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volume 1
issue 1

thebridge

closing the gap between homeless and sheltered

what's inside

AN ECONOMIC ISSUE
Are finances an overlooked cause of homelessness?
Page 5

VOICES OF HOPE
Formerly homeless individuals discuss their experiences
Page 8

CARITAS VILLAGE
Looking at Binghampton's creative answer to the corner culture
Page 10

ALSO INSIDE

TAKING THE FIRST STEP
Mapping out Memphis' homeless resources to help figure out what's next
Page 13

ESSAY FROM AN OUTSIDER
Olivia Hipp realizes that sometimes, the shelter gap is the size of a front porch
Page 14

Courtesy of James Ekenstedt

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS: Not all those who are homeless are unhappy or depressed. Many still have meaningful and happy lives.

THE BRASS MENAGERIE

A military family slowly falls from middle class into homelessness

BY FAT TOMMY
Contributing Writer

My wife was a collector of unique items. She had a knack for finding antique pieces that made great impressions on our friends. One of her proudest possessions was the brass menagerie. There was an elephant, a giraffe, a hippo, a rhino, an egret, and a few monkeys that graced our coffee table. Also two swans on our end tables. All of these animals were made of pure brass greatly detailed and in whimsical poses. We bought our brass zoo piece by piece. As well as gold-trimmed dishes to fill our walnut china cabinet.

She was a very fine homemaker with a graceful personality. For a Southern, Afro-American, she had exquisite taste and an uncanny ability to decorate. We had two Picasso prints plus my own artwork to give beauty and depth to our creativity.

Charleston is a picturesque, small city, home to the a fleet of the U.S. Navy. As the gateway to the South Carolina low country, it is far from the military district of Chesapeake Bay.

I did many paintings of destroyers and aircraft carriers. Our house was like walking into an art museum and a naval academy at once. A unique combination juxtaposed between serenity and war, and what stood out most of all was the brass menagerie. It captured your attention above all the artwork in our home.

We moved back to Memphis in the 1980's. She had a new job at a new location. Professionally, it was a step up. Our recreational use of cocaine and pain killers turned into pure addiction.

Slowly our possessions began to disappear as we sat in the basement shooting cocaine for days at a time. The china cabinet went first. Our drug dealer got it for an ounce of powder. My wife was placed on administrative leave for habitual absence from her job. She refused to go to drug rehab and was eventually terminated after eighteen years of service.

No benefits, no retirement. Just a lump sum of $12,000 based on nearly two decades of work and her psychological disorders. Next went the furniture. Then the house. A 1957 Dodge pickup truck. Antiques. The last items to go were, you guessed it, the brass menagerie. All our possessions simply disappeared, but the brass zoo hurt me most of all. We said we'd never part with it, so cute and enchanting. But they had to go like everything else.

> Next went the furniture. Then the house. A 1957 Dodge pickup truck. Antiques. The last items to go were, you guessed it, the brass menagerie.
>
> **-Fat Tommy**

It is amazing that I am still alive and in basically good health. I believe God spared me to send a message to others. I am no A.A. clone with umpteen years of sobriety. I don't believe a person needs that kind of crutch to defeat addiction.

Drug addiction was a terrible experience for me. I had met up with something that I couldn't control. It was frightening. To be in the clutches of evil and helpless to do anything about it.

I am a rationalist and a realist. I am not one given to believe in superstitions and supernatural forces. But my whole perspective changed once I experienced drug addiction and eventually homelessness.

Every person who has suffered drug and alcohol abuse has suffered loss in one form or another. Loss of family, morals, friends, jobs, homes, status, and principles. I was no exception. I stupidly thought that the party could go on forever.

A.A. philosophy states that you must hit rock bottom in order to recognize your own self destruction. I never really hit rock bottom all through my struggle with drugs. I never lost my basic convictions built around the victory of good over evil. I still practiced good in spite of my addictions. In this I found redemption, salvation, and the ability to overcome evil.

I am still no saint. Not even a good Christian. I try to be on a daily basis. There are good Jews and Muslims. Buddhists and Hindus. I never based my recovery on religion or a god of my own understanding. I based it on the brass menagerie. Giving up things I truly adored to appease my cravings. I recognized the existence of evil as long as I felt like there was no such thing as evil. I was headed in a dark direction. So I prayed to a god that is infinitely beyond my understanding or ability of conception.

I cannot shape and mold God into what fits my understanding. If I could do so, then the brass zoo could have been my god.

See "HOMELESSNESS" on Page 9

EMILY SULLIVAN/Photographer

MEET THE STAFF: *(from left to right)* Nathaniel Bishop, Caroline Ponsetti, Evan Katz, James Ekenstedt, Ellie Skochdopole, and Megan Barnes are the members of the editing staff for *The Bridge.* The project has been underway for ten months.

Letter from Editor-in-Chief Nathaniel Bishop

In the back of the room at the community center, a small group of students, volunteers, and activists discuss what it will take to start a street paper in Memphis. They outline the general direction and content of their project. Nashville's street paper, *The Contributor,* is mentioned often. There are other examples; Washington and Baltimore have street papers. Street papers, it seems, are common.

For me, this is a chance meeting. I've been sent at the overzealous whim of a community center supervisor. The group I've stumbled into seems affable, put together, polo-shirt nice without a douchey polo-shirt agenda. They meet at a convenient time and do not seem bothered that I keep coming to their gatherings. They are receptive to the idea of using Google docs.

Eventually, the meetings become weekly. The group remains an earnest assemblage with pragmatic underpinnings that, over a couple of months, solidifies to form a board with designated bureaus. Evan and James, the two Rhodes students responsible for conceiving the paper, belong to none of them. They are perpetually on the way to or just coming from a supportive organization, a street paper veteran, or a potential donor. They broadly dictate the paper's trajectory and mission. They are idealistic, focused. They each possess the uncanny balance of talent and dedication typical of the rapidly promoted twenty- six-year-old or Fulbright Scholar. They herd cats well.

The Bridge is their brainchild, and I am fortunate to serve as its editor-in-chief. As I write this, there's an email from Evan in my inbox suggesting we get on with deciding the newspaper's slogan. He keeps using the word connecting. Bridges connect things. *The Bridge* is designed to connect things. *The Bridge* is scarcely a metaphor.

The Bridge is concerned with redressing issues of homelessness with a voice of advocacy and opportunity. With precision and regularity, the content of this paper seeks to foster awareness of the process of homelessness. The sale and distribution of the paper is designed to provide a path for certified vendors to acquire the work skills and supplemental income necessary to permanently rejoin the housed population.

Vendors are independent contractors who participate in a two-part interview and training process. As representatives of *The Bridge* they are held to reasonable, professional standards. They are the sole means of the paper's distribution.

As with Nashville's paper, *The Contributor*, the price is fixed at one dollar for the public and twenty five cents for vendors. Wholesale receipts are used to purchase vendor incentives, defray printing costs, and, in the future, establish a permanent liaison between vendors and the board. The currently and formerly homeless people whose writing is featured in *The Bridge* are compensated through a combination of cash and copies of *The Bridge* itself.

The Bridge is volunteer run. The currently and formerly twenty-somethings who serve as board members, consultants, graphic designers, publicists, editors, layout specialists, vendor trainers, staff and editorial writers, photographers, legal council, and proofreaders, though rich in spirit, are uncompensated.

The Bridge's start-up costs have been graciously provided for through Rhodes College, though not in perpetuity. We are in the process of securing 501c3 status.

Unaffiliated with any outside organization, *The Bridge* has nonetheless benefited from many organizations willing to donate their time, facilities, and Rolodexes. Among them are The Union Mission, Caritas Village, Door of Hope, and The Mid-South Center for Peace and Justice.

