

The Shrine of St. Joseph of the Mountains

is situated in a sanctuary of natural beauty--a shaded grotto of oak trees and granite boulders--affording an unusual opportunity for guests to renew their love and their communion with God and their devotion to St. Joseph through peaceful meditation and prayer.



A visit to the Shrine starts at the foot of St. Joseph, the patron saint of Holy Homes. The statue depicts Joseph returning home from his work. Still carrying some of his tools, he has lifted the Holy Child into his arms. Through his fine example of faithfulness and devotion to those in his care as head of the Holy Family in Nazareth, St. Joseph is the perfect model for all parents. The Shrine

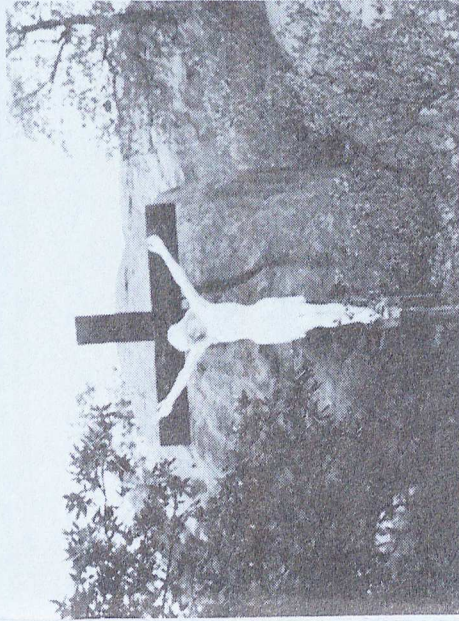


stands as an appeal to all people to promote spiritual peace, harmony and love in their own homes.

Beyond the statue of St. Joseph, a beautiful rustic path beckons you to walk with Jesus through His last days on earth. The pilgrimage begins at the table of His Last Supper, where He spent His last joyful moments. Up the path, pause to reflect on His agony in the Garden of Gethsemane. Follow His footsteps along the Way of the Cross, which memorializes His last hours, from His condemnation to death to His placement in the tomb. At each station you gain a better understanding of the great sacrifice He made for all mankind.

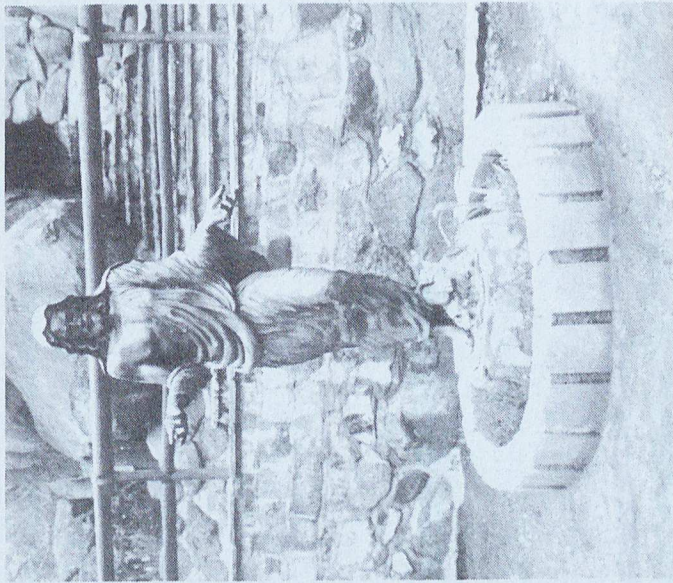
Finally, rejoice at the inspiring bronze sculpture of the Risen Savior, a beautiful reminder that our Lord did, indeed, rise from the dead and lives on in each of us forever.

The Shrine of St. Joseph of the Mountains is located in Yarnell, AZ, just a 1/2 mile off Highway 89 and is open during daylight hours. Visitors of all faiths are welcome. There is no admission charge.



Our staff is happy to work with retreats and pilgrimages to assure that your day at the Shrine is pleasant and memorable. Facilities include a gift shop and information center and clean rest rooms. A public picnic area is nearby.

