

Young

Catholic Worker aids poor here and in Haiti

By Rob Cullivan
Staff Writer

ROCHESTER — Sarah Brownell, 25, a native of Amsterdam, N.Y., remembered going through a period of atheism when she was a teenager.

"I decided that people just made up God to make them feel better," she recalled during an interview in a local restaurant. She added that Catholicism also appeared fairly irrelevant to modern people like her.

"It just seemed like something old, and there was nothing going on," she remembered of what she learned as a youth in her religious education classes. "We were talking about things that happened 2,000 years ago, and I wanted to know what was happening now."

Brownell found out "what was happening now" when she attended the Rochester Institute of Technology from 1993-98. She learned of St. Joseph's House of Hospitality on South Clinton Avenue, a Catholic Worker outreach center. The Catholic Worker movement is dedicated to working with the poor, as well as to nonviolence. It also examines the conditions that lead to impoverishment, characteristics that attracted the idealistic daughter of a father who is an artist and a mother who is a science teacher.

"I never heard about the Catholic Worker, which is horrible," she said. "I think they should teach about the Catholic Worker in religious education. The Catholic Worker is all about getting involved and ... really living what you believe."

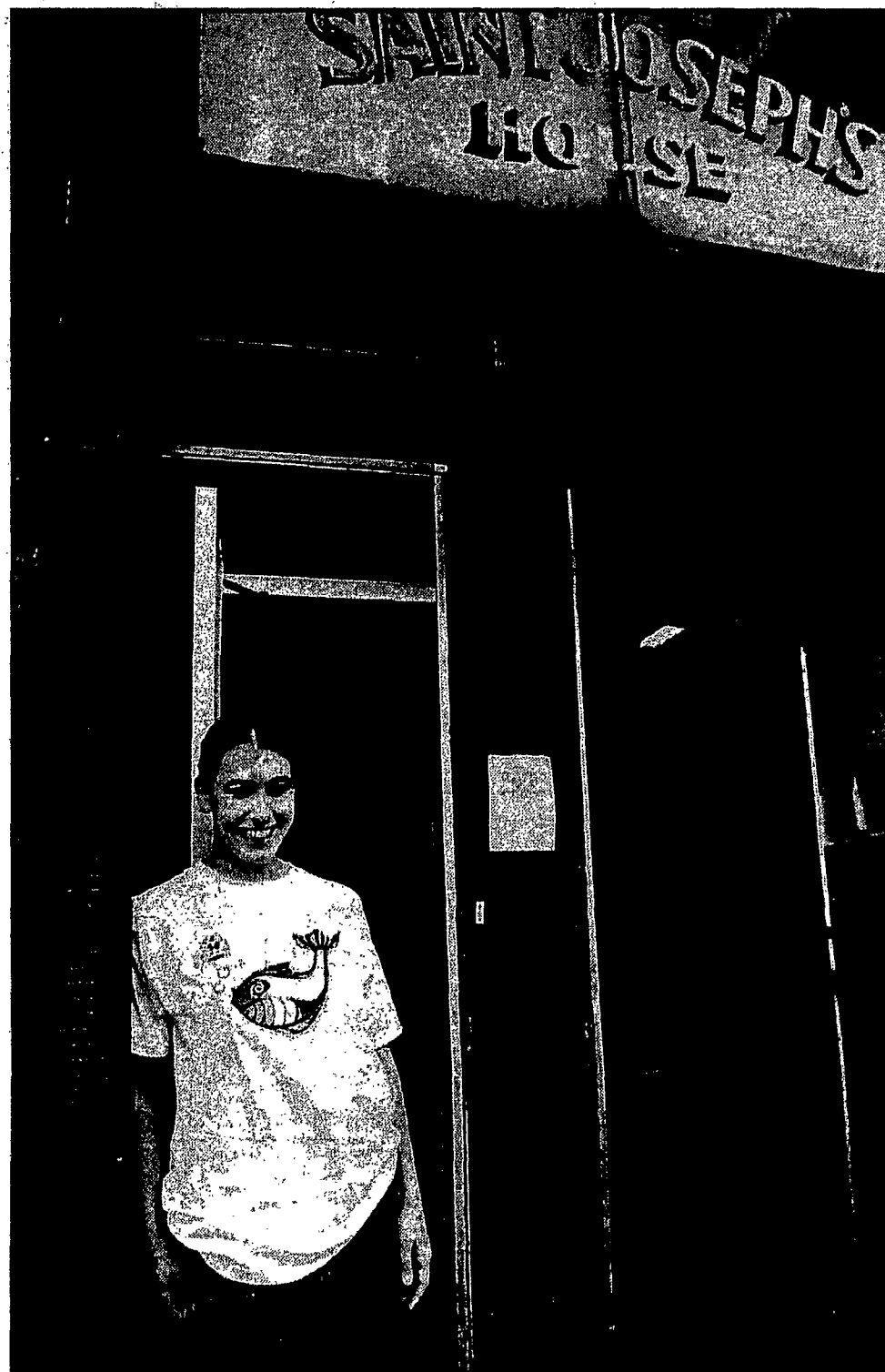
Studying physics at RIT, where she earned a B.S. degree in mechanical engineering, also intellectually converted her back to her faith, she said. As she researched the laws of physics, she sensed there had to be a designer behind them all.

