**Building Bridges at Bethany**

*Bridges* come in all sizes and shapes. Magnificent structures connect islands with the mainland. Covered bridges shelter the traveler crossing over the small river below. *Bridges* must be built with an inner core of strength to withstand frequent use, and they must be maintained to endure. Sometimes they may need strengthening, or jacking up or refurbishing if they are to last throughout their lifetime.

But, not all bridges are built of steel and concrete. Some are built of love, patience, understanding, knowledge and encouragement. These are the *bridges* that people build and maintain throughout their lives. They span the gap between relationships, between generations, between goals and accomplishments. They too sometimes need strengthening, jacking up or refurbishing. So many famous *bridges* have changed the worlds in which they have been constructed. And so it is at Bethany House where every day our mission is *building bridges* that help people find their way to the places they want to be.

Sometimes women and children come to us leaving burned *bridges* behind, and they have no clear place to go. The gap between the place they have been and the place they want to be is too wide for them to navigate on their own. They don't know what is on the other side, and they have no hope to help them get there.

One of the first *bridges* that we build in Bethany House spans across the feeling of helplessness to the new feeling of hope for the future. When the women and children first enter the doors of one of our homes, they immediately sense that they have crossed over into a safe place full of caring individuals who will help them in every possible way. They soon realize that they have much in common with the other guests who live there and start to build "relationship bridges" among themselves. The grownups share their troubles and fears and encourage and listen to each other. The children feel secure and start to feel free to enjoy playing with each other. As the foundations of these *bridges* are being built, the guests learn, that they can build their own core strength with the help and support of a caring, knowledgeable staff and the mutual understanding that comes from the other guests who live with them.

Sometimes, a person in need comes to live at Bethany and knows how to *build bridges*. One day a middle-age woman named Sophie, through no fault of her own, found herself with no home, no relatives, unable to work, in a hospital and with no place to go upon her release. She came to Bethany and soon found herself in a "family" and began to reach out to the younger women and children. They say: "She's like a Mother to us; we can tell her things and talk about 'girl stuff' with her." Sophie feels that she is an "extremely fortunate individual" who loves living in a home and is so happy to be of help to "the girls." She was in the hospital for 3 weeks and received many cards and when she came back home to Bethany there was a big WELCOME HOME sign waiting for her. She was missed. When her health is improved, she hopes to cross that bridge and have a place of her own. Whenever that happens, you know that she will use that same bridge to come back to Bethany and help others.

That's what people do. Mary is a young woman who came to Bethany, found the foundation she needed to help her bridge the gap between her difficulties and her goal of getting an education, and succeeded beyond her dreams. She has never forgotten Bethany and crosses back over the bridge often to visit and to offer her encouragement and help. One day she met Sophie who had just discovered that she had a long, lost brother in a Veteran's Hospital. She had no hope of traveling the distance to see him until Mary said, "I have a car. I can take you to visit your brother. When do you want to go?"

You can see that Bethany's mission of empowering the women and children begins with crossing that first *bridge*. These *bridges* that are built and exist between the staff, the many volunteers and supporters and the guests are the *bridges* that withstand the test of time because they are built on a sturdy foundation of compassion, caring and human goodness. Thank you for everything that you do and every *bridge* that you build.

*Jessie Fentnor*
A Bridge of Compassion

Supervisor Kate Murray is a woman who has helped to lift the hearts and spirits of others, particularly other women. She is a wonderful example of compassion to all of us, particularly to us at Bethany. She has faced many challenges in her life and has always done so with grace, patience and a warm sense of humor. Throughout it all, she has never lost sight of others who struggle and are in need of encouragement and support...and she has given it.

Therefore, we were pleased that she could be with on Thursday evening, October 19, 2006 when Bethany House hosted our Annual Fall Fashion Show and Awards Dinner at the Long Island Marriott Hotel in Uniondale. This is always a special event for us because our staff, volunteers, and friends all gather to celebrate and refresh our commitments to our mission of empowering women and children.