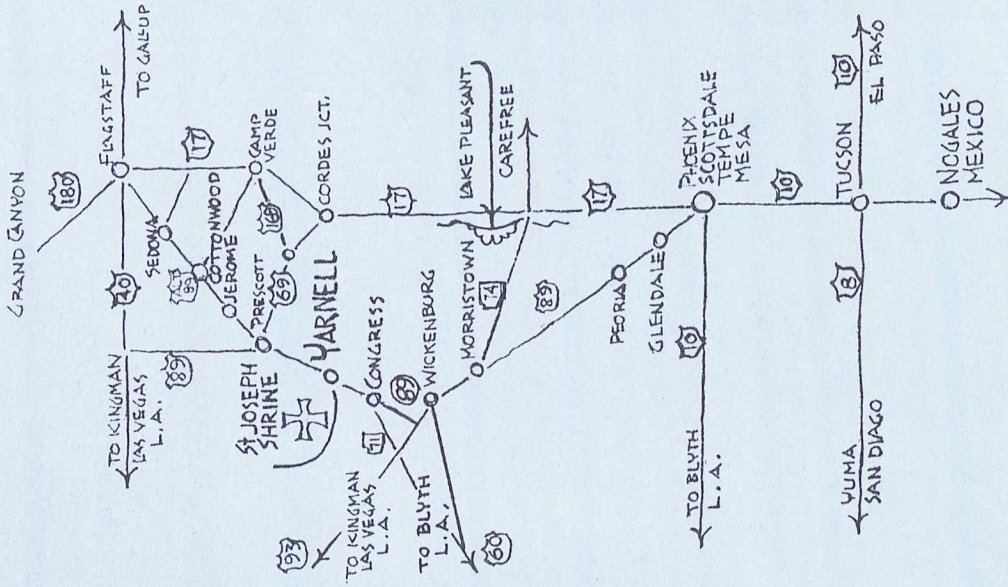




The Shrine of St. Joseph of the Mountains is continually growing, changing, and moving forward. Our newest project, a beautiful rustic chapel, is now in the planning stages. It is being designed to blend into its natural surroundings while providing a comfortable setting for prayerful reflection and liturgical services in any weather. We are excited about this newest Shrine expansion and we welcome your prayers and support. Donations to our building fund may be sent to:

The Shrine of St. Joseph
of the Mountains
P.O. Box 267
Yarnell, AZ 85362

The Shrine of St. Joseph of the Mountains



DRIVING TIME FROM YARNELL TO	DRIVING TIME
PHOENIX	2 hrs
PRESCOTT	1 hr
WICKENBURG	1/2 hr
FLAGSTAFF	2 1/2 hrs
TUCSON	4 hrs







SIMON HELPS JESUS
CARRY THE CROSS +

"AND AS THEY LED HIM AWAY,
THEY LAID HOLD OF ONE SIMON
OF CYRENE, COMING FROM THE
COUNTRY, AND THEY LAID THE
CROSS ON HIM TO CARRY AFTER
JESUS." LUKE 23-26

THOSE OF YOU WHO ARE BUR-
DENED WITH SORROW, MAY BE
COMFORTED BY THE THOUGHT
THAT, IN BEARING YOUR CROSS
PATIENTLY AND OFFERING IT
AS A PRAYER TO GOD IN MEMORY
OF THE SUFFERING OF HIS SON,
YOU ARE SHARING WITH SIMON
OF CYRENE THE WEIGHT OF THE
CROSS OF CHRIST.

"HEAR ME WHEN I CALL, O MY
JUST GOD, THOU WHO IN DIS-
TRESS DIDST LIFT ME UP. HAVE



SHRINE OF ST. JOSEPH OF THE MOUNTAINS

Yarnell, Arizona

Come visit this beautiful Shrine nestled against the hillside and find peace and renewal of spirit. As you pull into the parking area, you look up to see St. Joseph with the Christ Child in his arms bestowing a sign of peace upon all. You glance to the right and find Jesus seated at the Last Supper.

You are amazed at the life-sized, realistic-looking statues that seem to beckon you to come inside the gate and begin your pilgrimage. You are drawn to the steps to get a closer look at St. Joseph and see a path leading up the beautifully rustic trail that beckons you to follow it.

