

THE BRIDGE

Connecting the Fair Haven Community

Spring 2004

GOOD NEIGHBORS

One Woman's Leap of Faith

When Blanca Little chose to give up "the good life" she found a better one here in Fair Haven.

FAIR HAVEN IS HOME TO A LARGE HISPANIC COMMUNITY COMPRISED OF RESIDENTS WHO HAVE ARRIVED HERE FROM NEARLY EVERY SPANISH-SPEAKING COUNTRY IN THE WORLD. English is still a foreign tongue for many who have made this neighborhood their home. As a result, there are first and even second-generation Hispanic children who begin school with little or no experience using the most essential tool they will need to succeed in this country—an understanding of English. Blanca Little remembers well what it is like to be unable to speak English in an English-speaking land. It gives her particular insight into the challenges faced daily by her young students as she helps them to learn to read, write and speak the predominant language of North America.



Blanca Little teaches first and second graders in her bilingual class at Columbus School. She is also the wife of St. James' pastor Geoffrey Little, and together they live and work in Fair Haven, the neighborhood which they are dedicated to serving.

She feels drawn through her Hispanic cultural roots, personal experience and deeply held faith to want to help the young children of this community, especially the Spanish-speaking. Perhaps through fate, it would be Blanca's return to visit her native Cuba in 1998—almost thirty years after she left—that would give her a spiritual insight into the nature of her true self. Seeing again, first hand, the poverty that plagued the Cuban people, she felt inspired to answer a new calling to serve the needs of the greater community as a teacher.

Blanca was born in Cuba in 1959, the very same year that Fidel Castro's guerilla forces toppled the illegal government of army strongman Batista. The rebels hoped to end the poverty and corruption there, but the revolution served to bring to power yet another brutal regime. When she was eleven years old, Blanca left Cuba with her parents and siblings. It was 1970 and the Saborit family was fortunate to be able to arrange a life in the U.S. They settled in Cleveland with no English—and like so many immigrants before them—little money or resources, only plenty of hope. Young Blanca Saborit was a sixth grader and about to meet many unfamiliar faces and make new friends, while learning about a completely different language and culture. Her determination and outgoing personality helped Blanca embrace this American life. Although her family was poor, she was able to finance her education through hard work and a full scholarship to Ohio Wesleyan University. With her bilingual background, it seemed natural she pursue a degree in International Business.

After graduation, Blanca moved to Connecticut, where she began a successful career as an auditor with General Reinsurance. Climbing the corporate ladder, she created an affluent lifestyle for herself in the wealthy New York suburbs of Greenwich. Happily married to a highly paid corporate executive, and earning a six-figure income herself, you might say that Blanca was now living "the good life" and realizing the "Great American Dream".

Travel restrictions to Cuba loosened in the late nineties, and Blanca decided to visit her relatives in Cuba. It would signal a momentous turn of events in her life. Overpowered by the joy and love for life displayed by the Cuban people despite the extreme economic poverty of their daily lives, Blanca witnessed an enormous generosity and spirit of sharing. It made her realize that she needed to do more in her own life than just make money. It was time for her to roll up her sleeves and take on some difficult work. "Jesus calls us to do hard things. If it wasn't hard, people would do it voluntarily!" she quips

Although she was a little terrified of the unknown, Blanca felt compelled to quit corporate life after

twenty years in order to become a teacher. It would be a long path to earning teaching certification and hard to give up her high income, but she felt her husband's income alone was plenty. Sadly, their relationship slowly failed as Blanca's changing priorities brought about estrangement with her husband. When they divorced, she remained optimistic, feeling it was God's plan for her and a sense that something good would come out of the tragedy.

Something good did happen when Blanca met Geoff the following year. While working on the same community project, they met and fell in love, ultimately realizing theirs was truly a wonderful match. A shared sense of duty and commitment to so many of the same things has given them a special relationship allowing them to blend their work and personal lives. Geoff, frequently with guitar in hand, volunteers at her school, and together at St. James' they have helped start a Saturday morning Literacy Program for Fair Haven youngsters along with an ESL class for the parents of the children.

To learn more about the Literacy Program at St. James' please call: (203) 467-6958



Blanca Little is helping Hispanic children learn and improve English in her elementary school class and through a new literacy program in which she volunteers at St. James' Church.

