

JUBILEE PARTNERS REPORT

Winter 2017



"Jesus answered, 'Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.'"

John 14:23

Somali poet Warsan Shire insists that "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark..." And then in disturbing detail she describes the suffering of what is being experienced by over 60 million of our brothers and sisters around the globe at this very moment, internally displaced people and refugees who have been forcibly driven from their homes. This fall two Colombian women, Karen and Jardely have made a temporary home at Jubilee by two different paths. Karen's home in Colombia became "the mouth of a shark," and she left with her two young children as a refugee. Jardely left Colombia temporarily to continue her work for peace in our volunteer program. The two women are delighted to discover a "home" together for a while at Jubilee Partners in Comer, Georgia.

Karen has happy memories growing up in Valle del Cauca in the city of Buenaventura. Her mother taught at her elementary school. Her paternal grandfather and uncle were important in her life though she did not know her father. Karen says that Jubilee reminds her of a beautiful farm where she and her family would go for vacations. They traveled up a river on a large passenger boat to reach the farm. On one such trip, however, when Karen was nine years old, the boat collided with something in the middle of the night. Many people died screaming in the panic and chaos. Her family survived, but the frightening memories are still with her. She says they are mixed with happy memories as well, such as her enjoyment of the animals there and watching television with other children when the electricity came on for several hours every night. One time a friend baked her a special birthday cake, decorating it with colors that matched her outfit, and she still laughs describing kids gathered around snatching bits of icing.



Karen, Enzo, and Zara are making a new home in the US after fleeing violence in Colombia.

Moving on through school, Karen began university studies in sociology. She met her husband, Javier, and they had a baby boy, Enzo. As their home grew in love, her neighborhood was changing dramatically. The time came when, she says, "We had to go because of *la violencia*."

There were two primary reasons for this increasing violence. The first was the movement into Buenaventura of the widespread armed conflict plaguing parts of Colombia for more than 50 years: conflict between paramilitary factions in which nearby civilians suffered injury, death, kidnapping, child recruitment, sexual vio-

You can read the Jubilee newsletters as well as the *Jubilee Journals*
on our website www.jubileepartners.org

Inside this newsletter you will find the third edition of *The Jubilee Journal*, designed by our English class students and their kids. In this edition, our students talk about the theme of *home*. Read our newsletters as well as our *Jubilee Journals* on our website www.jubileepartners.org

lence, and displacement. At 6.8 million, Colombia's population of internally displaced persons is second only to Syria's. The other great threat to Karen's family was the intensification of the drug wars, which force many young boys into violent gangs. There are signs of hope in positive intervention by Colombia's government, but even that has been compromised by corruption and collusion on the part of government officials.

Karen's personal experience in this began in a neighborhood so quiet and calm that "people didn't know the place... but then the calm disappeared." The cycle of boys becoming gang members intensified. (Her husband Javier withstood the pressure, largely because of strong family support.) By 2014, gangs were in control, making rules which the local people must obey or suffer severe consequences. People were no longer free to come and go as before.



(L-R) Jardely, MuLa Paw, Hannah, and Tree at our Thanksgiving gathering.

The terror escalated. Rival gangs set off two bombs at a soccer field in her town, killing and injuring children. Karen saw the flashes of the explosions. A childhood friend of Javier's was killed, and Javier knew it could happen to him. He also witnessed a murder in a small market where a shopkeeper was shot for refusing to pay safe money—*la vacuna*. When Javier started receiving a small income for work related to a university practicum, he was pressured to pay the extra "tax." Once he graduated, they decided it was time for their family to leave.

Goodbyes were too risky. They packed their bags and fled across the border to Ecuador. There they found Quito Mennonite Church, which became family to them. Over the next two years, their second child, Zara, was born, as they worked to obtain refugee status. Karen and the children were among the lucky few who were prioritized to enter the US, but Javier is still in Ecuador awaiting agency sponsorship so he can reunite with his family.

When Jardely came to volunteer at Jubilee for this fall term, she was actually returning. Her parents, Diego and Luz Elena, are Mennonite Brethren ministers who lived at Jubilee in 2006 as part of a North-South Exchange Program. She was nine and remembers spending a lot of time with the children of staff and refugee families, especially with Blake and Sue's daughter, Jenny. (She laughs as she recalls her parents exclaiming, "What? You're not sleeping at our house again tonight?") Attending English classes with other children from all over the world—Congo, Burundi, Iraq, Sudan—was fun and formative. "We played every day, we were always together." She loved the Jubilee volunteers too.



Our Thanksgiving celebration this year brought together 340 friends from 11 countries.

This experience kindled in Jardely a deep desire for a diversity of people in her life. That led to her application eleven years later to join Jubilee's volunteer program, eager to come "home." She has become an integral part of the group of ten people on our excellent fall volunteer team.

Jardely cherishes the beauty and customs of Colombia and has a good life there, but she's keenly aware of her nation's deep problems. Though she has not suffered the imminent danger from which Karen fled, day-to-day life in the country's capital of Bogota has its own issues. "I would never walk on the street with a phone or ear buds or other distractions. I must appear neutral but confident, cold with no emotion, and alert. I am always suspicious, thinking, 'What's in their hands? Who is walking behind me? What are they wearing?' I am sorry to have to be suspicious, but the situation makes it necessary." While traveling, her family has been stopped at checkpoints by paramilitaries, though never detained.

Filled with hope that Colombians will heal and reconcile, Jardely has been part of peace-making initiatives like "Building Leaders for Peace," organized by Mennonite churches and other organizations. Last summer, around 55 people of all ages attended a camp preparing themselves for the tough work of peacemaking: facing up to past and present conflict, consoling those who hurt, forgiving perpetrators who are also victims and who may be neighbors, working together in the future. In June 2018 there will be a second camp with additional individuals to continue these efforts on a larger scale.

"Our eyes have been opened to the work to be done, but we have also learned about many resources for this task," Jardely says, then adds, "*Trabajo! Trabajo! Trabajo! Work! Work! Work!*" She is committed to the work and excited about using her education and talent through community art and social media. Jardely is another link in the long chain that connects Jubilee to peacemaking all over the globe.

As we give thanks for these two courageous women we also give thanks to a loving God who dwells within us wherever we are. In John 14, Jesus promises, "those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them." We pray that each person, near and far, can find a safe and peaceful home.



Longtime friends Stephen Speakman & Natalie Schmucker shared the joy of their wedding at Jubilee this fall.

from the people of Jubilee

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.

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The past few months have been filled with celebration! In October we commemorated the 98th birthday of Coffee Worth. Friends and family lined the sidewalk with streamers and applause to kick off the festivities.