

THE BRIDGE

Connecting the Fair Haven Community

🍁 Fall 2006

GOOD NEIGHBORS

Finding Inner Peace Through Prayer

How Maria Negrón's faith helps keep her busy life in balance.

AS A YOUNG WOMAN, MARIA NEGRÓN TRULY BEGAN A NEW LIFE WHEN SHE ARRIVED IN NEW HAVEN. Like most immigrants to America, she had to learn over so many of the things that most of us take for granted—not the least the language and customs. Accustomed to rolling-up her sleeves to get things done, Maria takes adversity with stride, keeping about her a calm demeanor. Surely, this great quality has made her successful re-inventing her life. She will tell you that it is merely her prayers that are being answered each day.



Maria Negrón speaks to the problems of parents daily in her work with the New Haven school system.

If you have children riding a bus to school in New Haven, you should feel great comfort that Maria Negrón is working behind the scenes. You can rest assured they are picked-up as promised in the morning and returned that afternoon, all safe and sound. As transportation coordinator for the New Haven Board of Education for the past ten years, Maria is a real problem solver. She is responsible for keeping things running smoothly and in the most literal sense, *no child is left behind*. As a mother of two, step-mom, and grandmother, Mrs. Negrón knows well the concerns of parents.

With school now back in full swing, Maria once again finds herself totally immersed in the large and complicated task of keeping kids moving daily throughout the city. As one may imagine, there is opportunity for complaining parents to voice their opinions. Calming jittery moms and solving problems is an essential part of what Maria does. While most parents are reasonable, there are those who are so angry or frustrated when they call that they can be abusive and disrespectful. Fortunately, Maria has learned ways to handle the difficult ones and disarm the worst callers. Despite this very tough part of her job, Maria feels very happy in her work and loves going to her job.

No stranger to the stress and frustration that life presents, Maria counts her faith as key to coping with adversity. Raised Catholic in Puerto Rico, she continued this faith in her adopted New Haven. While her belief in God was strong, she sensed something missing. About three years ago, a friend invited her to a service at St. James' and she found tremendous joy in the multicultural worship of this unique church. Now she enjoys spending time here with her daughters, and loves the new friends she made within the friendly and ethnically diverse congregation.

Back in 1978, Maria made the decision to move

here to the U.S. from her hometown of Coamo—a picturesque little town in south central Puerto Rico famous for its natural warm springs that were once rumored to be the elusive "Fountain of Youth" sought by explorer Juan Ponce de León. At the time, Maria was working hard, struggling to put herself through college. Maria's older sister was, by then, living in far-off Connecticut, and quite happy for her little sister to come join her in New Haven. Only 22, the young Maria saw this as a unique opportunity to better her financial and educational situation. Despite the fact that she spoke no English, the determined Maria began training in practical office skills such as typing, and took-up the challenging, but essential task of learning this "foreign" language.

Not long after settling into the Elm City, Maria met and married her first husband, and began working part time for Yale University. When her first daughter, Mari, was born, she left Yale in order to stay home to raise the baby. Once Maria returned to work outside her home once again, she began a job with the city of New Haven's Library. Eventually she accepted another city job utilizing her newly developed bi-lingual skills as a receptionist and translator in the Community Services department, helping people in need of

welfare and support. Although Maria contends with challenges in her present job, she found her past position presented the real possibility of physical threat from clients pushed to the edge by poverty and feelings of desperation. Despite the challenges, Maria liked the work, and remained there thirteen years until she took an exciting opportunity at the Board of Education. Now vital to the transportation department, the ability to deal with conflict that she honed dealing with hard cases at her previous job make today's problems seem like a walk in the park to Maria.

Now remarried to Axel Negrón—the man she calls "wonderful" and a generous person who loves his two stepdaughters as his own, the Negróns, like so many modern families, have blended the children of two marriages and made a good life together. Maria's aging father is now living here in New Haven, and she makes sure that he receives good care. She maintains a youthful and positive outlook on life, remaining quite connected to her family back in Puerto Rico, making a trip to her original home annually to be with her relatives. Perhaps there is some truth to the legend of "The Fountain of Youth" that keeps Maria so vital? Although she would likely tell you it is the peace she feels through the power of prayer.