Next you see Jesus kneeling in the Garden of Gethsemane and you pause to reflect on His agony. You follow the winding steps that Jesus took - the stations of the Cross. Large, rugged, wooden crosses have plaques and words helping you to feel that you, too, are making this climb with Him.

At each station you become more understanding of His suffering. At the very top of the mountain, you see another cross and statue of the crucifixion towering over you, and you kneel on the path in reverence.

Coming down the steps, you turn a corner to join Mary as she holds her beloved Son in her arms. You join with her in sorrow. As you continue down the steps, you come to the tomb to find Jesus laid there. You are moved by the greater understanding you now have of His great sacrifice.

A sadness overcomes you - but wait, what do you see in the garden at the foot of the hill? A magnificent, bronze portrayal of the risen Christ. You are overjoyed at His resurrection as you gaze at this almost unbelievable statue. With his arms reaching out, you see His fingerprints and His eyes seem to penetrate your very soul. You sit on a bench under a tree and quietly meditate. You are filled with His Love.

JUNE 1988 ISSUE ARIZONA HIGHWAYS MAGAZINE



Shrine of ST. JOSEPH

It was early 1942 when Mary Wasson happened upon the newspaper article about Felix Lucero. He had appeared, it said, in Tucson the year before, ensconced himself in a tent under the Broadway Boulevard bridge alongside the Santa Cruz River, and proceeded to sculpture the Last Supper out of riverbed sand.

She examined the accompanying photograph of his creation. "I think," she said to her husband, "that we've found our man."

Only they hadn't. Months passed before they finally located him, anonymously washing dishes in a Tucson cafe.

Shrine of

Then there was the matter of convincing him to undertake what the Wassons had in mind. Lucero, a wiry descendant of Mayo Indians and a native of a Spanish-speaking town in southern Colorado, was terse and stubborn in English. "It's cold in Yarnell," he muttered at one point.

"Then we'll come for you when it's warm." An offer of room and board, plus more money than he was making as a dishwasher, finally persuaded him. So in June, Mary and William Wasson returned to Tucson and took Felix Lucero into the mountains of central Arizona. For years they'd had a vision, and they believed that the little sculptor was now going to fulfill it.

The community of Yarnell squats amidst colossal boulders heaped at the edge of an escarpment that rises above one of the broadest vistas in the American Southwest. Here the world suddenly plummets, dropping nearly 2,000 feet from high, grassy rangeland to flat Sonoran Desert. At the bottom, the vast plain appears in motion, a tan sea lapping against the granite, as layers of heat from the desert floor collide with the cliff and roll back on themselves.

Up top it is cooler; red-tailed hawks take free glides on thermals, and frequent gusts kick brush along U.S. Route 89, Yarnell's main street. A gold mine, now depleted, created the town; today, barely a thousand people live here in houses squeezed into the complicated terrain, and the sound of rising wind is more prominent than that of civilization.

But half a mile away from the center of town, beginning in a glade of cottonwoods and black walnut trees, even the wind stills. The leaves settle, and the earth catches its breath. Calls of mockingbirds, cardinals, and quail blend to a choir's hum. Owing to some gentle mystery, here nature collaborates with humans who come to immerse themselves in a juniper sweetness, to transmute worldly tensions into prayer.

This is Arizona's Shrine of St. Joseph. His

tall image, as Felix Lucero eventually conceived him, stands at the base of a winding, ascending stone stairway, greeting visitors who come for undistracted contemplation of the redemption symbolized by the life of Christ. The son whom Joseph hoists in his arms is still a boy, the cross he holds a visual echo of his earthly father's hammer and framing square. Along the path set into the oak and acacia-covered hillside that rises above them, gleaming white representations of the adult Jesus portray the journey from the Garden of Gethsemane to Calvary.

The shrine was conceived during the Great Depression as a symbol of reassurance, personified by Joseph, head of the Holy Family. But in response to a world war, it expanded far beyond its original

concept, growing straight up the mountain. And recently it has spread below, across the tiny stream its founders dubbed the Brook of Cedron, on a mission to extend its blessing from Arizona to the Third World.