"There had to be a plan, so I started moving back to my faith."

Brownell began volunteering at St. Joseph's, serving meals to the homeless and the poor, and eventually moving in and editing the house's quarterly newsletter. Through another volunteer, she also learned that Corpus Christi Church on East Main Street was sponsoring a health/education/economic development project in Borgne, Haiti, to improve the lives of the inhabitants. The project is now independent of the parish, and is called H.O.P.E. — for Haiti Outreach-Pwoje Espwa. Pwoje Espwa are Creole words that mean "Project Hope."

Brownell traveled to Borgne in the summer of 1998 and worked with the villagers to install a solar-powered lighting system in the health clinic that had been built by H.O.P.E.

"Sunlight is readily available in Haiti," Brownell wrote in a Catholic Worker newsletter story about her trip. "There is



Andrea Dixon/Staff photographer

Sarah Brownell will be traveling to Haiti with her solar cooker (shown below), which purifies water using the sun's heat. The large pot in the middle of the cardboard reflector contains water and a water pasteurization indicator (WAPI). When the wax in the WAPI melts, the water is safe to drink

seldom a day without sun. (Solar-powered) systems are reliable, have no moving components to break down, are virtually noiseless, do not produce much heat, and allow the user to stay independent from the political and economic control of utility power or gasoline markets.

"I had plenty of help from the people of

Borgne," her article continued. "Everyday a new group of workers showed up to learn about the system and help me get it installed. I trained anyone who wanted to listen, and at least three people came so often that they now know as much about the system as I do."

After finishing the system, the villagers and Brownell held a party in the clinic and "danced the night away under light we had gathered from the sun," her article concluded.

Now Brownell will have a chance to dance again in Borgne, as well as work hard. She returned to Borgne this month, and will stay there until mid-August. This time, however, it's water, not the sun, that will concern her. Brownell will be working with the villagers to complete a solar-powered water purification system for the clinic. She noted that Borgne is located at the

end of a river that runs by several towns that dump their waste into it. Hence, Borgne needs its water purified to prevent disease.

All this dedication to the poor both here in the United States and abroad in Haiti grew out of a conviction that this is what God wants her to do with her talents, Brownell said. As a young, college-educated woman, Brownell briefly struggled with the idea of making the big bucks in the corporate world, but found the prospect of such a life depressing.

"I really never have been into making money," she said.

But couldn't she do good by making money and donating some of her income to projects like H.O.P.E.?

"There's already a lot of people doing that," she answered. "But there aren't a lot of people who are willing to go there and do it."

She added that as a single person, she has the freedom to serve others.

"I have no kids, no loans — no fears."

To learn about H.O.P.E., write: H.O.P.E., P.O. Box 18767, Rochester, NY 14618.

Events

For information on these events, call the hotline for Odyssey, the diocesan-sponsored young adults network, at 716/328-3228, ext. 375, or 1-800-388-7177, ext. 375, or visit the Web site at www.ggw.org/odyssey.

● **Saturday, July 8:** Hike, swimming and picnic at Stony Brook Park near Dansville. Meet at 11 a.m. at Borders Books Music & Cafe, 1000 Hylan Drive, Henrietta, to arrange car pools. Bring swimsuit. Call to find out what to bring for lunch.

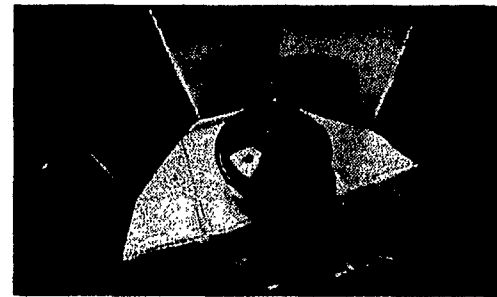
● **Saturday, July 15:** Cayuga Lake wine-tasting tour. Meet at Wegmans Food Market, 1750 East Ave., Rochester, at 8:30 a.m. to arrange car pools.

● **Sunday, July 16:** Sushi night out. Call for location and details.

● **Sunday, July 23:** Mass at St. Mary's Church, 15 St. Mary's Place, downtown Rochester. Meet at 9:30 a.m. in front of church; brunch after Mass at local restaurant.

● **Sunday, July 23:** Kayaking and canoeing. Call for details.

● **Thursday, July 27:** Dinner at the Elmwood Inn Restaurant, 1256 Mt. Hope Ave., Rochester, 7 p.m. RSVP by July 26.



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