



# JUBILEE PARTNERS REPORT

## Spring 2018

*“Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and everyone else. Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.”*

— 1 Thessalonians 5:15-16 NIV

From time to time people ask, “What’s it like to live at Jubilee? What’s a typical day like — especially when Washington has blocked the usual flow of families from the international refugee agencies?”

And the honest answer is that life at Jubilee bustles and hums, with projects and chores and gatherings. Plenty of surprises, too. We hope it will be of interest to many of you to get a quick scan of a Jubilee day, so more or less at random we have chosen: **February 22.**

**6:55 a.m.** A mild morning. Gray skies over northeast Georgia. And Robbie and Al are going to visit prisoners on death row. Al calls these “friendship visits” — a couple hours to check on a prisoner’s individual needs, his family situation, or discuss matters inside and outside the walls. They plan to visit four inmates, men they have known many years, and drive back to Jubilee in time for dinner.

**7:21 a.m.** Russ bikes to the garden to check on Elsie the cow. Elsie’s belly has grown round as a tractor tire. She is 282 days pregnant today. Usually 283 days is a full term. Elsie’s calf might come any hour. Russ, the resident partner who tends the cows, says Elsie calved a week early last time. So maybe today? Well, maybe.

**7:33 a.m.** Where are the car seats?

We have four Jubilee children who need a ride to school. Three kids need car seats. And two car seats have disappeared from our Toyota van. What can we do? We borrow a neighbor’s car seat for one little passenger and promote a five-year-old to a regular seat for the morning. Then we’re on our way to Comer Elementary and Head Start. The whole arrangement isn’t perfect, but we are trying our best with what we have. (We later learn that the missing seats have gone with Robbie and Al to visit death row.)



PHOTO CREDIT: RICK SIMPSON

**Pre-K class is going strong! Sometimes six or more 3-5’s with teachers Teresa and Corina plus an assistant — so much potential in one space.**

**9:23 a.m.** The bell rings outside Jubilee School in our Refugee Welcome Center. A few minutes later, English classes begin. Our students include former refugees who have settled nearby in Comer after completing our two-month refugee program. The classes are divided by proficiency, beginners to advanced learners. In the intermediate class, our neighbor Yue Mi works on conversation starters. “Tell me about your family?” she says.

**Noon.** About forty of us gather in the Koinonia House. Today, instead of regular devotions, we have a special report from resident partner Sue.

Sue has just returned from a week of intensive work in the country’s largest immigrant detention center for families: the South Texas Family Residential Center. It is a converted oil workers’ camp in Dilley, Texas. The detention center opened in 2014, when a surge of asylum-seekers came across the U.S.-Mexico border. The so-called “baby jail” can house an estimated 2,400 women and children.

If an immigrant woman, traveling with small children and no papers, is detained there is a good chance she will be taken to the Dilley detention center. Sue has just met dozens of these mothers, helping to prepare them for the uphill path to legal asylum.



PHOTO CREDIT : PETE DYBDAHL

**MuLa Paw and the smallest egg! Bigger, more wonderful news is that MuLa Paw’s adoption by Russ and Christina was finalized at the end of 2017. We thank God!**

“I am full and running over with what happened last week,” Sue says. Then she starts with a prayer for oppressed people in all places, people made in the image of their creator.

Sue sketches a composite portrait of a typical woman held in detention in Dilley. She is a mother. She probably comes from the “northern triangle” of Central America: El Salvador, Guatemala, or Honduras. She has suffered violence and brutality, maybe at the hands of an abusive boyfriend, or the gang that hijacked her bus every payday and took half her salary. Maybe she went to the police. Maybe that put her at greater risk. Maybe she saved up for the trip, or gathered her children and ran, begging rides north.

Sue emphasizes this truth about mothers who flee to the U.S.: “A woman with small children does not *want* to travel long distances to a strange land. She does it to survive.”

If a new arrival to the U.S. tells border officials she is afraid to return home, she is granted a “credible fear interview.” The screening focuses on her background and her fears. How do you pass your credible fear interview? Passing means you have a “significant possibility” of convincing an immigration judge you would face persecution or death if you returned to your home country.

Sue’s work was to prepare the detainee for their interviews. She would listen to the women, and help them fit their histories to the narrow definitions of persecution and asylum law. For the week, she was part of a nine-person team volunteering with a legal aid group called CARA. (Her trip was in response to an urgent call from Caya Simonsen — a “JP kid” who lived at Jubilee for most of her first 15 years and is now the volunteer coordinator for CARA.) “We have a difficult task ahead but it will be worth it,” Sue often told the women.





PHOTO CREDIT : TRACY NEWTON

**“Repent.” “Remember you are dust.” We enter into Lent with ashes on our foreheads, led by our Karenni neighbors.**

More than 99-percent of the women that CARA supports pass their interviews, the group says. But the women still face a difficult and often confusing path to asylum. They may be required to pay a bond as high as \$5,000 for their release or wear an ankle monitor. They must make regular check-ins with immigration officials. And ultimately, they must prove their case to an immigration judge before being legally welcomed into the U.S. In 2016, 57-percent of all asylum cases were denied, according to the Justice Department. The immigration court in Atlanta denied 98-percent of all asylum cases.

Volunteering at the detention center, Sue says, brought back memories of her work with the Mennonite Central Committee in El Salvador in the 1980s. Then, it was civil war. Now, it is an incomprehensible war zone of drugs and gangs and broken social institutions. Sue was reminded of the senselessness of violence. “I was really moved by the passion and the compassion of the people who work tirelessly with these courageous women and their children,” she says.

