

Showing Up *By Alison P. Martinez*



Top: Jane Davis and Gudrun Hoerig

Below: Jane Davis and Hogan

Photos by: James Black



Jane Davis, Hogan, and Magic

“Showing up is the deepest form of communication,” Jane Davis declares.

Showing up may happen face-to-face, by mail, telephone, or e-mail. But however it happens, it means: I care.

“Now, it’s not, ‘I care, and then I’m going to be enmeshed, codependent, involved in your outcome,’” Jane cautions. “It’s not that I need to make sure you don’t fall. That’s your walk.

“But if you fall, I’ll be there with you. Here’s my hand.”

Jane is founder of the nonprofit HOPE-HOWSE (Help Other People Evolve through Honest Open Willing Self-Evaluation.) She shows up for the least powerful among us—people in prison, homeless teens, homeless adults, abandoned animals—along with those of us seeking to “evolve” through service (volunteers.) She spoke with *New Mexico Woman* in the tranquil garden of her modest home in Santa Fe.

“We work with human beings who are in prison,” Jane says, “and we also give dinner parties with ethnic music and food at the homeless shelter, and we show up for troubled young people, and we give water to Chimayó pilgrims. It’s all about walking in this life of service.”

In New Mexico, HOPE-HOWSE currently sponsors two monthly groups for state prison inmates. Frank Hirsch, a retired manufacturer

from Chicago who volunteers in the prison outreach program, says, “Coming to the prison, you develop an appreciation for the inmates as human beings—not for what they’ve done. Talking with them is not like cocktail party conversation or committee gab. It’s pretty intense at times. These men have had time to sit and think.”

Joseph Valverde, who served 19 years in federal prison near the original HOPE-HOWSE in Atlanta, Ga. (which is still active and growing) writes, “From our perspective as prisoners, (that) you’re walking through the gates and taking your valuable time to come see some broken-down prisoners is truly amazing. It doesn’t matter what you do. Just your coming and taking the time to be with us gives us the hope we need to persevere. The act of caring—which you do every time you enter a prison—touches the lives of all the prisoners, whether they see you in person or not. Your coming tells us that someone cares.”

HOPE-HOWSE is grounded on the assumption that service flows both ways. Even a stray dog can serve.

When Jane met her dog Hogan, “All of a sudden this flash of energy knocked me over,” she recalls. “It was Hogan. He was emaciated, but what abounding energy!”

“I played with him a little, and then he got totally quiet, sat down and stared me right in the eye, smacked down his paw, all the time staring, and communicating: I’m yours, you’re mine, I’m claiming you. So, I communicated back: OK.

“Now Hogan comes to the prison as a volunteer,” Jane says. “I put a special collar and leash on when he’s in service, and he knows it. He’s an intuitive, wise dog, and I can always tell what someone’s thinking from his behavior.”

“A lot of times people who are doing this kind of altruistic work are invested in the outcome,” Jane observes. That need for a good

outcome makes for burnout when they can't fix the world's wrongs. But volunteers stay with HOPE-HOWSE year in, year out because it isn't about obligations and outcomes. It's about action: coming together, showing up, and being of service.

Jane admits that with her professional jobs, plus HOPE-HOWSE, her life is full. "I'm up at 3 o'clock in the morning, coordinating volunteers and programs," she says. But she insists, "I never, ever use the word *busy*, because it's a negative energy force. Take out the word *busy*, and say your life is *full*. A full life: how wonderful!"

Jane sees many people who believe they couldn't fit one single thing more into their schedule, even if it's something they really want to do. They think: When am I going to have time to do this? They turn aside from opportunities.

"When an opportunity for action comes into your path, into your moment, do it right then," Jane urges. "Most things don't take long. You may not be able to do it now all the time, of course, but it's a practice, an option.

"And here's another tip: Get out of the outcome business! Don't think how to make something happen. Just take the next right step."

Jane expects that HOPE-HOWSE will take its next step forward when someone—she doesn't yet know who—donates 40 acres of New Mexico land. On this land, ex-inmates and others will build a community, with quiet space for writers and artists, vegetable growing, something always simmering on the stove, and more animals.

"HOPE-HOWSE now functions without walls," Jane concludes, "and we will always stay simple and keep our grassroots nature. We say all are welcome, and we mean all are welcome."

Gov. Bill Richardson proclaimed September 17, 2006, HOPE-HOWSE Day, "a day of peace and human dignity" throughout New Mexico. For details and to contact Jane Davis, visit www.hope-howse.org. **N!W**

Alison P. Martinez was New Mexico State Talking Book Librarian before she took up magazine writing. This is her second piece for New Mexico Woman, among 158 published nationally. "The best part of writing is getting to know people like Jane Davis," Alison says.