William and Mary Wasson, who donated the land, belonged to the Catholic Action League, a group organized in the 1930s to aid the poor. William Wasson had worked in banking and real estate and had once been approached to run for mayor of Phoenix. Instead, he and Mary, a pianist and published composer, dedicated themselves to charity, housing many homeless unfortunates under their own roof. In 1937, they and other league members decided to build a retreat away from the urban trauma of the Depression. Because Joseph was a

(PRECEDING PANEL, PAGES 32 AND 33) *Rays of sunlight penetrate Christ's tomb, illuminating the sculpture of the Sorrowing Mary and Jesus in repose.*

(BELOW) *Statue of St. Joseph, symbol of reassurance, stands among boulders and acacia trees at the base of a stone stairway leading up a Yarnell hillside.*



workingman, he was chosen as a symbol with whom all classes could identify.

That summer they camped out in Yarnell and held a box social, raising \$32 toward a statue. That was hardly enough for alabaster; so they engaged a retired plasterer from Phoenix to try an economical shortcut. He poured a large block of concrete, which he chipped until an image emerged. It was, recalled Mary Wasson, "not perfect, perhaps, but very strong and appealing." Phoenix artist John Coghlan softened whatever imperfections there may have been by painting it, and it was set in place alongside a thicket of mountain mahogany.

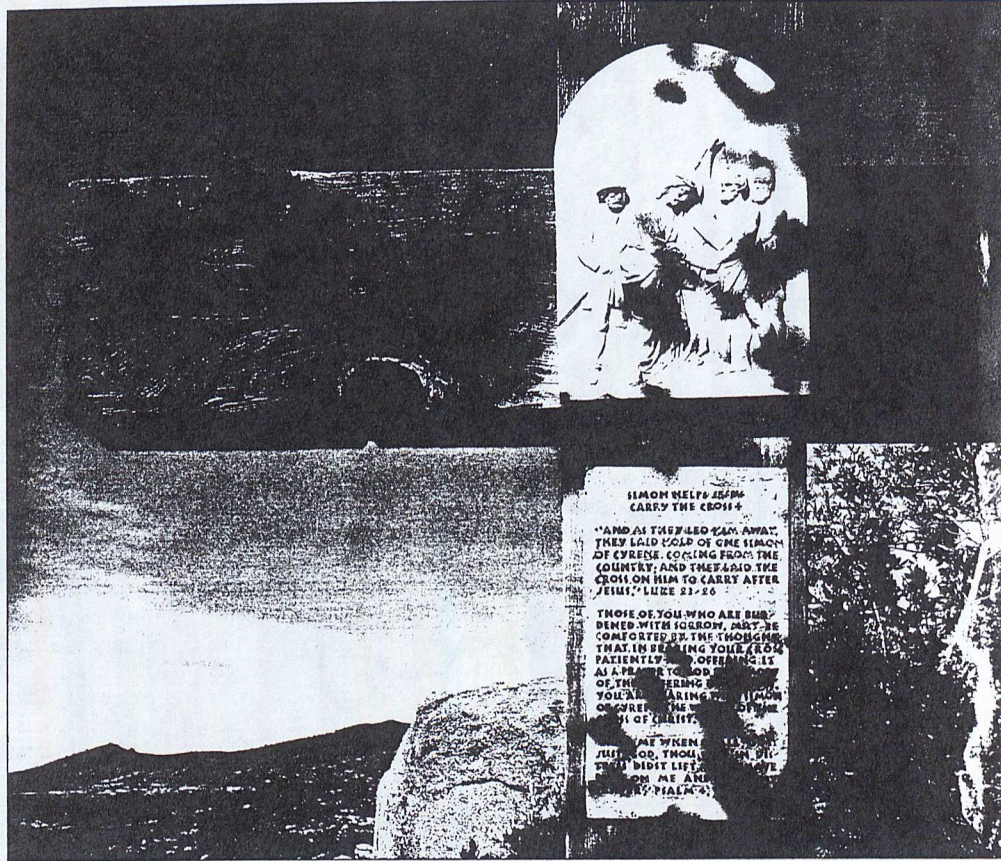
By 1938, when they held their first pilgrimage, their concerns had grown beyond economic woes, and the people who came to meditate and sleep outdoors prayed for peace in Europe and Asia. Eventually, the league decided that the shrine must also memorialize the sacrifice of the soldiers who were giving their lives to purify the world.

