of our 12-person group got a chance to serve in wide variety of ways. All of us spent two days at a food distribution organization called Fair Foods loading trucks with food, organizing the warehouse, shoveling snow, and sorting produce. On the other two days, we worked with the organizations Project 21, Cribs to Crayons, and Global Ministries Christian Church. Project 21 is an after school homework center for kids, and a few of us had the opportunity to tutor kids from the community. Other group members worked at Cribs to Crayons putting together gift packages filled with new toys for families in need. There, I had the opportunity to paint a wall in the church basement, deliver donated furniture, and fix the ceiling of a house in the community. Our work did not end at dinner-time though. On one of the nights we volunteered in a homeless outreach ministry called Starlight Missions. Its goal is to “bring the church to the streets.” We helped provide food, clothes, and blankets to the homeless. Most importantly, though, we provided and received loving friendship and a Christian community. The night always ends with an informal yet powerful worship service. It was unique and rewarding. The whole trip was a great experience. I learned that no matter how big the social injustice, a few people can still make a difference. The hard working people at the Boston Project inspired me to tackle the social injustices around me head on and reminded me that God does not just suggest that we serve others, He commands
During the week of April 16-23, Calvin will host Embrace Our Place, a weeklong celebration of college and community connections. Embrace Our Place will include a variety of events both on and off-campus. The week will commence with an urban bike tour and opening reception downtown beginning at 6:30 PM at the Calvin Center Art Gallery at 106 South Division. Delicious local food will be served, local businesses will showcase their wares and a great program is planned for 8:00 PM at the Ladies Literary Club at 61 Sheldon Boulevard, right around the corner from the Art Gallery. Other events during the week include an Engaged Scholars Showcase highlighting faculty and student research on issues of local importance; a rain garden planting; neighborhood walking tours, and much more. On Friday and Saturday, April 20 & 21, the 10th anniversary of the Calvin Environmental Assessment Program (CEAP) will be celebrated at the Bunker Interpretive Center. Findings from campus environmental research conducted since 1997 will be displayed and interactive activities for the whole family will make for a fun celebration. On Monday, April 23 the Embrace Our Place festival will conclude with the annual Community Partnerships Celebration which recognizes the collaborative work accomplished between many Grand Rapids community organizations and Calvin faculty and students. For a complete schedule of activities, go to: http://www.calvin.edu/admin/provost/engagement/.

Embrace Our Place grew out of a larger research project funded by the Teagle Foundation which is enabling Calvin to explore ways to strengthen liberal arts education by focusing on our place with Grand Rapids and the West Michigan region. A growing body of literature affirms the need for place-based educational initiatives. Through interviews with faculty, upper level students, alumni, and community leaders the project is examining the college-community connections and how a focus on the particulars of our place can strengthen liberal arts education at Calvin. If you have any questions regarding Embrace Our Place or the Teagle project, please contact Dr. Gail Gunst Heff-