As the time ends, Sue’s thoughts turn outdoors. Wildflowers are blooming at Jubilee. It is unseasonably warm for February. The peach and plum trees are covered with purple and white flowers. For grace, she chooses the hymn “For the Beauty of the Earth.”

**12:33 p.m.** Coffee Worth announces a special guest: her old friend, Soon Ja. The two met while Coffee, a Presbyterian missionary for decades, was working at a South Korean orphanage in the early 1970s. Almost a half century later, Soon Ja has come to Jubilee for lunch. We are having pinto beans, sweet potato cornbread, cooked cabbage, and cabbage coleslaw. The garden coordinator, Tracy, harvested nine heads of cabbage this morning.

**1:30 p.m.** “K House” cleaning begins. It’s our weekly deep clean of the main community building, the Koinonia House, and surrounding areas. If a thing can be scrubbed or swept or mopped or vacuumed, then it is.

**3 p.m.** Construction continues at the Beech House, a new 144-square foot “small house.” The afternoon’s work includes pouring concrete into post holes around posts made from 2x4s. The lumber comes from pine that was felled, milled, and dried at Jubilee. The building crew includes several long-time friends who are visiting for the week: former volunteers Greg and Jenny Huang-Dale from Maine and former resident partner Steve Bjork, visiting from Boston. Our “extended guest” from the Bruderhof communities, Arthur Noble, coordinates the crew.

**3:49 p.m.** While gathering eggs, Jubilee kid MuLa Paw gets a surprise: a chicken egg no larger than a grape. The tiny egg raises suspicions there might be a quail hiding (and laying) in the henhouse. MuLa Paw and her mom, Christina, investigate. No quail. It’s just one of those things.

**4:44 p.m.** Elsie the cow is hiding behind a hay bale, still grazing. No calf.



PHOTO CREDIT : TRACY NEWTON

**5:30 p.m.** Dance fitness class begins at the Jubilee School. The school building has become an impromptu community center for Jubilee's ever-growing circle of friends and neighbors. In recent months, it has hosted a funeral, worship services for former Karenni refugees, a weaving workshop, a women's group, a youth group, and vocational workshops. For the past year, Comer neighbor Mia Townsend has been leading fitness classes. Mia says to drop by if you're in town.

**7:30 p.m.** Small group time in the Jubilee library. Jubilee's Sunday worship services typically include five or six dozen people, drawn from many backgrounds. This winter, many members of the worship community also started meeting in small groups each week. It was a recommendation from a recent pastoral visit — that we make time to listen to one another and deepen our friendships. Meetings usually center on sharing, prayer, and a weekly scripture reading. (This week's reading is from 1 Thessalonians 5: "Rejoice always...") The evening is so sweetly mild that the group gathered in the library leaves the door open. Soon, they hear voices singing nearby. The group breaks early to join the...

**8:11 p.m.** Singing in the Koinonia House. Our visitors from Maine, Greg and Jenny, teach the folks in the dining room a new song. "Give me moon in the nighttime," it goes, "moon in the nighttime to sing my soul awake."

**9:55 p.m.** Five minutes until quiet hours and the K House is still. (PS. Elsie gave birth to a fine heifer calf a few hours later.)

from the people of Jubilee



PHOTO CREDIT: EMMA STUTZMAN



PHOTO CREDIT: RANGSEY CHENG

(clockwise) "We like this reading loft!" says this Eastern Mennonite University group of energetic spring-breakers. "Babies in Box Houses" enjoy many childcare hours of play. Mondays after school, **HIGH SCHOOL HANGOUT** brings together two dozen students for games, talk, and good food with Jubilee staff and neighbors facilitating.



PHOTO CREDIT: PETE DYBDAL





PHOTO CREDIT : RICK SIMPSON

Our newly renovated House #1 is finished! The banner (above) thanks First Presbyterian Church of Athens, GA for their labor and generous funding. Open house drew a small crowd in mid-February, including (below right) Apprentice Cristy Fossum and long-time neighbor Cathy Pentz who are enjoying the new kitchen/dining area.



Along with costumes, tamales & atole, Ms Daikon Radish (Sara) & Ms Kale (Tracy) pose as we celebrated Chelsea's (aka Elsa of *Frozen's*) 4th Birthday. (The Jubilee garden WAS quite frozen as well at that time!)



PHOTO CREDIT : RICK SIMPSON

### Who we are

Jubilee Partners is an intentional Christian service community in north Georgia. Our primary ministry is offering hospitality to newly arrived refugees. We are a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization; donations are thus tax-deductible. Your donations and support of our work are most appreciated.

Jubilee Partners Box 68 , Comer, GA 30629 706-783-5131  
[www.jubileepartners.org](http://www.jubileepartners.org)

*View Jubilee's newsletter in color online at [www.jubileepartners.org](http://www.jubileepartners.org)!*



*Jubilee Partners*  
*P.O. Box 68*  
*Comer, GA 30629*

Non-Profit Organization  
U.S. Postage is  
PAID  
Athens, Georgia  
Permit Number 14



**Spring 2018**



PHOTO CREDIT: ANGIE MARTIN

A lively "Womens Group" meeting of Karenni and Karen weavers (Hsut Po, Prei Mo, Shae Meh, and Soe Myar) demonstrate and teach eager learners—interested fellow-weavers from North Carolina, UGA students, and many of us who live here. The event was facilitated by neighbor and former volunteer Mia Townsend. Contact: [theweavingwomen@gmail.com](mailto:theweavingwomen@gmail.com)