

# In Need of an Angel

*In the March 16 issue, PEOPLE began a new series with profiles of six ordinary Americans who have extraordinary approaches to life. Each had found a surprisingly direct way to help fight one of the country's seemingly insoluble problems: AIDS, poverty, hunger or mental retardation. At a time when charitable people often feel powerless, we wanted to call attention*

*to those who have shown what a difference one person can make. The response was enormous. Many readers sent word of inspiring projects in their own communities and many others sent help to the samaritans on whom we reported. Clearly there is plenty of will for helping once a way has been found. Here we present five more people who have found such ways.*

## Unwanted babies find a Father's love

The house is dim and smells damp, maybe because it's old and furnished with castoffs. A 6'2" priest with a booming voice walks through the living room, which is lined with cribs. Babies with heads full of curls reach up from their little pens, pleading to be picked up and held. One by one, Father John Fagan obliges them. Then he retreats to be alone, and to cry.

"I thought," he explains later, "My God, dear Jesus, there has got to be a better way. We've just got to find mamas for these babies."

The 10 babies for whom this Brooklyn brownstone is home are a tiny percentage of the 300 "boarder babies" in New York City. Others are left to languish in hospitals for weeks, often months, until they're claimed by someone. The term "boarder baby" accurately describes their state of limbo. Their mothers are child abusers or drug addicts who can't care for them, and the state can't or won't work fast enough to find them foster homes.

"I got a call last year from a state worker who told me the situation with these babies was so bad that they were sleeping in social service offices at night," Father Fagan recalls. "I was asked to open our house in Brooklyn, which had been a home for wayward girls, until foster homes could be found. Well, I agreed to that." What he didn't foresee was becoming so deeply involved that he couldn't bear simply to warehouse the babies until the mothers

or the state could get their act together. "They were reaching up at me," he says. "They're not supposed to be able to talk yet, but they can. They said to me, 'Get me out of here.' They said, 'Hold me—not me and him, just me. I want all of your attention and affection. I don't want to stay in this crib.'"

So last November Father Fagan, a 60-year-old monsignor straight out of central casting, started seeking good, temporary homes. He'll take single women, men, couples or families, just as long as they're loving and will care for the child at least 100 days. "Don't ask me for one sex or say, 'I only want a Jewish baby or a Catholic baby or a white or a black or Hispanic,'" says Fagan. Most of the kids are black (75 percent) or Hispanic (15 percent). "The first baby that needs you—that's the deal." After 100 days, the baby goes back to its mother (if she has completed rehabilitation) or the foster parent can begin preadoptive procedures. Fagan has placed 84 babies in the last five months.

And yet the monsignor still weeps. "I'm playing catch-up," he says. "Family life is where it's at. These children belong with someone who loves them unconditionally, warts and all, and that means a mother and father. If they never experience love," he asks, "how can they love anyone else?"

**Father John Fagan, Little Guys Program, 200 Montague Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201** □



EVELYN FLORET



Cintha Price, who used to live in a hovel, joins Bill Braun behind the screen door of the house he helped build for her.

## A builder puts a roof over Appalachia's poor

A shack and two decrepit trailers linked by a leaky wood roof. No bathroom. No heating system. For years this was home to Cintha Price, a 73-year-old widow in Harlan, Ky. "It would be warmer in a deep freezer than in that old house," recalls Price, who relied on coal fires when winter temperatures hit single digits. With neither the funds nor the dexterity to make simple repairs, Price watched her home decay around her.

Bill Braun, 37, who worked as a carpenter for 15 years in Oregon, didn't think it fair that Price and others like her should face such poverty. "I was building houses for people who could find someone else to do it," he says. "But in Appalachia, if someone like me didn't do it, it wouldn't get done." So in 1985 Braun moved with his wife, Joyce, and his daughter, Margaret, now 8, to Harlan County, one of this country's poorest regions. He has now helped build and renovate homes for 40 families or individuals, including Price. She now

lives in a two-bedroom house made of maintenance-free materials with lots of insulation to keep her warm. "These jobs aren't picnic sites, but I'm glad I came here," says Braun, who receives housing, food and expense money from his Mennonite church. "The best advice I can give to someone who wants to volunteer is to do it. Don't put it off."

Braun discovered the rewards of sharing his skills when a national branch of his church put him in touch with the Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises in 1985. Formed in 1980, this private agency has helped thousands of people renovate and build homes in areas where as much as 26 percent of the population lives below the poverty line. In 1986 the Federation started building 65 homes (52 are finished) and renovating 212 others. The Federation members hire unemployed local people to work at low wages and learn building skills: Cintha Price's son, William, an unemployed mining electrician, worked for 15 months, then got a permanent job as an electrician. Always in need of lumber, drywall, vinyl siding and smaller supplies such as power tools and tape

measures, the Federation also wants to attract more volunteers. Though retired electricians, plumbers and carpenters would be the most useful, anyone with as little as two weeks to spare can help.