And on that occasion, it was very appropriate that we presented our Fifth Annual Sursum Corda Award to An Outstanding Woman of Compassion, Supervisor Kate Murray. Sursum Corda is a Latin phrase meaning “Lift up your hearts!” and Bethany House was honored to present this award to Supervisor Murray because she has lifted the hearts of so many of us. Her generosity to those in need, especially to women and children, has touched countless lives here in the Town of Hempstead and far beyond. We are thankful for the Bridge of Compassion that has brought us together and will continue to help us on our journey for many years to come.

Kate Murray was the first woman to be elected Supervisor in Hempstead Town’s 361-year history, and she is no stranger to shattering the glass ceiling and accomplishing a host of impressive “firsts” in her career. Before serving as Supervisor of America’s largest township, she was the first woman and first attorney to be elected Town Clerk. On February 3, 1998, Kate Murray became the first woman elected to the New York State Assembly from the 19th District.

A graduate of Boston College and Suffolk University Law School, Supervisor Murray now serves as the Chief Executive Officer of the Town of Hempstead and oversees a budget of $371.7 million and the day-to-day operations of a municipality with more than 2,100 employees, and the provision of services to some 762,000 residents.

GREAT NEWS:

Bethany’s WEB SITE is up and running!

Please visit us at www.bethanyhouseny.com

Special thanks to
Colin Cuskley and Joe Hanshe
for their expert help!
A Bridge from the Capitol
Congresswoman McCarthy Visits Bethany

Monday, July 10th was not only a "Red Letter Day" at Bethany House; it was a "Red, White and Blue Day" also. This day was so very special because our own Congresswoman Carolyn McCarthy came to visit our young children at Bethany South to talk to them about Patriotism. Everyone sat outside in a semi-circle holding American flags as they listened to the Congresswoman speak about the freedoms we have in our country and the things that make our country the "greatest in the world." She encouraged the children to read, to learn all they can, and to know that they can choose and be whatever they wish because they are growing up in a wonderful country full of opportunities for all.

The children enjoyed listening and asking questions. Everyone smiled when one little girl asked, "Do you live with the President?" Congresswoman McCarthy laughed and said no, but that she had had a very special ride with the President on his private plane, Air Force One, when he came to Long Island to speak at the U.S. Merchant Marine Academy's Graduation ceremony.

In addition to Congresswoman McCarthy's talk with the children, Bethany was honored to have two veterans come and speak to our children about the meaning of the word "Veteran" and its relationship to our country's history. It was a beautiful sunny day and everyone enjoyed seeing the television camera crews from Long Island News Channel 12 as well as those from TeleCare [Channel 29] as they recorded the program as well as a few interviews with the children.

Before Congresswoman McCarthy left, she toured Bethany South and was very impressed with thrilled how warm and inviting the house is. She then had a pleasant visit with Sister Aimee and Georgia Brown [Resident Director for Bethany South] who told her more about Bethany. The Congresswoman offered to connect us to her grant writer so that we might apply for funding directly through her office in Washington.

This "Red Letter Day" turned out to be a very memorable one for our children and a true learning experience for everyone concerned. Of course, we all felt very proud to have the opportunity to welcome Congresswoman McCarthy to Bethany House!

Jessie Fentner
A Bridge Across an Ocean - Summering at Bethany

From Webster’s Dictionary – *summer*. Function: *noun*.

Etymology: Middle English *sumer*, from Old English *sumor*, akin to Old High German & Old Norse *sumer* summer, Sanskrit *samā* year, season. 1: the season between spring and autumn comprising in the northern hemisphere usually the months of June, July, and August or as reckoned astronomically extending from the June solstice to the September equinox; 2: the warmer half of the year.

Among the upper middle class and more privately among the wealthy, summer also functions as a verb. One summered at Newport or in the Hamptons; budding zions of business summered at camp. To spend one’s summer as a verb meant that one participated in the leisure of activities structured around parties, swimming, tennis and sometimes reading the novel of the summer.