✠ St. James' Response Card **Please, let us hear from you!**

- I would like to make the following comments on this issue of *The Bridge*:
- I would like to request prayers from the church for the following:

- I would like a pastoral visit from the church.
- I would like to make a tax-deductible donation to the ministry of St. James' Church in Fair Haven. Enclosed is a check for the following amount: \$ _____

Name:
Address:
Telephone:
E-mail:

Please clip and mail to: St. James' Church, 62 East Grand Avenue, New Haven, CT 06513
(Or, better yet, drop it by the church office anytime.) **Thank you!**



HISTORICAL HAVEN

A COMMUNITY TRADITION OF HELPING CHILDREN LEARN

ERected in 1908, the first school in Fair Haven began at the corner of Grand and Clinton Avenues just west of the Grand Avenue Bridge. Captain Nathaniel Grannis, a local real estate speculator, deeded three quarters of an acre there for building a community meetinghouse, school and common for his neighborhood. You may think of it as the real beginning of a now long-standing interest of this community in service to children. Throughout the years, Fair Haven has created a number of schools and programs for children and received the support of not only civic and church organizations but also private individuals.

One of the best-known institutions in our schools has to be the PTA—created over 100 years ago by two mothers with vision, in a time when women did not even have the vote, and in a society that frowned upon women's activism. You can trace the formation of the Connecticut PTA to its roots in the Fair Haven neighborhood and New Haven where Francis Sheldon Bolton organized the Connecticut Congress of Mothers as a branch of the National Congress of Mothers. Mrs. Bolton was a mother, nurse, educator, and children's advocate, the author of early help guides for parenting, and Connecticut's sole delegate to the national convention. At the convention of 1897, Mrs. Alice McClellan Birney, co-founder and first National President, appointed Bolton "organizer" for the Connecticut chapter. The young Francis Bolton had a broad reach to the public through such outlets as *The Mothers Journal*, a monthly magazine she edited. Three years later, at a heavily promoted assembly in the

Bolton's home on Division Street, a small group who had braved the stormy weather to attend this important meeting formed the Connecticut Congress of Mothers. To reflect the evolving relationships between child, parent and school, the organization later changed its name to the Parent Teachers Association, known today as National PTA.



The National PTA commemorated their 100th anniversary in 1997 with a special U.S. postage stamp.

From the early days of the movement in Connecticut, some prominent Fair Haven citizens supported the development of the National Congress of Mothers. One supporter was Francis Bolton's good friend, Adelaide Bradley, who hosted meetings of the New Haven Mothers' Club at her palatial home, "The Heights." The Bradley's house was a mansion built on Sherland Avenue by the Hon. James F. Babcock, lawyer, friend of Abraham Lincoln, and publisher of the *New Haven Palladium*. The well-appointed Adelaide was the wife of Andrew R. Bradley, president of the large Bradley-Smith Co., which made confectionaries and sold cigars.

Together with his business partner, George Smith, Mr. Bradley coined the name "lollipop" for the candy-on-a-stick they manufactured at their New Haven plant. The Bradley's were known for the generous support they gave to helping social organizations like the New Haven Mother's Club that were working for the benefit of the community.

The following sources were the basis for this article:

Fair Haven. A Journey through Time ©1976 by Doris B. Townshend
The New Haven Preservation Trust website: www.nhpt.org
Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute website: www.yale.edu/ynhti
The Connecticut PTA website: www.ctpta.org
The National PTA website: www.pta.org

RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER

Practiced in the Art of Negotiation

Since 1981, **Community Mediation, Inc.** has been resolving disputes and conflicts within the Fair Haven neighborhood and throughout the greater New Haven area. Committed to a philosophy of mediation based on non-violent means, CM helps individuals and groups to find peaceful solutions to their differences. With offices at 134 Grand Avenue, they are the oldest nonprofit community-based mediation program in Connecticut.

Last year CM provided both staff members and trained volunteers to act as mediators in resolving more than a thousand disputes. Nearly half of their cases originate as minor criminal cases referred by the court system. With a 60% rate of success, CM offers relief to the community and helps to reduce the strain on an over-burdened court system.