This, our inaugural issue, appropriately revolves around the theme of origins. The stories within are written by those currently and formerly experiencing homelessness and *The Bridge* staff writers. The stories largely focus on the process of becoming homeless and often convey surprise and fear as their subjects recall their experiences. And just as often, they are determined to be made examples of – the resilience of their human spirit; the necessity of narrativizing one's past.

In the coming months, we will take incisive looks at homelessness in order to document it as it is lived and to challenge it as it is often conceived, as an amorphous, regrettable quandary. It is our editorial mission to speak with a voice that is neither melodramatic nor dispassionate in its advocacy, that engenders sympathy without soliciting pity. We seek the most solid middle ground to connect disparate people. A sturdy, careful bridge.

-Nathaniel Bishop

thebridge

Staff of *The Bridge*

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Editorial Policy

The Bridge is a monthly publication dedicated to issues of homelessness in Memphis, TN. It is run by volunteers and is unaffiliated with any religious or political organization.

All articles in *The Bridge* are approved by the editor-in-chief and directors. However, specifically labled pieces from outside groups or contributing writers may appear and do not necessarily represent the views of *The Bridge* editors and staff nor do they constitute an endorsement.

The Bridge welcomes letters from all walks of the Memphis community. Letters to the editor should be sent to editor@thememphisbridge.com and may be edited for content.

Want to get involved?
How to Contact *The Bridge*

The Bridge is a publication by the Memphis Street Newspaper Organization. The Memphis Street Newspaper Organization exists purely to provide reliable income for those with experiences of homelessness and also to raise awareness about issues of homelessness in the larger community.

If you're interested in being a Vendor of *The Bridge* and you have a previous or current experience with homelessness, please contact:
vendors@thememphisbridge.com
For advertising-related requests, please contact:
advertising@thememphisbridge.com
If you'd like to make a donation to *The Bridge,* please contact:
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To learn more about our organizatoin, visit thememphisbridge.com.

THE HOMELESS OF 2012

1 OUT OF 194 US citizens will be homeless **each year**

3.4 percent of those in poverty will have some experience with HOMELESSNESS

5 percent of the currently homeless have just been released **FROM PRISON**

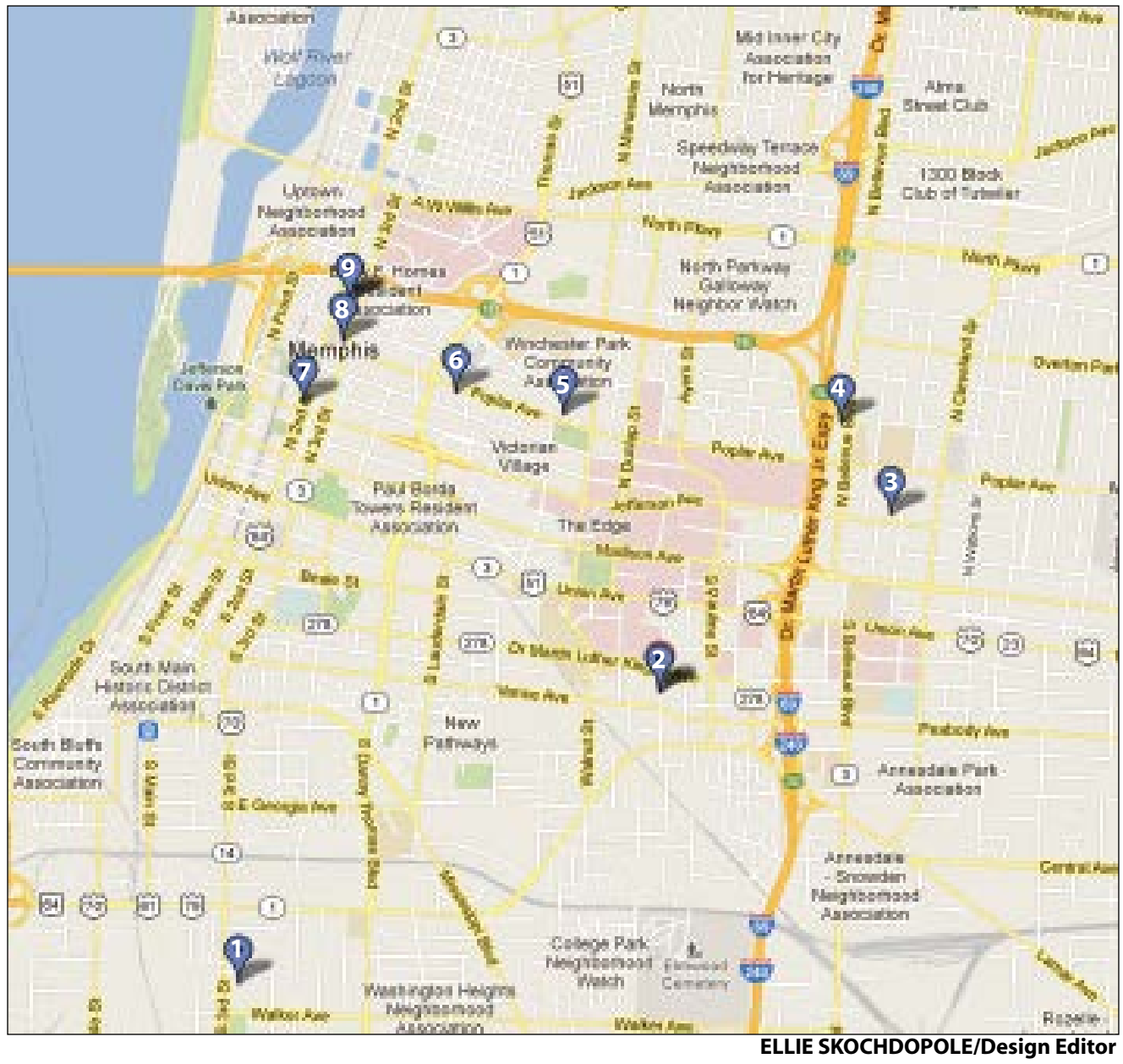
In the US, **633,782** people sleep on the streets EACH NIGHT

3/2000 people in Memphis have lost thier homes, **a 20% increase** SINCE LAST YEAR

LET'S WORK **TOGETHER** **to change the rate** OF HOMELESSNESS **IN 2013**

COURTESY OF THE NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS, NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS, AND THE COMMERCIAL APPEAL

COMPILED BY MEGAN BARNES



ELLIE SKOCHDOPOLE/Design Editor

Homeless resources in downtown, midtown Memphis area

1 Calvary Rescue Mission
960 South Third Street
Offers overnight and temporary shelter, as well as counseling and two meals a day.

2 MIFA
910 Vance Avenue
Prevents homelessness by providing assessment and referals to transitional housing, emergency shelters, rental assistance, and rapid re-housing.

3 Manna House
1268 Jefferson Avenue
Offers a place of hospitality for the homeless and impoverished to be treated with dignity and respect. Anyone can use their coffee, water, restrooms, showers and personal hygiene packets.

4 Door of Hope
245 North Bellvue Boulevard
Offers long-term housing to chronically homeless and disabled individuals as well as regular lunches throughout the week.

5 St. Mary's Episcopal Church
700 Poplar Avenue
Provides a worship service and a breakfast every Sunday morning from 8:30 to 10:00.

6 Union Mission
383 Poplar Avenue
Provides overnight shelter, showers, meals, and changes of clothes to currently homeless indiviudals.

7 Hospitality Hub
82 North Second Street
Offers conseling, hospitality services, phone and computer access, and locker space. Hospitality Hub also provides a Sunday morning hot breakfast at Calvary Episcopal Church.

8 First Presbyterian Church
166 Poplar Avenue
Offers ID renewal service, hygiene kits, and a soup kitchen every Sunday from 2:30 to 4:00 p.m.