To *summer* is also a verb for some of us at Bethany House, but with a different meaning – though no less exciting. For the past four summers since I moved to Rome, I’ve had the privilege of summering at Bethany House. Two years ago, Bea Mirelli and her husband Vanni Pelagallo came from Rome to spend their summer vacation at Bethany House. One must realize that Italians covet their summer vacation. It is something they plan for, arrange, sift through the subjunctive possibilities of leisure and come, finally, to a decision about what would be best for their spirit – as long as it involves the sun and rest. To give up one’s summer vacation, travel to the United States and work in a homeless shelter is not the normal vacation rite for an Italian.

The following reflection is divided into two parts. The first comes to us from Bea and Vanni and their continued remembrances of the impact that Bethany House has had on their lives. In the second are some of my reflections on what it means to be part of the Bethany family during the summer and the graces that flow into my life because of this opportunity. Daniel C. McDonald, SJ

From Beau Mirelli: Our “Roman Holiday” at Bethany House

*Bethany House* is an unforgettable experience to Vanni, my husband, and to myself even though three years have already passed since we decided to spend our summer holiday in a “different” way. I like saying that it happened by chance and that it was because of a casual meeting in a corridor of the Pontifical University in Rome between a Jesuit Father, who after a while revealed to me that he was the President of the Board of Trustees at Bethany. Why I didn’t know this about him before and why this was mentioned by him before belongs to those little mysteries of life. When my excitement about this revelation was translated into the possibility of going to Bethany House and working I was even more excited.

From the very beginning everything went smoothly and easily and, after a first connection over the phone in April with Sr. Aimee, we found ourselves in front of Bethany’s doors that August. We had no real expectations about Bethany; we were just very curious and longing for this new experience (to most Italians Long Island was the place where stars of Hollywood and from all over the world have their summer cottages and spend their vacations). We were ready to help out with whatever. Fr. Dan, to whom I will be grateful for ever for making this happen, introduced us to the staff and to all the wonderful people (and I proudly say that the majority are women) working at and for Bethany and we enjoyed a marvelous Afro-American-Italian meal. Everyone was very friendly and warm to us “foreigners” from the very beginning and we felt immediately very much at home. Thanks to Sr. Aimee, we had the chance to live in one of the Houses which meant a lot to us since we had the opportunity to live with the women and children day by day and to really experience your country and part of your culture from the very inside which is so different from being a tourist abroad.

We summered at Bethany House, spending four weeks there. Sr. Aimee, Bethany’s real “mother” (but don’t forget her dog “Mama Dog” of course), had scheduled Vanni and me for different tasks and after the first two days which we spent working together repainting one of the bedrooms at Bethany Too, Vanni started to help
Brian and John, the only two men at Bethany—actually his Guardian Angels. He was engaged with the heavy work for the Houses. He helped wash Bethany Too, reorganizing the front yard, helped out with the gardening and took care and moving furniture. I was scheduled for food shopping for the Houses, cleaning the windows, reorganizing a pantry, taking care of the laundry, helping out in the kitchen, sending out invitations for a fashion show on Long Island (which we missed, unfortunately) for fundraising purposes.

Last but not least, we spent the most beautiful time talking to the women during the long, hot summer nights (all day they were all busy with their duties and had to take care of their little babies), never escaping Mama Dog’s protective notice. Above all we keep the fond memories of “our girls,” as we still call them, the ones we lived with at Bethany South: Serene, Krista, Desiree and Bunch.

It was a great experience not least of all because it was in the USA. Most times when we Europeans think of the States, we do not think of shelters and the like. Each time I think of Bethany, my memories go back to the staff and to all of the people working at and for Bethany. There is a great sense of mission and togetherness at Bethany, a sense of being part of a real team that works together and strongly believes in a noble and good cause. One of the authors of Bethany House, of course, is its Executive Director, Sr. Aimee. A strong, caring, enthusiastic person, highly organized, very demanding too, but at the same time always offering chances to her staff and motivating people a lot, which to me is fundamental to be as effective and efficient as Bethany is. I guess Sr. Aimee infected her staff with this kind of incredible mixture of love and rigor. We will also never forget Linda and Lucille, the other two wonderful and brave pioneers of the House.

