

## I Am God's Mule

*Editor's Note* This reflection is by Dan Hughes and is from the July 2010 issue of *Via Pacis*, published by the *Des Moines Catholic Worker*. It is used and edited with permission.

You have heard the saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." It's not true!... I just turned 57. I become an older dog every day. I am like the proverbial farmer's mule that would not budge unless the farmer got his attention, and then he worked well....

Often in life, I have required assistance to regain focus. As strange as it seems, this mule actually likes to pay attention, and though sometimes woefully, does not wish to be. This mule sees the benefit of an occasional pop between my eyes and is grateful for its lessons. This mule so much does not want to be blind to the inconsistent ways of the world around me or in me.

In the last year and a half, I have been popped between the eyes several times.... [A]nd once again I'm jolted to attention. I say once again because I have been popped before and gained clarity about what really matters. It always hurts, and always helps. Unfortunately, like the Israelites wandering in the desert, who, after seeing signs and wonders, forgot, I get self-centered and wander aimlessly. Fortunately, by the grace of God, life gives me a reality check, and I am forced to wake up and pay attention, to learn a well-needed lesson, again.

A year ago December, I was diagnosed as having severe congestive heart failure, acquired quite suddenly it is suspected, from a flu-like viral attack.... In the hospital a doctor says, "Your heart is functioning at 25 percent of normal capacity; go on disability if you want to see your grandchildren graduate."

...If, as in my case, the way one earns a living comes from physical labor, and the body fails, and one can't earn a living, it feels precarious. It gets one's attention! So does losing health insurance and easy access to health care for not having a thousand dollars a month for an insurance policy that didn't pay enough anyway. Monthly payments made faithfully for years mean nothing if you can't pay next month's payment. There was even a point in time where I envisioned my girls being without a home. Life is surely unpredictable to say the least. Not according to any plan I had made. Still, I consider this a very good year, one of the best and I am grateful.

The experiences I have had are the same many share; in fact, I've had it easy, and still it was difficult. I have taken responsibility, taken steps to improve my health naturally, and it is working. I am feeling better physically, but that's not the important thing. I am spiritually, emotionally healthier. I have taken my toe out of water and dove in.

I am fully engaged and excited to be a member of the Des Moines Catholic Worker community. I have



learned from our guests; these are my people, and they feed my spirit. I am learning in broader ways how an economic system that makes some rich at the expense of the poor works against all of us. I learn "humility" as I watch our staff do their work. I am grateful to all of our outside supporters...who have made the choice to volunteer their time and bring in donations....

We'll all stumble and fall and make mistakes. It is in our way of living that we can choose to make a difference. That's the important stuff. The book of James tells us true religion takes action. Des Moines Catholic Workers strive to take responsibility for our actions, in community, in the service of others.

I have chosen, with intention, to live in this community where all have a voice, where all care what the others needs and ideas are, and are willing to put forth the effort to live together peacefully. After all, how can we claim peacemaker status to the world if we aren't at home. It is incredible how wonderful it has been being part of this active community, working and growing together over the last few months. I am getting a clearer vision of how good things could be; I am living large in a life worth living.