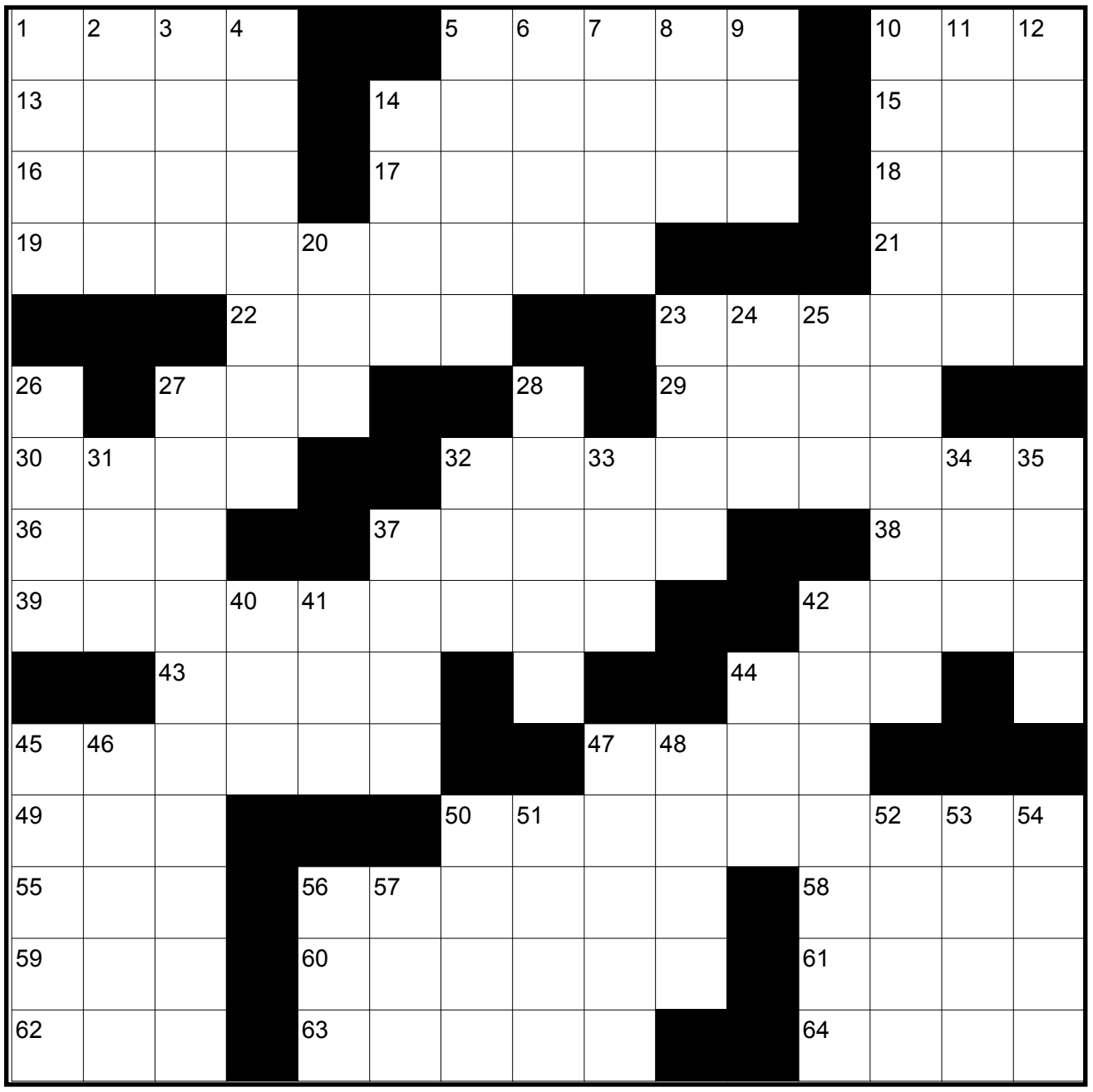
9 Saint Mary's Catholic Church
155 Market Street
Serves coffee, water, sandwiches, and other food six days a week while offeirng spiritual guidance and occasional provisions.

OTHER RESOURCES

Mid-South Peace and Justice
3573 Southern Avenue
A membership-based organization that works to engage, organize, and mobilize communities to realize social justice through non-violent action.

COMPILED BY ELLIE SKOCHDOPOLE

"ICE CREAM"



DOWN

1 Bath houses
2 ___San Lucas
3 Whatever follow-up
4 Tenants
5 Shapely fruits
6 Ancient eight up
7 Nil
8 Famous pharaoh's nick
9 The snake says...
10 Often purple
11 Quite mad
12 Dipstick's treat
14 Imposter
20 ___ Lanka
23 Tiny biter
24 Crewman's conjunction?
25 Some parabolas
26 Global warming grp.
27 Kal-El alias
28 Oxidizes
31 Tah-___
32 Forty mi. SE of 38 across
33 ___ whiz!
34 Toddler's break
35 They all live in Texas
37 Another last name in cars
40 Roll-a-way
41 Prospector's choice
42 Glowing
44 Clandestine org.
45 Milk fat
46 The advice vessel?
47 Pius Luddites
48 Demo- or techno-
50 Steals
51 CO(NH2)2
52 Gin berry
53 Name ending for Mar- or Clar-
54 Christmas ditty
56 Letterman feature
57 4G variety

ACROSS

1 Lion King antagonist
5 Two to a quart
10 Tear
13 Matador's move
14 Vowels
15 Epoch
16 One place to put trash
17 White and tan horses
18 State of matter
19 Dairy Queen invention
21 Cingular buyer
22 Flubs
23 Move away from the wind
27 Test tube?
29 Snitch
30 Tablet forerunners
32 Themed containers
36 May be tin or aluminum
37 Beginning
38 Not rigid
39 Wonka specialty
42 Hitchcock's single shot
43 Last name in cars
44 A street ___ named desire
45 Hindi strata
47 It's never base
49 Decompose
50 Alliterative flavor
55 Ever, to a poet
56 Meathead's spouse
58 As well as
59 Ingested
60 Optimum result
61 Sniffer
62 No es bueno
63 Passover (var.)
64 Blue-green

COMPILED BY NATHAN BISHOP

Get a happier, healthier you with National Nutrition Month

BY BROOKE HALL
Contributing Wrtier

With fast food dining options on every corner and a variety of dollar menus vying for your attention, choosing a healthy meal over a greasy cheeseburger can be challenging. However, with March being National Nutrition Month, eating a healthy diet is easier than ever. By learning how to eat a healthy diet, better eating habits are within reach.

At Church Health Center Wellness, located at 1115 Union Avenue, anyone from the community is welcome to attend our free nutrition classes. Nutrition classes, along with cooking classes, are available every Thursday at 9 a.m. and 10:30 a.m. Participate in a food demonstration, sample a tasty recipe and leave with a healthy recipe!

While National Nutrition Month is recognized every March, establishing and maintaining a balanced diet should continue throughout the year. Don't rely to heavily on supplements. Adding fruits and vegetables to meals helps you get the nutrients you need to be healthy naturally. Eating balanced meals throughout the day is a great step toward healthier living!

Visualize what a dinner plate looks like. Now, make it half that size. Imagine filling up the plate with food. Now take away half of the meat and add more greens, colorful vegetables and a piece of fruit. To go along with your dinner, a glass of water or a cup (8oz) of lowfat milk makes for a great pairing! Remember, it's better to eat your calories than to drink your calories, so try to eliminate sodas and juices. A dinner plate should contain 50 percent vegetables, no more than a palm-size piece of meat and a small fist-size portion of carbohydrates such as pasta, potatoes or corn.

Eating healthy foods is vital to a healthy lifestyle. As a direct result of eating a healthy balanced diet, your body will change. Listen to your body. Greasy and sugary foods don't make you feel better. Food is meant for two purposes: enjoyment and fuel. If too much fuel (food) is consumed, it is then stored in the body as fat. As the body accumulates more fat, it increases the work that has to be performed by vital organs in the body, and it increases the risk of other complications. These risks include high cholesterol, high triglycerides, type 2 diabetes, cancer, depression, sleep apnea, polycystic ovary syndrome and sexual health issues like erectile dysfunction.