Convinced that housing is the key to Appalachia's recovery, the Federation's executive director, David Lollis, gave up his own paycheck for two months last year when funds ran low. "It means we failed to make donors realize how important our cause is," he says. Lollis doesn't need to explain the rewards to those who work with him. One home that Bill Braun helped build was for Jean Shepherd, 47, who lost one leg in a gun accident and was living with her son, John, 16, in a rotting, rat-infested shack. "Her son now has a room that's private and warm where he can do his homework," says Braun. "That affects how he does in school, which affects his whole future." Braun also put up drywall for bedridden Polly Campbell, 89. Afterward, she took his hand in hers. "God bless you," she said. "You did a wonderful job." She was right.

**Federation of Appalachian Housing Enterprises, Drawer B, Berea, Ky. 40403** □

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## Kids get more than cots from a Detroit shelter's den mother

Jarrie Tent loves children, but she sees too many of them in her job as executive director of Detroit's Coalition on Temporary Shelter. She has seen a mother break a tiny peppermint candy in half so that her hungry child could have two separate snacks. She has seen women who come to the shelter with their infants right after giving birth. "What is there here for kids?" asks Tent. "We have a park down the street, but it's not safe. We have a couple of toys, but it's not enough. We let them run up and down the hallway for an hour every day, but what kind of recreation is that?"

After seeing 827 such children last year pass through the shelter she runs, Tent, 48, stopped hoping they would all return to normal life. "Even if their parents find a house," says Tent, a divorced mother of two, "it's usually so deteriorated that they are often forced to roam from one slum to the next and finally return to us." So Tent is starting a crusade. She plans to extend the 100-bed COTS shelter to include a third floor with a children's art workshop and play school. "Do you know

what it would mean to these kids to have someone read them a book or bring crayons and draw a picture?" she asks. "It would broaden their universe." To achieve her goal, Tent needs carpenters to renovate the place, music and art teachers, and supplies: books, paint, crayons, paper, a cassette player for taping stories. She will even ask the Detroit school system to open a one-room schoolhouse for the kids, who usually spend between 10 days and two months at the shelter. "Changing schools as they move is a real problem for them," she says. "And a classroom here might help their stability."

A housing shelter that caters to kids will be a rarity but not an impossibility for Tent, a high school dropout and former drug addict who pulled her life together and eventually opened the COTS shelter in 1982. "Once I got off drugs, I saw I could do anything," she says. Her duties have ranged from scrubbing the bathroom to running the whole place.

Shelter directors across the country who have seen the number of

homeless increase by 20 percent in recent months agree with Tent that volunteers can readily help out even if their time is limited. Casa Juan Diego, a shelter for Central American refugees in Houston, needs volunteer doctors, English teachers and legal advisers, along with laundry soap, dish soap and disposable diapers. McKinnell Emergency Shelter in Anchorage needs people to teach the homeless about child care and needs babysitters to free young mothers for job hunting.

Even if Tent doesn't yet have the resources she wants, she still has her raspy laugh to cheer her guests. When one little girl, wearing colored barrettes and bright yellow shoes, sees Tent, she peeks out from behind her mother and smiles. The feeling is mutual. "This job does more good for me," claims Tent, "than it does for anyone else."

***The Coalition on Temporary Shelter, 26 Peterboro, Detroit, Mich. 48201. For information about other shelters: Coalition for the Homeless, 105 E. 22 Street, New York, N.Y. 10010*** □

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**"I see the disillusionment in children's eyes," says Jarrie Tent, here counseling a family that can't find a home.**



## A Pittsburgh neighbor's plot turns slums into budding havens

Every May a variant of Paul Revere's cry rings out in Pittsburgh: "The plants are coming! The plants are coming!" The message arrives courtesy of Fannie Royston, who provides \$7,000 to \$10,000 worth of seedlings every year to the poorest sections of the city, turning empty lots into bountiful gardens. Cabbages and beans are just part of Royston's crop. With her help, the devastated blocks of her own South Oakland neighborhood began a remarkable renewal. Houses worth \$6,000 about 10 years ago now cost \$60,000, hungry stomachs have been filled by fresh vegetables and crime has decreased.

For a quarter of a century Royston, now 68, has been a one-woman relief agency. Angry that black children rarely succeeded at the local elementary school, she used to hire tutors, who gave remedial help in her home. She also taught a thing or two to adults who played cards and drank late into the night: "I took a big pot and a metal spoon and I walked through the streets banging on that thing and yelling for them to go to sleep. No wonder their kids were doing so poorly with the

noise those parents made at all hours." Royston has helped teenagers get out of jail and find work, paid rent for her poor neighbors, and bought clothes and food for needy children. In the '60s she defied the racism of the community—and protests of neighbors, who dumped garbage in her yard—by taking in a sick white woman.