There is a great sense of care and love in every single detail there and one more time I thought that, yes, little things do make the difference in life. During the night, while sitting in the back yard and talking about their rather dramatic histories of life, the guests told us many times how welcomed they felt when they came to Bethany. I also remember them listening to music in the morning while cleaning up their rooms before leaving for the day. There is, in fact, also a sense of peace at Bethany and I dare say of joy (which was unexpected to us since we always connected the idea of a shelter to an idea of sadness, but Bethany is different). Every time we look at the pictures from Bethany, we just see women and babies with big smiles on their faces. Showing these pictures to Italian friends they hardly believe we snapped these in a shelter for homeless women and their children. The more I think about it, the more I am convinced that the women we met with, in spite of their difficult lives, were very rich in humanity and I start thinking about the actual meaning of the word “poverty” and what this really signing to us people coming from the so called “rich” countries in the western world.

Many good memories and feelings still live in us and it’s not easy to express them all by words, but I am sure that Bethany enriched us and gave us much more than we could possibly give to Bethany. I am now more convinced than before that our human soul and human heart, our dreams and needs are the same beyond any latitude or longitude and while staying at Bethany I thought one more time that the real moving cause of the world is Love. Bethany has simply been one more confirmation.

To summer at Bethany was a transforming experience for us; one we will never forget—and one that sustains us in our daily lives.

More thoughts from Fr. Dan on page 6.
A Bridge of Surprises For Bethany

Sometimes, even those of us who live our lives helping others in need of encouragement and substance find ourselves in a situation that leaves us wanting and discouraged, and we desperately need a Bridge of Surprises. Recently, this happened to Bethany.

In September, we had a burglary at the construction site at Bethany One. Apparently, a crew came over the fence into our back yard, climbed in through the second story extension and, once inside, went through the house in search of items they could use or sell.

They also broke into our shed and took all the new toys that we keep for children's birthdays and special occasions as well as all the extra pampers that were stored there. They stole a number of Bethany's tools and the construction company also lost their ladders and scaffolding equipment. All in all, it was not a very good day for us.

Channel 12 News did a story on the incident, and we hoped for some response from people who might be in a position to help us. A woman who saw the news report called her son and told him what had happened, thinking he might find a way to make things better.

As soon as his mother called, John Theissen contacted Sister Aimée to see what he could do. You see, John is the founder of a most unique organization, The John Theissen Children's Foundation, whose mission it is to provide toys for children in need. And so, the next day Sisters Aimée and Fran went over to John's magical storehouse and filled the van with brand new trucks and dolls, stuffed animals and puzzles, educational toys and backyard games!

Surely John's kindness built a Bridge of Surprises to help Bethany move across and beyond a most difficult experience. Thank you, John, for all your efforts for the children who ask no more from us than to be cherished and loved.

A Great Way To Spend The Summer Vacation

A story is told about a seven-year-old boy, Michael. Michael was a good kid, not particularly gifted with athletics nor with mechanical abilities. He didn't actually do that well in school, either. But he had a great personality and was known for his promptness. One day his mother asked him to go to the store to pick up a gallon of milk. This should have taken about 15 minutes. When Michael didn't return after 30 minutes, his mother became a bit anxious and started peering out the window. Real worry set in after 45 minutes, and she began calling people who lived along the route to the store to see if they had seen Michael. Some minutes after an hour had elapsed; Michael came through the door with the milk carton. His good mother asked him what had happened and why was he so late. Michael said that Tommy's bicycle was in the store parking lot and got hit by a car and he was really concerned about how badly broken the bicycle was and wondered how he could help Tommy. Michael's mother, still somewhat upset said, "But how could you help him? You couldn't fix that bike - you don't know how to fix anything like that." "You are right," Michael said, "but at least I could cry with him."