When eating a healthy diet that is primarily plant-based, the chance of becoming obese is slimmer. Obesity is assessed by the Body Mass Index (BMI) tool, which uses height and weight to assess if a person is too heavy for their height. If you are currently overweight or obese, even a small amount of weight loss can decrease your insulin resistance, lower your chances of developing type 2 diabetes, reduce aches and pains, improve energy and help you lower your cholesterol.

Brooke Hall is a registered dietitian and nutritionist at the Church Health Center, whose ministries provide healthcare for the working uninsured and promote healthy bodies and spirits for all. For more information about the Church Health Center, call (901) 259-4673 or visit www.ChurchHealthCenter.org.

DIANE LOFTIS/Staff Photographer

MINIMUM SUPPORT FOR MINIMUM WAGE: The extreme difference between housing prices and the minimum wage can make it hard to afford basic housing even with a full-time job. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, minimum wage would have to be raised by 175% for someone to afford a two-bedroom apartment in Tennesee.

Simple economics: how wages and housing costs contribute to homelessness

BY AARON BANKS
Staff Writer

The most fundamental cause of homelessness is economic; if someone cannot pay the rent, then they are likelier to exprience homelessness. But with housing prices rising faster than the Federal minimum wage can keep up, many people are forced to live their lives on the verge of homelessness- one emergency or illness away from living on the streets.

The federal government defines "affordable housing" as taking up thirty percent of one's income. Unfortunately, no state currently has a minimum wage high enough for someone to afford even a single bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent, as determined by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Even with President Obama's newly proposed increase in the minimum wage to $9.00 an hour, those attempting to provide for a family on a minimum wage income will encounter numerous difficulties.

According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the wage required to adequately afford a two-bedroom apartment in Tennessee is $12.56 an hour, almost 75% above Tennessee's minimum wage of $7.25 an hour. This difference means that a single mother earning minimum wage in Tennessee has to spend upwards of 50% of her income just to house her family, leaving very little for other basic necessities or a savings account to act as a safety net.

As a result, many of those earning minimum wage lack the money to recover from temporary unemployment or even just a small rise in their rent.

While homelessness can be caused by more complex, less preventable problems such as mental illness, a temporary loss of income is much easier to offset, often requiring only a one-time payment of less than $1,000 to stay the long term homelessness of an individual or family.

While $1,000 may seem to be a large investment, it pales in comparison to the cost that one homeless person can incur upon the city at large. A University of Texas study on homelessness concluded that the average homeless person costs the state over $14,000 a year in incarceration costs alone, with the majority of the prison stays lasting only one night.

Homeless individuals who live on the street also tend to have more medical issues than those who are housed. In a study by St. Michael's hospital in Toronto, researchers found that the average hospital visit for a homeless person costs $2,500 more than a visit from a patient who is housed. The study also found that the homeless visit the hospital an average of twenty-three times a year, while, in the same amount of time, the housed population averages only five hospital visits. And as most homeless lack proper health insurance, the cost of their medical bills is simply thrust upon the state.

Several programs have been started in the Memphis area to address the issue of a temporary crisis causing much more permanent homelessness. Memphis Light, Gas and Water's Project Care has provided home repairs to those in need since 1984. The repairs are often small, such as fixing a water or gas leak, and can cost between $500 and $1,000. While this cost may not seem astronomical, to those living on minimum wage, $500 is almost an entire two weeks' pay. A figure such as this can mean the difference between keeping one's home and living on the streets.

> "To those living on minimum wage, $500 is almost an entire two weeks' pay. A figure such as this can mean the difference between keeping one's home and living on the streets."
> **-Aaron Banks**

In mid 2012, Annie Moore, a 65-year-old South Memphis resident, had a leaking water heater that filled her home with three inches of water over the course of two months. During that time, the water managed to make its way into every part of the house, damaging appliances, furniture and even the foundation of her home. Unable to resolve the issue herself due to health issues and a shortage of funds, Moore's home inched closer and closer to being condemned.

When one of her neighbors called in what seemed to be a broken water line, Moore was at a loss for what to do. Fortunately, Project Care was able to raise $40,000 in time and materials so that the necessary repairs could be made to Moore's home. Without the generosity of others and the assistance of Memphis Light, Gas, and Water, Moore likely would have been forced out of her home.

While Moore's situation may not have been typical, it does show how quickly a small problem can balloon into a much larger crisis. A leaking water heater can cause $40,000 worth of damage and bring someone to the mercy of others.

For those living on a fixed or low income, the danger of living on the street can just be one extra bill away, whether that bill is $100 or $40,000.

Plus-1, another program of Memphis Light, Gas and Water, allows customers of MLGW to donate a dollar or more on their utility bill directly to the Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association's, or MIFA, emergency services program, which provides one-time assistance with utilities and other necessities to those facing unavoidable economic hardship. Since it's inception, the Plus-1 program has provided millions of dollars to those in need. Every year, MIFA is able to assist nearly 15,000 people in the greater Memphis area. Despite these large numbers, the Plus-1 program is forced to deny more than 75% of its requests for assistance due to limited funds.

While the Plus-1 program may not be able to serve everyone in need, it still allows the Memphis area to do a great deal of good. For example, Zach Randolph of the Memphis Grizzlies has donated $20,000 to the program each year for the past four years- enough to pay the utility bills of one hundred families in need for an entire year.

Randolph's charitable work doesn't end there,. During this past holiday season, he provided 900 boxes of food to families in need from local high schools and 100 coats to students of Cummings Elementary School, all handed out by Randolph himself. These charitable contributions have earned Randolph the NBA's Kia Community Assist Award for the second time in four years.

While the programs listed here provide much needed support for community, they aren't able to provide enough support with their current resources. Due to a combination of high unemployment here in Memphis, a minimum wage too low to cover the cost of a family, and rising housing prices, there are still those who live with the spectre of homelessness looming over their every action, awaiting a minor setback to send a family on a sharp, downward spiral.

Voices of struggle

*Those with personal experiences of homelessness share their stories**

Homelessness strikes three times, leaves stronger person in its wake

Over the past year I have seen God work many miracles in my life. I am able to truly appreciate all of them. There was a time in my life when that was not the case. I took and took anything and everyting I could. I was arrogant and felt like life owed me something. Boy was I so, so wrong.

I remember the first time I became homeless in 2001. I was still young. I was nineteen years old. Even at that point in my life, throughout it all, I was stubborn.

In 2009 I ended up homeless a second time. I cried every chance I got a moment alone. I also remember 5 fearful nights sleeping alone in my truck which I had parked in a very secluded and dark parking lot. For the most part they were sleepless and restless nights. I was literally so scared something would happen that I had the shakes. I occasionally dozed off for a few minutes here and there, but until I got in the Salvation Army Women's Lodge on December 19, 2009, I didn't get a full night's sleep. I remember changing and washing up in public restrooms like McDonald's, The Career Center, or the library. None of my friends or family knew what was going on. Once I ended up in the shelter, some friends and family said, "I didn't know! You should have said something! I would have helped you!"

A year and a half later, after I was truck-less and homeless a third time, and seven months pregnant. No friends or family were there anymore. I found my way to the church where I had grown up with my grammy. I attended that night's service. As people started to leave, my heart sank. I realized I had nowhere to go.

I swallowed my shame and asked the pastor if I could sleep in one of the Sunday school classes on the couch. He said no, that the security system was so powerful that any movement would set it off. So I walked to Montessi's Grocery Store next door. I walked around just looking. When the store closed, I walked back to the church and sat on the front steps and said a prayer for God's protection. Then, I proceeded to walk around the church building until I found a soft, grassy spot in a corner of the outside of the building, where I slept two nights in a row. Between my bundle of joy kicking, the crickets, and the summer heat it was not a restful sleep. But I did what I had to do.