✠ 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

GETTING A GOOD SEAT ON THE SCHOOL BUS

Over fifty years ago, in 1954, desegregation in the classroom became law after the Supreme Court's decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* overturned the idea of "separate but equal" as ratified by Congress in 1868 with the Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution. That Amendment only guaranteed "equal protection" under the law, but did not guarantee "equal rights"—a subtle but important distinction that allowed school systems to keep black children in their own schools separate from those of white kids. What the Court found unanimously in that landmark 1954 ruling was that "Separate educational facilities are inherently unequal."

In the decade after the 1954 Court decision, few students actually attended integrated schools in not only the Deep South, but also here in Fair Haven and other sections of New Haven. Unlike the South, which had passed actual segregation laws following the Civil War, the North had school segregation because neighborhoods separated along black and white lines, and children attended the local schools. In the early 1970s, the Supreme Court ruled again in several cases creating forced busing as a way of enforcing integration in school districts that had found creative ways to avoid the law. This controversial court-ordered solution was a factor in so-called "white flight" from city to suburb—a *de facto* form of discrimination, and a phenomenon that resulted in lowered tax revenues and poorer urban schools. New Haven has had real success in dealing with the problem, due in large part to creative schooling options in the form of magnet schools populated by both city kids and by the busing of students from suburban areas.

In the two hundred years since public education first began in Fair Haven in 1808, the local community has

sought ways to keep children safe and learning. Long time residents may recall the days when kids found their way to school relying on their own resourcefulness. There was not the free school bus system of today. Rather, students would walk, ride public transportation, or—if affluent—ride by car. For many, it was not unheard of to walk a mile or two in any sort of weather to a neighborhood school, and to even go home and return the same distance each day for lunch. Some may see today's schoolchildren as pampered by bus services that virtually deliver kids to their doors.



However, they might be interested to learn that pedestrian injury is second only to cancer as the leading cause of death of children between the ages of five and nine years¹.

According to two studies conducted in the early and late 90's co-authored by Thomas S. Renshaw, MD, Chief of Pediatric Orthopedics at Yale School of Medicine, "Low-income areas with high populations experience more childhood pedestrian trauma. Although those factors may be out of our control, it is still possible to reduce the number of accidents by initiating some simple interventions."

In response to the two studies, New Haven officials implemented five initiatives that may account for a significant decrease in accidents including: improved safety education for children, expanded school busing to reduce the number of children walking, a safe driving campaign promoting careful driving, decentralized public housing, and increased traffic tickets.

¹*The Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* (May 2002)

The following sources were the basis for this article:
Encyclopedia of Everyday Law website: law.enotes.com
San Diego Earth Times website: sdearthtimes.com
U.S. Dept. of Education website: www.ed.gov
Wikipedia website: wikipedia.org

RIGHT AROUND THE CORNER

Small Organization Does Big Things

Established in 1965 by the Rev. Dr. Robert E. Jones, a Yale Divinity School student, the **Fair Haven Parents' Ministry, Inc.** provides low-income residents of the neighborhood assistance in basic living needs. It is the oldest organization of its kind in the community, and for forty years FHPM has been developing and implementing a broad range of services including emergency food services, energy assistance, job referrals and training, and a senior aide program to name some of the important work the not-for-profit organization offers. FHPM is an agency of the Connecticut State Department of Social Services and supported by several local churches, including the Diocese and Archdiocese of Greater New Haven.



The organization first came about as an effort to address the problem of hunger among the many local low and fixed-income families and individuals struggling to obtain the essentials most of us take for granted. FHPM created the first food pantry and breakfast program in Fair Haven with the support of community parents and local churches. These efforts were successful, and FHPM began addressing other social problems and finding solutions to challenges in the areas of education and health. One such success came about as a challenge to medical students from Yale to provide weekly *pro bono* medical services to area residents through the establishment of a clinic at Columbus School. Today that small clinic is the Fair Haven Community Health Clinic on Grand Avenue.

