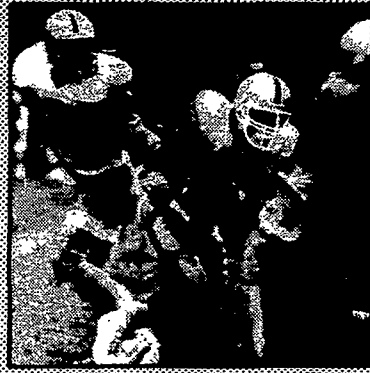




Holy obsession

Beneath the myths about Matt Talbot lies the truth of his life, one given first to drink, then to prayer and penance, and now the subject of the drama 'Talbot's Box.' Page 8.



Defensive duel

A key City-Catholic football game between Aquinas and Bishop Kearney last Sunday featured lots of rain but few points as the two grid powerhouses played to a 7-7 standoff. Page 12.

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Refugees seek new life in merciful land

By Teresa A. Parsons

More than 200 men, women and children are waiting in western New York for a chance at a normal life.

Still others continue to arrive from countries — Afghanistan, El Salvador, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Guatemala, Ethiopia — where they attest that chance is slim. Each is hoping to find a new home in the country they describe as "compassionate" and "neutral."

Twenty or even 40 years ago, that country would have been the United States. Today, it is Canada.

"We have heard that Canada is a merciful country, and we have heard that they treat well the people who come here on humanitarian grounds," explained one refugee from Sri Lanka.

In January, however, Canada will implement a new, more restrictive immigration law. Those working with refugees in Buffalo are unsure what changes in policy the new law will bring.

Judging by their most recent experience, however, staff members at La Casa refugee center in Lackawanna, N.Y., should brace for an onslaught. On February 20, 1987, Cana-

an border officials began delaying the entry of refugees until they could attend individual immigration hearings. Within two weeks, more than 300 people were backed up at the Canadian border near Buffalo.

Immigration officials began referring the refugees to La Casa, then a small-scale refugee assistance program located in the former convent building at Queen of All Saints Parish in Lackawanna. Staff members at La Casa responded by recruiting host families and institutions to offer shelter, soliciting donations of food, clothing and medical care, and advocating for financial support from Erie County's social services department.

A year-and-a-half later, the parade of misery has hardly slackened its pace. New refugees arrive at the border daily, and are routinely sent to La Casa. Meanwhile, the Canadian immigration system is so backlogged that the new arrivals face a five-month wait for a preliminary hearing.

La Casa, meanwhile, has imposed a tenuous sense of order over the chaos that followed February 20. Staff members have arranged to receive some remuneration from social serv-

ices, although they continue to depend heavily on private donations.

Some 200 refugees have been placed in the homes of host families or in institutions such as convents, churches and seminaries, primarily in western New York, but also stretching from Cleveland, Ohio, to Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley. Because hosts are becoming increasingly difficult to locate as the delay in scheduling refugees' hearing dates increases, La Casa is working through such local groups as the Rochester Sanctuary Committee, seeking new volunteers to serve as hosts.

"Practically all our sure sources of hospitality are full," said Sister Bette DiCesare, a La Casa staff member.

The Lyons of East Aurora are one such source. They became involved with La Casa after Jim Lyons, 24, a Spanish-speaking baggage handler at the Buffalo airport, was asked one evening to translate for a newly arrived Salvadoran refugee family, and ended up inviting them to stay at his parents' suburban home.

"I called at midnight, and my mother had to go up and tell (my father) that I was bringing home this Salvadoran family with five children," Lyons recalled. Although his father's first response was not pleasant, Lyons said, he had "a total change of heart when he got to meet Jose and heard about his situation."

Since then, the Lyons family has welcomed several Sri Lankans, and currently house a Bolivian couple. "It has been a beautiful chance for them to open up their hearts and show their generosity," Jim Lyons said of his family.

Meanwhile, Lyons also spends nearly 25 hours per week at La Casa, answering telephones, transporting refugees and coordinating living arrangements for as many as 65 La Casa residents, who are primarily single men. They share a building which Sister DiCesare estimates could comfortably accommodate 25. "Men, very often when the house is full, end up sleeping on the sofas and the floor," she said. "There are usually 40-60 people here all the time."

Despite crowded conditions, clashing cultures, and tension and suspense bred by helpless waiting, residents at La Casa manage a relatively comfortable communal lifestyle. Each is assigned tasks, ranging from cooking and cleanup to answering telephones or transporting fellow residents to appointments. "There are so many people of so many nations. It has been a great thing for a person like me, to come out of my shell," explained a Sri Lankan, who asked to be identified only as Bala.

Although Bala, 50, faces only a few more
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As he awaits a hearing date, this 15-year-old Sri Lankan boy spends much of his time thinking about the family he left behind.



Volunteer Jim Lyons presides over a daily meeting at the La Casa refugee center in Lackawanna, N.Y.

Linda Dow Hayes/Courier-Journal

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School cancels performance of puppet show on AIDS

By Rob Cullivan

A performance of a puppet show designed to teach seventh graders the causes of Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome was canceled Monday, Sept. 26, by Nazareth Hall School because of a diocesan directive stating the show was inappropriate for diocesan schools, according to Sister Mary Ann Lauer, school principal.

The school, which is owned and operated by the Sisters of St. Joseph, had scheduled a performance of the Kids on the Block puppet show for October 4. Kids on the Block, a series of puppet shows for elementary school children, is designed to teach children about such issues as drug and alcohol abuse, teen pregnancy, and divorce.

Sponsored locally by Central Trust Co., Kids on the Block is headquartered in Washington, D.C. Its shows have been used in the diocesan school system in the past, and have been considered effective because the use of puppets

seems to make the heavy subject matter seem less threatening to children who might be intimidated by the material if it were presented by standard methods.

The AIDS show in question features two characters: 14-year-old JoAnne Spinoza and her former babysitter, 25-year-old Natalie Gregg, who contracted AIDS from an infected needle she once used to inject herself with illegal drugs.

Anne Wegman, associate director of the diocese's Department of Youth Ministry, previewed the show's script last spring and found it to contain material that students might interpret as condoning sex outside of marriage.

Although the script says that monogamous sexual relationships are the ideal way to avoid contracting AIDS through sexual intercourse, Wegman said that the puppet characters move too quickly from this point to a discussion of
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Kids on the Block puppets Natalie and JoAnne discuss some tough subjects.