Through a friend I got connected to a caseworker in Frayser. She wrote a referral for me to Door of Hope. Within six months I was blessed with a rental home. It was even furnished by the organization.

Today, I am in the process of moving into a three bedroom apartment in Whitehaven which will afford me the opportunity to reunite with my children.

I am not writing this for your sympathy or to get anything from you. I write this to let you know I'm still human, and if you are currently experiencing homelessness, hopefully this will be a ray of sunshine to not give up. Anything that's worth it takes a little pain and hard work.

– Cynthia Crawford

Search for permanence leads to move to Memphis, confusion over horrible situation

I was doing what I was supposed to be doing. I was going to work, paying my bills, and keeping my rent paid.

I really don't quite understand why I became homeless. I guess if people don't like you they can make you homeless at anytime.

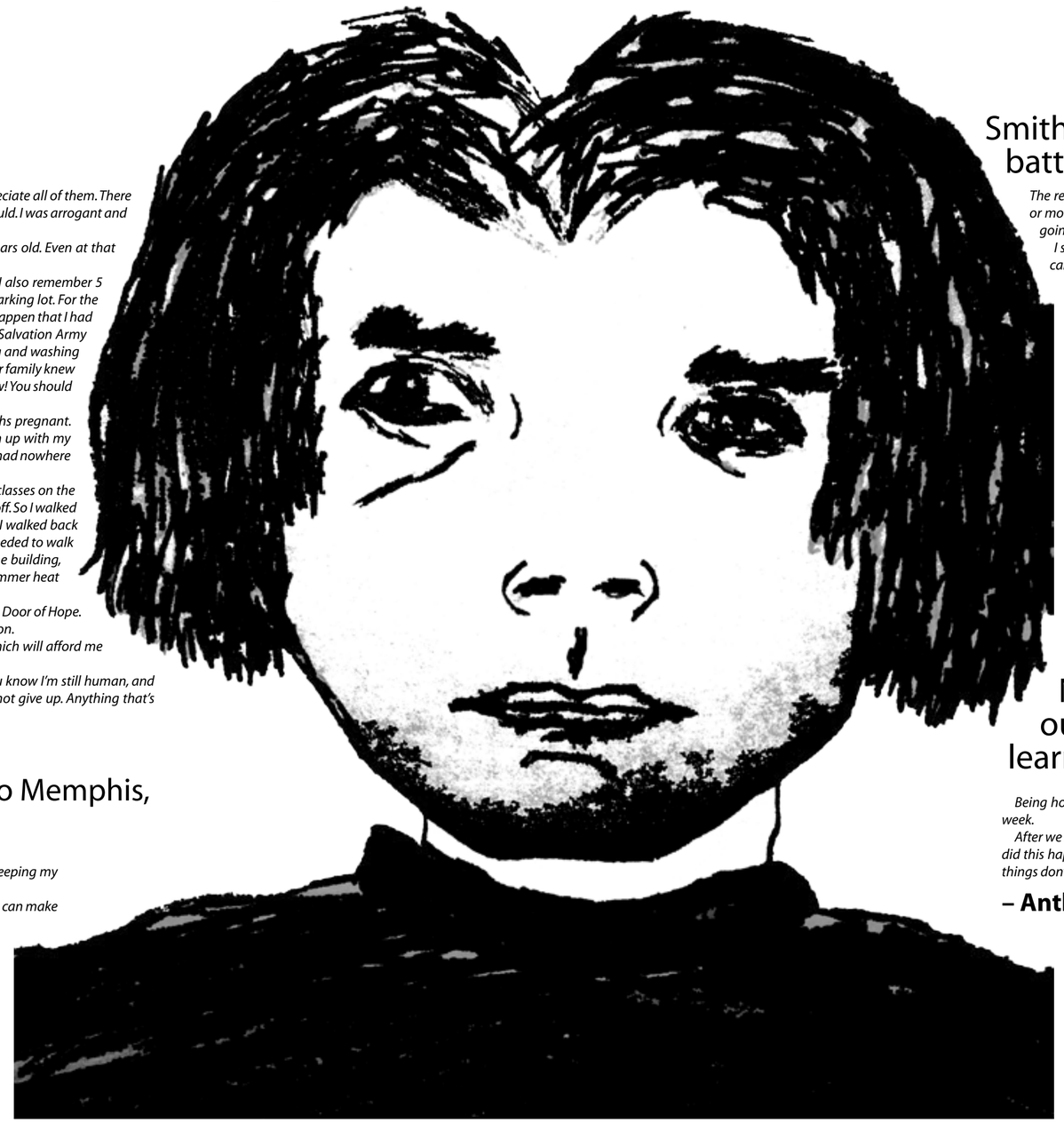
I know that it was really hectic for me. I was still trying to go to work at that time. I was moving from place to place. I had to live in a place with no utilities.

One night I got ready for work at two o'clock in the morning. I was getting water from outside to wash myself and my clothes. Cold water on your body in the morning ain't nothing nice.

I eventually lost my job. It was a month before my son graduated from high school. Fortunately he had friends to help him. I prayed that we would make it through this. I was happy for him to graduate.

I got my check two days later. That's when I came to Memphis.

– Candi Jones



Smith lives in car, braves cold winter nights in battle for life, sanctuary

The reality of being homeless set in when I discovered I had no where to stay but in my car, and I had no food or money. All I had was a half tank of gas in my car an all my clothes in the trunk, and I had no idea what I was going to do.

I sat in my car in a parking lot trying to figure out what to do. I sat there for at least five hours. Then I began calling shelters. It was the twenty-third of December and very cold. I felt so alone and helpless.

The shelters were all full because it was winter time, so I couldn't get in anywhere, and then I had to figure out where I was going to park my car so I could sleep in my car. I found a parking lot where I thought no one would see me, and that is where I stayed for about a week. I would ask people if they could get me some food and sometimes they did, but most of the time they didn't.

I can remember how cold it was and two or three nights it was thirteen degrees. I thought I would freeze, but I didn't, and finally I found a shelter to go to.

– Smith

Departure from hometown brings troubles, tears for Savannah native

I thank God for today. My heart is open, and I can actually feel life and all its wonders. I am no longer terrified at the thought that I have nowhere to go, no one to turn to, and no one to ask for help.

I will never forget that cold, snowy, icy night. I was dropped off at the men's Union Mission on Christmas Eve. When I was told it was a men's mission I panicked. It was then I realized my ride had already left heading back to Savannah, TN. I felt totally helpless, alone, and in my deep, dark emotional pain, I began to cry. I knew nobody in Memphis. It was a new town, and I was homeless.

– T.R.

Negative circumstances lead to positive outlook on life, unique learning experience, hope for future

Being homeless was a bad time, but a good experience. We learn more and more, if not every day, maybe once a week.

After we get housed, we look back thinking it's not so bad, and I already know if we make a mistake we think, "How did this happen? I was doing so good. At least, I thought I was." We also say to ourselves, "Things happen," knowing things don't just happen. Our mind wanders like this. We try to figure it out and can't. No way.

– Anthony

***Names have been changed to protect the identity of the writers.**

Drawing by Anthony

ARTISTIC VOICE: Door of Hope Writing group, an outreach organization for those experiencing homelessness, provides a safe haven for artistic endeavours such as writing and drawing. Anthony, one of the writers featured left, has created multiple works here, including the sketch above.