William and Mary Wasson pondered over what would be appropriate. With their teenage sons, Bill and Barney, they tramped up the hillside behind the statue of St. Joseph. Wasson, who had studied commercial art, began to sketch an idea. The boys, long accustomed to sharing their bedroom with a stream of needy strangers, watched and accurately foresaw the formidable quantity of rocks and underbrush their summers would henceforth be dedicated to removing.

The memorial to the ultimate sacrifice the soldiers were making would replicate the Stations of the Cross. The Last Supper, the Vigil in Gethsemane, the Crucifixion, the fallen Jesus in the arms of the Sorrowing Mother, and Christ laid in the tomb would be portrayed by life-sized statues. Wooden crosses would line the path, bearing plaques and Gospel verses to depict scenes along Jesus' journey to glory. Mary Wasson pored over the Scriptures, choosing wording from the King James version and avoiding references that might cast blame on Jews. The message of the shrine, she insisted, must transcend sectarianism.

And the sculptures had to be exquisite. But how could they afford a professional artist when donations arrived at the rate of a sack of cement at a time? The cost of marble was prohibitive; the blue granite of Yarnell was far too hard to carve, and no one had heard of any lesser material that was sufficiently durable. They had to find someone versatile, ingenious, and willing to create beauty out of whatever their transparent budget could sustain.

Enter Felix Lucero, who had labored for



(ABOVE) Yarnell's Stations of the Cross, conceived as a memorial to servicemen killed in World War II, were fashioned by sculptor Felix Lucero from slabs of concrete. The high-relief panels were mounted on wooden crosses that line a path at the Shrine of St. Joseph.

holy wages all his life. When he was just an infant, his mother had died. He was a sickly child, and his grandparents vowed in church that if he were healed he would become a priest. But Felix decided early that art, not the cloth, was his calling.

He made an instant spiritual compromise the day he found his World War I battalion surrounded by Germans. Within minutes, all but 10 were wiped out. Their officers were dead, and Felix was chosen to lead. His promise under fire to the Almighty was to devote the next 20 years to sculpturing images of the Savior if the soldiers somehow got out alive. They lay among bushes, waiting until dark to begin crawling back toward headquarters. At one point, Lucero slept, dreaming that the artillery glow had coalesced into a brilliant vision of Jesus. When he awoke, the shimmering light remained. In an illuminated rapture, he followed it, leading his men to safety.

He passed the next 19 years roaming Europe, re-creating his battlefield image of Christ from media ranging from marble to wax. The 20th year found him back in the United States, fulfilling his promise with the group sculpture, "The Last Supper," in the Tucson riverbed. But God, he learned, wasn't through with him yet.

He had never tried reinforced concrete before, the material league members had concluded they could afford. His first efforts cracked or simply crumbled. "Not going to work," the moody artist grumbled.

Mary Wasson consulted a concrete expert. "It's impossible," he agreed. "Concrete dries too fast. You'll never get the parts to stick to each other."

"Let's assume," she countered, "that it's impossible, but you were going to do it anyway. Suppose you were building a bridge and the cement ran out. How could you fix it so you could add on more bridge later?"

Shrine of

The expert supposed that he would drive steel reinforcing rods into the soft cement and somehow keep the exposed end moist, perhaps by covering it with wet blankets, so the concrete wouldn't set and new portions could be tied on with less danger of cracking. Thus ensued many journeys to the Phoenix dump, from which were rescued tangles of wire, former car parts, bolts, and nails. Eventually, the statues Lucero formed from white Portland cement were nearly solid scrap metal inside. He laid wet gunnysacks over the unfinished portions and soaked them through the night. The Wasson boys hauled cement and water by pack burro up the path that was climbing ever higher.