This story says something about my work at Bethany. Perhaps I cannot actually fix anything, but I can be one with the people who work here and the guests passing through.

In one sense it does not matter what kinds of actual tasks I accomplish. What is important is how Bethany House changes me and how it makes me more compassionate, responsive and more of a believer that human misery can be changed by the spirit of good people — in this case, the good people who work at Bethany to change the lives of these women and children.

Summer is a time to restore ourselves, to recoup our energies for the next year. Bethany restores me because it provides me with the reflections that sustain my life during both good and difficult times. It nourishes my prayer life, informs my teaching — Bethany often makes it into my lectures and is believable because I have first-hand experience. In short it is an active and fond memory of the concrete needs of people that must inform the other parts of my life and God's message to me about action and justice, and this is very much part of what I learn at Bethany each summer — to be a person of more compassion. Compassion saves me from wandering hungry for meaning and without purpose. In summary, Bea and Vanni and I say:

"This is a great way to spend our summer vacations. A great way!" — Dan McDonald, S.J.
A Bridge of Support

Bethany has been blessed with two very special young women, Janie Howard and Sylvia Barnes, recent graduates of Molloy College, who have started a unique support group that was designed expressly for our young mothers and is called Mutual Aid. Through empathetic listening and directed discussion, Janie and Sylvia strive to reduce feelings of isolation and anxiety and to build up self-reliance and confidence in each of the participants.

Although the topics of each meeting are directed by the needs of the group, the primary focus remains on three themes: developing goals and resources, sharing useful information, and preparing for life transitions. In this way, the participants have been able to find the common ground they all share and to build upon it together. It is wonderful to see how they provide a Bridge of Support for one another across the challenging, rough waters of personal growth and individual expression. All this is achieved by simply listening with the heart and offering each other encouragement and understanding.

Janie and Sylvia think of themselves as a small "Cheerleading Squad" which encourages the Bethany women not to do just the bare minimum and settle, but to reach toward the maximum potential of the human spirit and fulfill dreams: each participant is challenged to build a strong foundation while they are at Bethany, and then to set realistic goals of where they want to be in six months, in one year.

The Mutual Aid sessions run consecutively for six weeks at each of the three residences. This Bridge of mutual caring and support is helping our young mothers to better cope with the unique challenges and struggles that face the homeless family and to believe that whatever they want to be they are already becoming! Thank you, Janie and Sylvia for taking the time to build the special Bridges that reach across differences and stand firmly on the common ground that is shared by us all!

JANIE and SYLVIA - We All Thank You!

BUILDING Little BRIDGES
by TURNING to ONE ANOTHER

Ask "What’s possible?" not "What’s wrong?" Keep asking.
Notice what you care about.
Assume that many others share your dreams.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.
Talk to people you know. Talk to people you don’t know.
Talk to people you never talk to.
Be intrigued by the difference you hear.
Expect to be surprised. Treasure curiosity more than certainty.

Invite in everybody who cares to work on what’s possible.
Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.
Know that creative solutions come from new connections.

Remember, you don’t fear people whose story you know.
Real listening always brings people closer together.
Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.

Rely on human goodness. Stay together...
Margaret J. Wheatley

Build your Bridge!
Imagine...

WHAT IT'S LIKE NOT TO HAVE ONE -

Bethany House of Nassau County
102 WHITEHOUSE AVENUE
ROOSEVELT NY 11575
516 868-6866

"a place to come when there's no place to go..."

HOLD THIS DATE

Bethany House
ANNOUNCES ITS
11TH ANNUAL GOLF OUTING

MONDAY JULY 23, 2007

AT
TAM O' SHANTER GOLF CLUB

OUR HONOREES WILL BE
Hugh McNamara
AND
Garden City Printers & Mailers