One on One with Roderick Baldwin

Former homeless man hosts organization to help fellow Memphians

BY HENRY MORRIS
Staff Writer

Recently I sat down and shared an order of bagels and lox with Roderick Baldwin, a man who has experienced homelessness and currently serves as host, overseer, founder at Door of Hope, an organization that gets chronically homeless people into permanent housing. Roderick was effusive when discussing his experiences with homelessness, and he was eager to share his unique insights on the current state of homelessness in America. He was engaging, with a true Memphis drawl that changed volume as he held court. Below are excerpts from our 75-minute long discussion.

Life Experiences

HM: You were born in Tunica but came Memphis in the early 60's. What do you think it is about Memphis that's made you stay?

RB: Memphis is up and coming. Memphis is what you make of it. I'm grateful that I had a mother to teach me and store in me the ability to have an open mind about things. Growing up in Memphis, everything is stereotyped. I hate to say this, but there is a lot of slave mentality here in Memphis.

Growing up, man, I was in the Cub Scouts and the Boy Scouts. And plus, I was real involved in interscholastic athletics. I had a partial scholarship to Baylor but I couldn't go because my mom… we were poor, we didn't have a whole lot. And that really, really bothered me as a kid—not being able to continue what I loved to do. Also, I didn't get to go on my senior trip, things like that. But, my mom really stored in us something about making something of yourself.

So I got into the Hotel restaurant business and I was in it for 25 years. My longest stint was the Peabody hotel. It was a great ride with that. But then I made some bad choices in life. I started drinking, and then I met some individuals… next thing you know I was using drugs. And that took me into a whole 'nother phase in life, man, where I stopped being responsible. Not only for my life, but stopped being responsible for doing what I needed to do for society. My family didn't want to have anything to do with me, so I walked away from a lot of things in my life, and I ended up on the streets, man. And when I did that… you know I used to make jokes at the guys drinking on the corner, and say, "I'd never be like that." And I ended up just like that.

HM: (Snapping) Just that fast.

RB: Well it happened over a period of time. The more I drank, the worse it got. The more I used, the quicker it got. And being out on the streets, I got used to it and started blending in with everybody else and finding out the outlets for that day. Finding a place to lay my head, but going through a lot of fear of something that might happen to me. I tell you man, it was a struggle finding the next meal or finding the next place to lay your head.

Escaping Homelessness and Life Afterwards

RB: I had this moment of clarity, man. I had been out, I had worked, made a lot of money, I had a big paycheck, and I went on this escapade: drinking, partying, and I didn't go back to work. And I stayed on this certain street for five days. Stuck. Doing these things that I liked to do. All of the sudden man, I don't know what happened, but I ended up f****n' butt naked, and all of the sudden I had this moment of clarity. Real deal: I was either going to be locked up, or someone was going to take my life, or I'm going to walk around here miserable, like a zombie, for the rest of my life.

And I saw my inner self walking down this street on Sunday morning and I saw, man this is where you're heading: to death, or prison, or something. And I walked down to 600 Poplar, downtown by the union mission. I asked a guy named Tomcat, and I said "I need some help, I can't do this anymore." They made a call to the Harbor House, and I was on my way man. I haven't looked back, but I keep a memory of where I came.

Man, I tell you, my life is full because today I do cross paths with individuals that I used to drink with, use with, or individuals that have done some bad things in life, and trying to help them and give them some hope that they can change their lives… because I tell you, a lot of us don't make it, brother.

HM: So when you see these people that you used to interact with on a daily basis… In your interactions with them, do you think that they treat you differently?

RB: Well they look at me with a whole new set of eyes. I'm not doing the same thing that they're doing. Some of them treat me differently than what we used to, some of them respect me now. Now I don't play with them about their lives, I'm trying to help them realize there's a way out, a better life than what they're doing, if they put forward the effort. But, when you've been doing something for so long man, it's so difficult for individuals to want to do something different. There are some people I run across now, still doing the same thing, but they look bad, man. They look rough.

HM: It ages you.

RB: Yeah, or the health conditions. They have certain health problems. Even myself, the things that I was doing took a toll on my body. High blood pressure, I have a bad heart, next thing you know, my kidneys went bad. Over the years, that wear and tear on my body, I don't have kidneys today. I had to go on dialysis. I had other problems, man. But I tell you, having that moment of clarity, I wanted to do something to help myself mentally, spiritually, and physically. Because there were some times when… I cut my finger off man (Holds up pinky finger, cut to the 5th metacarpal). Went to the trauma center; they released me, and guess what I did? I went right back to doin' what I loved to do. I stopped trying to take care of myself. I tell you man, I have grown into appreciating life, being responsible, and to have something of my own. You understand what I'm saying? Instead of just living off the fat of the land. Expecting somebody to give me something. Or if I didn't get what I want, having a state of mind that everybody in the world owed me something.

The one thing I do try to change, Henry, is people's perceptions. I don't like people labeling me. Get to know my name, get to know who I am, just because I'm part of a race that people have stereotyped and labeled, that doesn't make me, as a whole, part of the norm.

Stereotypes About Homelessness

RB: Now the trend is, is that we are advocates for the stereotypes about homelessness. Homelessness has been categorized years ago as people with an alcohol problem, or a drug addiction; that's not the case anymore. The trend is now, either you got some mental illness or some circumstance that has happened to you over the years or at some point in your life, where you've gotten disconnected with society.

HM: So how does that stereotype of addicts hurt your organization and its cause?

DIANE LOFTIS/Staff Photographer

LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL: Roderick Baldwin tells his journey from homelessness to hopefulness. He helps run Door of Hope, which aids the unsheltered in finding housing.

RB: They're not having an open mind about it and really being educated about it. The truth hasn't been told. Over the years, society has looked at homelessness with blinders on and said that this is a group of people. Everybody could be homeless in the blinkin' of an eye, man. But it's about the different types of homelessness that we need to focus on and the ones that need the most prioritizing. The mental illnesses and the disabilities of people, those I feel are the ones that need the most focus, the most help.

Current State of Homelessness

HM: Do you think that homelessness is a mental illness? Has it gotten to that point?

RB: I don't think that homelessness is a mental illness; homelessness is a moral and ethical situation. Like I said, people don't choose to be homeless. But when it comes to them and that's all they know what to do, that's what they get used to being. Now, the way time and society have evolved, maybe you might have a baby born into homelessness, into poverty, because their parents are that way. It's not a mental illness. Mental illness is part of the process.

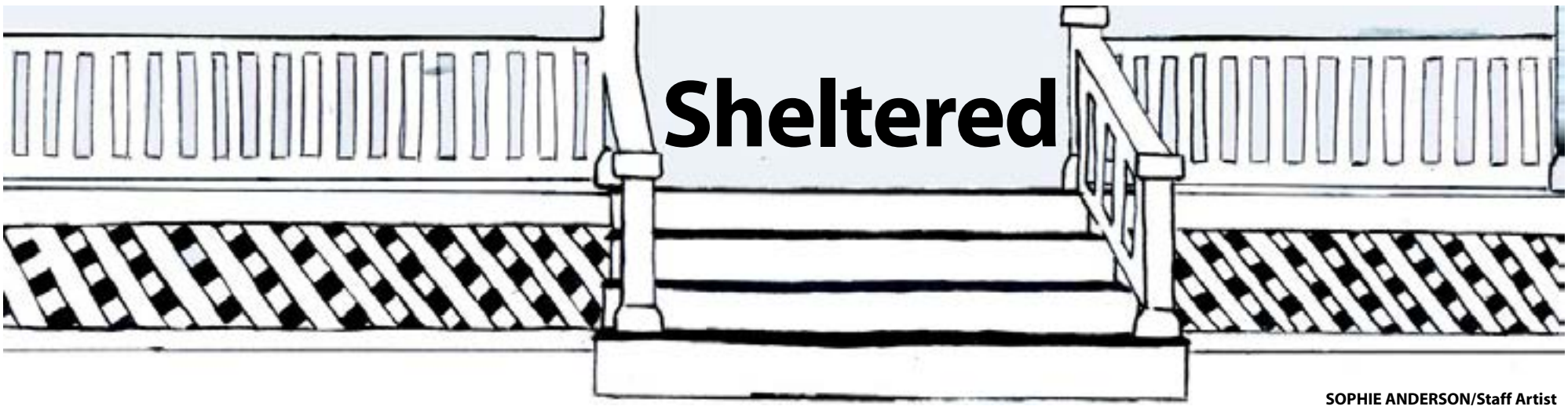
The thing is, that when the government helps you get someone off the street, the government is not dealing with those core issues that we deal with. All they want to say is that we're getting them off the street. We'll do so much for them, but then, they ain't doing nothing to combat homelessness. They ain't doing nothing but a revolving door.