Lucero became obsessed, wielding his trowel like a scalpel, letting his beard grow until he resembled an apostle. As he completed sculptures, he painted them with white cement-hide, but often he broke up his work and started over. The image had

to be exactly what he'd seen on the battlefield. Midway through the Way of the Cross, he paused to redo St. Joseph (the original is buried near its base). Inspired by Lucero's passion, young Barney Wasson wired some steel together and began shaping a statue of Our Lady of Fatima for the family garden.

Lucero completed the Sorrowing Mary and Jesus in the tomb, for which the workers dug a cave into the hillside. Some claim that the death-form he created is neither dead nor a statue, as it appears to breathe.

He saved the Crucifixion for last. Twice he destroyed it before it was finished—on a Good Friday. Complaining of the cold, he returned to his Tucson riverbed. Shortly thereafter his tent caught fire and Felix Lucero died, never seeing the work he considered his masterpiece set into place among the massive granite boulders of Yarnell.

More than 40 years later, the statues remain, testament to what faith can create from humble materials. Seasons have passed. Barney Wasson became a professional artist devoted to the liturgy, designing church interiors and baptismal fonts throughout Arizona and beyond. His brother, Bill, became a priest, pastor to a marketplace parish in Cuernavaca, Mexico. When an orphan was caught one day stealing from the poor box, he remembered his family's example and took the boy in.

Word got around; more homeless urchins arrived, coming off the streets to live with the gringo priest who was adopting orphans. Over the last ⁴⁰ years, more than

(BELOW) Lone figure of Jesus at the Last Supper sits surrounded by natural beauty.
(RIGHT) Years ago Father William Wasson took in a family of eight orphaned Mexican children. Today one of them, Carlos Ayala, has come to Yarnell to create a new statue for the shrine.



THE SHRINE OF ST. JOSEPH AND FATHER WASSON'S ORPHANS ARE
TWO SEPARATE ORGANIZATIONS.
(Students help when time permits)

16,000 as of 1995

~~7,000~~ formerly abandoned children of Mexico and Central America have been reared by Father William Wasson. His family, *Nuestros Pequeños Hermanos* (Our Little Brothers and Sisters), is considered the largest orphanage in the world.

A few years ago, he decided that there was something more he could do, and subsequently he established a school for his orphaned Latin American children at the shrine in Yarnell. *only 11 this year*

Every year ³⁶ of the youngsters arrive for intensive English language studies to enhance their chances of finding jobs in their home countries. They helped to build their school and dormitories, and now take care of the shrine. Some work in the gift shop, which features artifacts from Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, and Haiti; proceeds go to needy children in those countries. Early mornings, they worship in the outdoor sanctuary, accompanied by the mockingbirds, often encountering deer and javelina. At times they are joined by their American priest father, who passes on a legacy of sharing to them.

For decades, thousands of visitors of all creeds have come to reflect along the quiet paths of the Shrine of St. Joseph; now, they are invited to linger and share a meal with children of the Third World. "The shrine," Barney Wasson observes, "began during a time of need. Then it became a war memorial. And now it has returned to its original emphasis: charity."

Below the tomb of the fallen Jesus is a small garden. As the meaning of the shrine has come full circle, so, too, will its symbolism be completed. Carlos Ayala, one of a family of eight orphaned children from the village of Tilzapotla in central Mexico, was seven years old when he and his brothers and sisters came to Father Wasson. Eventually he received scholarships in painting and sculpture, graduating with honors from Mexico's Instituto de Bellas Artes. Now he is in residence in Yarnell, designing a statue to represent the Resurrection. It will portray Christ as a gardener, surrounded by examples of life continually being reborn.

"Faith," explains Father Wasson, "grows from simple pleasures: from the consoling company of nature and God's creatures, from clouds floating like prayers through sunlight. From children. The shrine offers an opportunity to share such faith. It transcends the borders we construct within and without: it brings us, and God, closer together." ❏

Alan Weisman teaches at Prescott College. He and Jay Dusard are author and photographer of *La Frontera: The United States Border With Mexico*, published in 1986 by Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

see postcard
Mr. Wasson



FATHER WASSON

(statue not shown)

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