Of all Royston's causes, the gardens, which are cared for by both blacks and whites, come first. She began by growing seedlings in her basement and bathroom. Then she persuaded the city to assign 100 delinquent kids to help clear debris from vacant lots and later plant the gardens. Now Royston buys her plants from a mental hospital greenhouse with money she earns working overtime at a post office sorting machine.

Fannie's gardening instincts go back to Georgia, where her father was a sharecropper. After his death, the 13-member family moved to Pittsburgh to run a restaurant and live in a three-room flat. Fannie went to school at 13 with only one cotton dress to wear during winter. At 17, she married a well-off mechanic, moved to a better area and

later did sewing for rich families. "Oh yes, I could dress," she says. "'Quiet elegance' I learned from my clients." After her husband died in 1963, Royston went walking in her leather coat and cashmere dress through South Oakland. The contrast between her comfortable adult life and the decay she saw distressed her. That day she decided to settle there and help others overcome poverty just as she did.

Last year while Royston was in Washington, D.C. to receive a community service award, a stranger handed her an envelope. Inside she found \$5,000 from the donor—millionaire H. Ross Perot. Unfortunately that's the best news she's had lately. Recent cutbacks in corporate giving have hurt—she lost \$2,000 a year when Gulf Oil moved out of town—and she wonders whether she'll be able to afford the new truck, manure and seedlings she needs this year. But Fannie Royston won't stop fighting. "When folks tell me I can't do something," she says, "I just go ahead and do it anyway."

**Families and Gardens, Inc., 1000 Allegheny Building, Pittsburgh, Pa. 15219** □

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**"In a dream I had, a voice said, 'Plant gardens,' " says Royston, who delivers onion sets to neighbor Marianna Jankowski.**



## Harvard's helping hands join a new brigade of campus activists



RICHARD HOWARD

In Harvard Yard junior Jim Morris brings his deaf friend Manuel Alvarado a step closer to the hearing world.

As newspapers and movies tell it, college kids of the '80s are a bunch of soulless yuppies-in-training, and Jim Morris, 20, seems to fit the pattern to a T-shirt. He is smart, ambitious, wears prototypical preppy clothes and goes to Harvard. What's on Morris' mind these days, however, isn't stocks or a new Porsche but Manuel Alvarado, an 8-year-old who is deaf. Every other week, Jim and Manuel spend a day together, fishing, playing basketball or hanging around Harvard Yard. They communicate easily because Morris has studied signing since his freshman year and used the technique while organizing activities at a center for the deaf, where Manuel became his pal. "Signing is a beautiful and expressive language," says Morris, a junior majoring in history and science. "And Manuel is like the brother I never had."

Morris is not the lone conscience at Harvard. He is a member of Phillips Brooks House, the country's oldest student volunteer group, which has 950 members, nearly twice as many as 10 years ago. Founded in 1894, PBH's roster has included Franklin Roosevelt, Ted Kennedy and Henry Kissinger.

Raising all their own operating costs, the group's volunteers—mostly undergrads but also any locals who want to help—serve 13,500 needy people with 30 separate projects. They shop with the elderly, tutor inner-city high school students and, under Morris' guidance, work with the deaf. This year Cambridge chose PBH to run a shelter for 23 homeless men.

"Students want to give of themselves," says PBH president Shawn MacDonald, a junior who volunteers 40 hours a week to run the place and work with handicapped kids. Plenty of other campuses share that spirit. Nationwide, 15 to 25 percent of college kids do volunteer work, and the numbers keep growing: The Campus Outreach Opportunity League, a student volunteer network, now serves 250 colleges. This month The National Hunger Cleanup recruited 6,000 students in 55 cities to work in soup kitchens, clean up parks and repair tenements in a one-day antipoverty campaign.

Despite limited funds and an especially desperate need for vehicles, PBH has come up with some bold ways to provide service. Mary Ellen

Ronayne, 20, a sophomore majoring in history and literature, wasn't content to work 12 hours a week in a literacy program; knowing there were thousands of illiterates in Cambridge alone, she formed a group that goes door to door telling people how to get help. "I might go into teaching," she says now. "Some people can't imagine that of a Harvard graduate. They think Harvard means you're going to make a lot of money. But teaching has made a big difference in my life and I want to do the same for others." Many of those taught at the center have gotten off welfare and found jobs. Nellie Dedmon, now 44, who went to the learning center 13 years ago as a welfare mother, got her high school diploma and now teaches at the center herself. Says Nellie, grinning, "I even took a course at Harvard along the way."

**Phillips Brooks House, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. 02138** □

—Written by Michael Small and Benilde Little, reported by Jane Beckwith, Barbara Cornell, Maria Leonhauser and William Sonzski