HM: And it's getting worse because of that.

RB: Yeah.

HM: What could be done, at this point?

RB: (Laughs) We need to change they perspective. Certain government agencies have put in their certain own structured rules and laws to go by. Long as you give them somewhere to lay they head, they'll be alright. But that's not the case. You gotta do something to keep them from being homeless. We're trying to end it. We're not trying to keep something in the revolving door. All of us in the blinking of an eye could be homeless, without something. Then what you do?



SOPHIE ANDERSON/Staff Artist

Student learns the shelter gap is the size of a front porch

BY OLIVIA HIPP
Staff Writer

So, a homeless man slept in our front yard last night…" My housemate's words trailed off as she watched to see if I was listening while I fiddled with the coffee maker. "Wait, what?" I stared at her in a groggy stupor. "As in, in front of our house?"

"What did you do?" I asked her, startled by this coincidental timing.

"I mean, nothing really." She paused. "What was I supposed to do? I just saw him sleeping from my window and locked the door and let him be. I mean, we're a house of 20-year old girls, you know?"

I had just joined the Memphis Street Paper editing team the day before and had spent the early hours of the morning in my room scouring Google for stats about homelessness in Memphis. Or anywhere for that matter. Really, for anything of substance to say. And yet here in my front yard lay the very substantial imprint of person, not a statistic, right below my front porch.

I was terrified to write this essay. I think I did everything I possibly could have to put it off, short of giving up all together. It's not that I didn't want to write it. On the contrary, I worried so much about it, because I wanted to really do it justice. I just didn't know what to say. What could I possibly have to say that would shed any light on the problem that is homelessness in Memphis? What enlightening insight could I have on the origins of homelessness?

After a sleepless night trying to find the right thing to say, I woke up to an email from my editor at *The Bridge* recommending that I harness my anxiety about writing the essay to write about my lack of understanding homelessness in a community experiencing such high levels of it. I read that, and I felt paralyzed. Sylvia Plath describes it as an emptiness, "the way the eye of a tornado must feel, moving dully along in the middle of the surrounding hullabaloo." What could I possibly have to say about all of this hullabaloo around me?

Whatever you choose to call it, there is a certain paralysis that creeps into the mind at the prospect of choosing one path from a sea of options. As a second semester junior rapidly approaching graduation and the "real world", I am very conscious of the frightening realization that your life choices are in your own hands. To recoil in the face of an overwhelming sense of freedom is natural. The recognition of the scope of your own agency can be surprisingly daunting. But as I listened to my friend's account of this stranger seeking shelter outside of my home, with a rush of embarrassment, I suddenly realized how much, much more paralyzing an absence of agency would be.

Though he was gone by the time I looked, I could not get the image of this man curled up on my lawn out of my mind, and I was struck by how oblivious I really was to the condition of homelessness in the very city where I lived. How is one even supposed to talk about homelessness? We all know how to be PC with other social issues. We've got our reputation and most certainly our good intent. Everything fits snugly in its respective compartmentalized box, and we talk about the world's problems in lofty, distanced terms. But homelessness cannot go in an invisible, politicized box when it is sharing your sidewalk, your community, and your narrative.

So how does it start? I think when people see others experiencing homelessness, it is easy to imagine they have always lived that way. When one sees someone experiencing homelessness, it is easy to imagine that somehow they have always lived this way. But what about the first night? How do you know it's not someone's first week unsheltered? Talking to friends who have worked with the homeless community and looking back on my own experiences, what struck me most was the fullness of the lives people had experienced before homelessness. That tip over the edge from having a home and security to being on the streets is much quicker than most people care to admit. Society often blames the individual, but poverty is a huge, difficult issue that is often both situational and generational. When you factor in stipulations for government aid, minimum wage, and personal crises, not to mention the current economy, the pit of homelessness is one into which it is easy to slip.

Leafing through the Nashville's street paper, I found the same pattern. People don't just permanently exist homeless; their lives have followed a trajectory just like any other. Bill Warmath wrote, "Worry is a chronic thing for us homeless folks. It comes in all forms—what to do, where to go (that is safe), who to trust, shelter for a moment's peace and most of all, hope—where did it go?—hope that may be something, that might bless us all. I pray to my maker that just one more day the sun will rise and that depression will not be that languishing pain with its violin playing the blues laughing at my shortcomings." This striking prose spurred me on to read the rest, and I read reflections of people who found themselves homeless and their struggles to get off the streets. I found complex, resilient lives fighting for their place every day. The daily struggle that ensues after losing shelter is a constant one that I cannot begin to understand.

What struck me the most, however, was something else Warmath wrote in his article on hope. He said, "It's a job being homeless." This isn't supposed to be a manipulative sob story, and it is most certainly not supposed to be a preachy lecture from a sheltered college student on a topic she has never even experienced. This is a wake-up call. This is a hope that we can breach the waters dividing us from a community within our community that has been pushed to the outskirts of society. Maybe *The Bridge* can help give a voice to a group of people that are unheard, and my lack of personal experience a place to start closing the gap between my coffee maker and the sort of life that requires one to seek shelter below a stranger's front porch.

Homelessness knocks man down but not out

Con't from Page One

I believe that I was predestined to follow a path towards truth and understanding. But I won't know god until I am totally with god. I am still jostling around trying to make sense of my existence, trying to find that certain person who will fulfill my life, and trying to find that certain logic that will ease my prying, inquisitive mind.

Even though I don't shoot cocain and dilaudids on a daily basis, I still suffer. Being sober is not the total answer. But it helps greatly. I sometimes fall back to negative thinking and bad behavior out of pure boredom. I can be a sober misfit as well as a drunken one. Mentally hyperactive with nowhere to deposit the out-pours of my soul, I turn to friendly partying with no hostile motives. Just a short break from circular philosophy and aimless living. Even Noah got drunk sometimes.

.This tightrope of life requires some sense of stability and purpose. Or else, we will give away all of our prized possessions for a few minutes of pleasure, an escape from a reality that contradicts itself continually.

It may not be a brass menagerie, but wee will sell our souls fro a small price.

I was sitting on the front porch of a dilapidated shotgun house surrounded by tall weeds. The house stood atop a deep ravine that had railroad tracks at the bottom. On each side of the trench were the same tall weeds littered by some colorless short trees. There were no lights on the dead end excuse for a street. The shotgun house was the only one occupied. The rest were vacant, crumbling sentinels to a gloomy, hopeless poverty. Slinking cats prowled the weeds, their eyes glowing like sinister lanterns in the suffocating darkness of a tepid summer night. I fought mosquitoes that whined in my ears as I waited for the dope lady to bring me my package. I couldn't come inside for reasons that only the dope seller knew. I sat there impatiently as she took her time cooking up cocaine mixed with baking soda that made the soft powder crystallize.

Headlights suddenly appeared then went out as the car parked in front of the porch. A young lady got out on the passenger side. She was about 22 years old with a figure like Venus and smooth black skin that glowed with vitality. She gave me that sex-for-drugs stare as she knocked on the door. She was a steady customer, and she was let inside immediately while I had to wait outside on the porch infested with mosquitoes. I was getting more and more impatient.

