

January 5, 1986

I spent New Year's Eve at a very pleasant party--a gathering of a few families where there was lots of joy and lots of children and no alcoholic beverages.

The hosts for this gathering had just bought a spanking new house in a distant New Jersey suburb. The acquisition of this beautiful home was made possible by long hours of overtime work on the part of the mother and father, who were concerned not to have their four children go through adolescence in what the parents regarded to be the spiritually disordered environment of New York City.

Yet even amid the joy of this New Year's celebration, and in a new home filled with bright hopes, dark thoughts kept crossing my mind. How fragile this home seemed as a protection against the unknown terrors which the future might hold for these children, with the earth poisoned as it is by so much narrow living. What might they yet have to live through, or perish by, and how helpless are we to do anything about it. And I thought of how peculiar a time it is in which we live when one can advance so far into middle age and find oneself so thoroughly reluctant to envy the young.

A day or two after New Year's the New York Times ran a feature story about Roosevelt Island. It quoted the president of the Roosevelt Island residents' association as saying, "Some Buddhist monk wants to build a peace monument here, but me--I want baseball diamonds." She went on to say, according to the Times: "Peace may come and peace may go, but my kids have to play in the Little League!"

As the chairperson of the Peace Pagoda Committee I was stunned to read this quotation. "Building baseball diamonds in the face of a nuclear holocaust!" I thought to myself--I who no longer need to sleep in order to dream of our destruction.

Yet I think there is a lesson in this suburban home and in these sought-after baseball diamonds. Every age calls for a special service from those living in it. Rarely is this service what the people upon whom it is laid would have designed for themselves. Our own predilection would undoubtedly be to undertake some heroic, titanic and sacrificial labor which would vanquish danger and evil. And yet here we may find it given to us only to love what we cannot save, like these parents with their suburban homes and their baseball diamonds--to love the earth and the children of the earth in our helplessness, simply as if they were meant not to be destroyed. Thus we learn of hope, and of the loss of it, and of the use of it practiced not as a rational assessment but as a virtue for living.