Not all disputes involve the criminal system. Conflicts commonly develop over personal, family and housing problems. According to



Executive Director Charlie Pillsbury

Charlie Pillsbury, executive director and the anti-war Green Party candidate for Congress in 2002, Community Mediation offers a wide range of innovative programs designed to promote peace and justice. CM has developed approaches to resolving a variety of disputes over problems ranging from custody conflicts between parents to racial profiling by city police. One of their most effective programs has been peer mediation in the public schools, which uses students trained in dispute resolution to head-off possible violence.

To learn more about Community Mediation, and how you can get involved, please visit their website at: www.community-mediation.org.

Pastoral Reflections

We Need Jesus for Real Community Transformation



BY THE REV. GEOFF LITTLE
PASTOR, ST. JAMES' CHURCH

One thing that has impressed me lately about Fair Haven is the level of interest in transforming the neighborhood. We have small but enthusiastic community groups—some of which meet at St. James' Church—dedicated to everything from the use of commercial property to traffic safety and the location of police officers on the streets at night.

It is all worthy effort, but in terms of real transformation, limited in its effectiveness. Why, you ask? Because community organization dependent on human resources alone can only address things—bridges, fences, laws, ordinances, and the like. While changing things on the surface can be highly satisfactory, there is always the nagging feeling—for me at least—that all the effort is just not enough. If we put out a fire on one block, there are always ten more fires burning somewhere else.

The Christian perspective is that real transformation is possible; but it must begin in the inner self—in the heart—where only God is powerful enough to have any influence. One beautiful passage in the Old Testament of the Bible reads, "I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts... The days are coming, declares the Lord, when this city will be rebuilt for me from the Tower of Hananel to the Corner Gate." (Jeremiah 31:33, 38). Here is the bold promise of transformation at the core—true change from the inside all the way out to the gates of the city.

Jesus Christ, God made human, became the fulfillment of that promise when he died on the cross and rose again from the dead. He shed his blood to make transformation of the inner self a reality, and then was resurrected in glorious form to say to the world, "Peace. The job is done, and done well."

If you see the new movie, *The Passion of the Christ*, please keep in mind this aspect of the crucifixion of Christ. The violence of the cross was in keeping with God's intention to bring a violent change within us. To be a mere model of love so we could be inspired to be more religious, more spiritual, would only result in surface change—like any other human effort to transform. Hear his words from the cross to you, "I love you. Let me change your heart, and then with me you really can change the world."

Family Matters

Love Thy Neighborhood

BY BETSY HAUGH
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN
AND FAMILY MINISTRIES,
ST. JAMES' CHURCH

In Leviticus, The Lord told Moses, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

We read of a man in Luke 10 who asks Jesus the question, "And who is my neighbor?" The uncertainty in defining "our neighbors" and the ways we can best express our love are old ideas with which we all struggle. At St. James' we believe that the young people of Fair Haven truly are our neighbors and one of the ways we can show our love is by fulfilling the important needs of our neighborhood children.



A few months ago, we recognized a crucial need of our Fair Haven children. We found many youngsters were having trouble in learning to read. This led us to create a literacy program to assist children in grades K-2. Every Saturday afternoon our group of literacy volunteers works with the children by reading to them and helping to develop literacy skills. Currently there are more than 20 children enrolled in this fun and important program, and for me it is one of the highlights of my week.

For information about volunteer opportunities and the St. James' Literacy Program, please call the church at (203) 467-6958 or send me email at elizabethhaugh@hotmail.com.

Created for the Fair Haven community by



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COMMUNITY AND CHURCH CALENDAR SPRING 2004

Services every 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th Sundays
10 AM: Bible teaching and Holy Communion, English language.
12 NOON: Bible teaching and Holy Communion, Spanish language.

Service every 1st Sunday
10 AM: Bible teaching and Holy Communion, bilingual. Community lunch after service.

Good Friday, April 9: Services, St. James' Church, 12 Noon and 7 PM.

Easter Sunday, April 11: Services, St. James' Church, 10 AM and 12 Noon.

Tuesday, April 27: Interracial Dialogue Project Leadership Breakfast Fundraiser, New Haven Lawn Club, 8 AM. For tickets contact Sharon Stoyer of IDP at 203-668-3553.

St. James Literacy Program: Saturdays, 2-4 PM, St. James' Church. ESL for adults too!

Quinnipiac River Community Group: every 2nd Tuesday, 7 PM, St. James' Church.

Alzheimer's Support Group: every 1st Wednesday, 7 PM, The Mary Wade Home, 118 Clinton Ave.