The dope lady came outside and showed me her wares. Venus followed behind her, still having that look on her face. I declined the invitation. I knew that game well. I was no stranger to the ghetto. You get broke and still don't get what was promised. Only teased into buying more crack, if you are that naïve.

Rock bottom? Not quite. At least not for me. Not because my will was that strong, but because god placed a shield in front of me where I could recognize evil working and brace myself against Satan. I knew what I was getting into. I would not get totally tricked and trapped into giving my soul over, not even to a beautiful young woman. I was getting older. I hated myself for addiction. The brass menagerie still lingered on my mind

DIANE LOFTIS/Staff Photographer

HOME AWAY FROM HOMELESSNESS: Caritas Village offers a place for the homeless to grab a bite to eat, work on their art or creative writing, and visit with friends. The organization also offers a school for the children of homeless Memphians. Caritas, which means the pure love of God, focuses on a Christian "ministry of presence," says founder Onie Jones.

Caritas Village provides community, spiritual learning

BY KATIE CANNON
Staff Writer

From the street, it doesn't look like much, just a plain brick building bearing the name "The Caritas Village" in unassuming black and white print on a small sign. However, upon opening its doors, hand painted to reflect the community spirit it hopes to engender, you immediately find yourself at the pulsing cultural and spiritual heart of the West Binghamton neighborhood.

Replete with cozy nooks and bright, splashy colors, The Caritas Village serves as a restaurant, art gallery and studio, coffee shop, theatre, and free health clinic. The community center acts as a living translation of its name. "Caritas" is a Latin word that means "love for all people." As a self-proclaimed haven for the voiceless, The Caritas Village welcomes people from all walks of life into its doors.

The idea for The Caritas Village was first sparked in the mind of Onie Jones in 2000. During a 10-month spiritual formation group, she felt called by God to move into Binghamton with a mission to get involved in the community and serve as a "ministry of presence." Seeking to become immersed in neighborhood life, she began slowly, organizing a few events a year to try and bring her diverse new community together. As her passion and influence in Binghamton grew, Jones sought to expand.

> "At Caritas, people could put their feet under the same table and go on a journey together."
> **-Onie Jones**

After quitting her job in medical management in 2005, she focused all her energies on creating a place where everyone "could put their feet under the same table and go on a journey together." Finally, in 2006, The Caritas Village opened as a community center and has thrived ever since as place to create, learn, discuss, and make connections with people of all backgrounds and beliefs.

The Caritas Village runs mostly on a volunteer basis, with only four people currently working as hired staff. Everyone who works with The Village strives to realize the goals of its mission statement, which is to "break down walls of hostility between and among neighboring cultures and build bridges of love and trust between the rich and those made poor, and to provide a positive alternative to the street corners for the neighborhood children." Whether you are young or old, black or white, Asian or Latino, whatever your political or religious beliefs, you will be welcomed with open arms at Caritas.

The patrons of Caritas are devoted to social justice, creative learning, and experimenting with how these areas can work in conjunction with each other. They seek to acknowledge the problems that the community and the world at large faces with regard to cultural differences. They are not interested in simply smoothing over divisive community issues or turning a blind eye to discord among its people. As a result, the Village serves as a place where these problems can be openly discussed and all opinions can be expressed.

The Caritas Village conducts both everyday activities and many large events throughout the year to achieve their mission. Much of their curriculum is focused on children and encourages the ability to "think creatively" within the neighborhood kids. Even when organized classes or events are not taking place, the local youth can come to the Village after school simply to talk, play, and create.

One children's program Caritas sponsors is a "Peacemakers" group that strives to nurture the idea of peacemaking on both a personal and global level through art. This year, the Peacemakers are using theatre as their medium. On February 21st, they performed Rudyard Kipling's Rikki-Tikki-Tavi.

Another project that Caritas has started is the "Create Community" program, in which people in need of income are provided with a means of exercising their creativity to make money. Right now, the crafty product for sale is a funky beaded necklace, each one handmade and slightly different from the next. Jones and her volunteers make these necklaces to raise money for the Village, but anyone who wishes may come make the necklaces themselves and keep their earnings from selling them.

Caritas is also bringing art to the community through the "Artists in Residency" program, in which visiting artists are provided with nearby housing so they can "exhibit, teach and learn the positive effects that art can play in a community or urban environment." The Village also has an art exhibition center, the Hope Gallery, that holds six shows a year from new and developing artists. When an artist is not showing, the gallery hosts other art and theatre events as well as workshops for children. In addition to ongoing projects like these, the community center regularly hosts gatherings of chess, poetry, and creative writing clubs, as well as three separate bible studies.

As the sign out front reads, Caritas is a place "where friends and neighbors break bread together." This isn't a metaphor. Everyday at lunchtime, both Caritas regulars and curious passerby alike can enjoy a delicious meal courtesy of The Village's celebrated kitchens—and for an affordable price. The restaurant, which boasts "the best quesadillas in town" is run by a trained chef and serves a hot lunch every weekday from 11:00 A.M. to 2 P.M. Like most things at Caritas village, the burger is considered "a spiritual experience," the kind of food that not only nourishes the body, but the soul.

A favorite among Memphians looking to eat well for cheap, the restaurant has been lauded as a must-go Memphis spot, as on Ilovememphisblog.com, where it has been featured in numerous articles, like "365 Things to Do in Memphis."

Apart from its cultural and culinary endeavors, the Caritas Village also hosts a free clinic every Tuesday night from 6-8 P.M. Run entirely by a volunteer staff of doctors and nurses, the clinic can treat minor ailments and illnesses as well as help find doctors to take care of more serious or chronic health concerns. They also provide general health education.

Within the walls of Caritas, homeless or impoverished Memphians not only physical care, but true acceptance. The Village devotes itself to providing a refuge for those who are hard off; they are currently providing low-rent housing around the center to several people who have previously been homeless.

They are advocates for the downtrodden, often pointing out problems in the Memphis community that many people are too quick to dismiss, like the appalling murder rate in the city. Every year, the village erects a memorial for all people murdered in Memphis that year. On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, they name each and every homicide victim, calling attention to the many who are forgotten on the Memphis streets.

Furthermore, the Village acts as a haven for groups that may not otherwise have a place to speak their minds, like the socialist group that regularly meets there. The Village often sponsors events that deal with controversial topics. For example, in February, Caritas hosted a weekly discussion called "Living in the Tension" which focused on bridging the gay community with the church community. The Caritas Village does not try to force people to fit into a mold of what they think one should be. They celebrate differences while seeking to eliminate the barriers that separate and alienate different groups. They are looking to find common ground between different races, socioeconomic backgrounds, political beliefs—a common spirit that unites us all, through art and acceptance.

At its core, Caritas is what volunteer board member Cher Doiron calls a "spirit-driven" enterprise—a place where all are welcome to come in from the cold, eat, drink, and form relationships. Connections made here are often forged from "unspoken need"—people simply reaching out to each other in gestures of friendship. It is a center of learning, of, art, of love; a network of sorts, connected by solidarity, steeped in diversity.

UNSHELTERED: UNSEEN

Activists provided cameras to currently homeless individuals in an effort to capture their day-to-day experiences. Their photos provide a glimpse into the everyday realities of homelessness.

MARK S LYONS/Unsheltered: Unseen

MARC MARTIN/Unsheltered: Unseen

SHARLOD PETE BEAMON/Unshetlered: Unseen

ANTHONY SASFRASS/Unsheltered: Unseen

COMPILED BY ELLIE SKOCHDOPOLE

UNSHELTERED: UNSEEN

LINDA MORRIS/Unsheltered: Unseen

VIVI LONG STREST/Unsheltered: Unseen

THOMAS WIMBUSH/Unsheltered: Unseen

LEE HILL/Unsheltered: Unseen

COMPILED BY ELLIE SKOCHDOPOLE