To learn more about the Fair Haven Parents' Ministry, or give them support, please call (203) 865-5585 or visit their office at 160 Ferry Street.

Pastoral Reflections

Cutting off Television



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

One of Jesus' most difficult sayings is, *If your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off* (Mark 9:43). I interpret this passage to mean God expects us to be prepared to

stop doing anything that causes us to stray from his will—even things we believe to be critically important to us. For me watching television was my right hand causing me to sin. Of course, I would have never admitted it was that important, but my actions indicated otherwise. Examining myself honestly, I concluded it was keeping me from knowing God better and growing as a person. My wife Blanca and I have cut off television in our house for three months now. It was painful at first, almost like losing a hand, but here is what we have gained in return:

First, time for better things—about two hours per day. No longer are we saying we don't have time to pray and read the Bible, talk to old friends, take up a new hobby, or venture out to see something in town. I still follow my beloved Red Sox, but now by radio, listen-

ing while I do something else at the same time.

Second, *the silence of the shams*—no more commercials. I estimate that more than half of my time was spent absorbing messages of advertisers selling their wares. I never realized the extent it shaped my preferences and dulled my critical thinking about buying. Cutting off the television has actually saved us money as we purchase less of what we do not need.

Finally, a saner perspective on the human body—less sexual innuendo. Real life is far less sexually charged than we ever imagined. Blanca and I are much happier with our own bodies and one another's now that we are not constantly comparing ourselves to shapely people cleverly manipulated by the cameras. We can't escape the hyped sexuality in newspapers and billboards, but we have discovered there is something extra destructive about the power of moving video. Much the same can be said about violence as sex.

Perhaps many of you are thinking, "well, that's nice, but TV is not that important to me, and does not affect me that way." Wonderful! Let me encourage you to examine yourself to see if your behavior with respect to watching television really matches your self-evaluation. After all, addicts are most often the last to admit their addiction.

Family Matters

Literacy for Kids

BY BLANCA R. LITTLE
DIRECTOR, ST. JAMES' CHRISTIAN ACADEMY

Helping children acquire and enhance their literacy skills while they hear the Good News of Jesus Christ is an important part of our ministry at St. James' Church. On October 15, we will begin the fourth year of our "Literacy for Kids" program. We offer free, two hour long Saturday classes in reading and writing for first, second, and third graders from 2:00-4:00 PM.

In the fall of 2007, with God's help, we intend to expand this program by opening St. James' Christian Academy, an early elementary school at the church. Our mission will be to provide accelerated learning and Christian living for children in early grades K-2.

All of our classes are small—with a maximum size of ten children—so that we can provide students individualized instruction.

If you are interested in enrolling your child in the free Saturday Literacy Program, or in the school—or if you are interested in applying for a teaching job, please call Blanca Little at 203-676-0685.



Created for the Fair Haven community by



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COMMUNITY AND CHURCH CALENDAR FALL 2006

Service every 1st Sunday
10 AM: Sermon and Holy Communion, bilingual.
Community lunch following the service.

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

Sunday school for children and teens during both services.

Alzheimer's Support Group: Every 1st Wed., 6 PM, The Mary Wade Home, 118 Clinton Ave. Light dinner and respite care provided. Call Rosanne Mondrone, 203-562-7222

The weekend transportation program is free for those 60 years and older. Call ext. 148 for info.

St. James' Literacy Program: Saturdays, 2-4 PM, at the Church. Class begins Oct. 15 for kids age 5-8. Call Blanca Little, 203-467-6083.

Tent Revival Meetings: Friday-Sunday, September 22, 23, 24, 6:30 PM, United Methodist Church, Corner of Dixwell Avenue and Church Street, Hamden. Preaching, Music, Food, Fellowship. The Rev. Geoff Little, Preacher. Call St. James' Church 467-6958 for more information.

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