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MESSAGE FROM YOUR VENDOR

The harassment that happens behind CLOSED DOORS:

Unthinkable acts from unexpected perpetrators in homeless shelters

BY JAMIE YOUNG
Contributing Writer

In a city like Memphis, where homelessness is a crime, there are fewer than 12 shelters available for the down and out. For those who are concurrently dealing with a mental illness, there is essentially one.

The local state-backed facility dedicated to helping people with disabilities is now under fire for putting its residents in the care of an alleged violent sexual predator.

The Beers Van Gogh Center of Excellence in the downtown area pledges to serve “people with mental illness from the community, and homeless individuals with severe and persistent mental illness, [where they can] come to establish or re-establish links to mainstream resources.”

It was built in 2010 with more than \$1.3 million of public and private funding and houses about 10 people, according to the website.

The Tennessee Mental Health Consumer Association (TMHCA) oversees the center. TMHCA is run for and by mental health consumers, which pains those who charge the Beers Van Gogh Center with wrongdoing all the more.

“If they really are made up of people like us, then they ought to know what we’re going through, and do everything in their power to stop this,” said one individual who asked to remain anonymous.

Most of the harassment at Beers Van Gogh is attributed to Hervelle Williams, the Certified Peer Recovery Specialist in charge of caring for many of the residents.

The allegations began trickling in shortly after the Center opened. Women have admitted to being groped, threatened, propositioned in person, and sent lurid photographs by phone.

Men weren’t safe, either, some claim. Tracy Curry, a former staffer and staunch advocate for Williams’ dismissal, says that the abuse wasn’t limited to sexual harassment.

Security camera footage retrieved by Curry shows one man being pinned to the ground in a room by two staff (identified as possibly including Williams) and forcibly shoved out the door. The camera wasn’t able to capture what transpired directly outside, but witnesses report the man was beaten “without mercy.”

Curry also reports that he witnessed intoxicating substances being sold and distributed with Williams’ knowledge.

“They’d come in drunk and leave drunker,” he explained.

Sources close to Curry have been informed that Williams visits individuals in their home, apart from his duties at the Center.

Former employees interviewed find this situation particularly disturbing. “Look what he was willing to do with the cameras on,” Curry remarks. “Now imagine what he’s capable of without anyone watching.”

Official incident reports of attacks by Williams are not to be found, which Curry ascribes to his managerial position.

“He holds the keys to the records, so he destroys them. It’s like keeping the fox in the henhouse.”

Two individuals brought their concerns to local group Homeless Organizing for Power and Equality (H.O.P.E.) last year.

“This is just an instance where one person was brave enough to come forward at a meeting, and then a few more,” said H.O.P.E. representative Paul Garner.

He expressed that most well-intentioned outsiders don’t realize how deep the problem of rape and sexual harassment in homeless shelters can run and how much of the abuse goes unreported.

“For so many people, this kind of thing is just another Tuesday,” Garner explains.

H.O.P.E. has actively fought to remove Williams from Beers Van Gogh for nearly one year, since July 2012.

Letters have been sent and phone conferences have been held with TMHCA, which has publicly stated that Williams has been investigated and will be held accountable if credible evidence of wrongdoing is discovered.

The Tennessee Mental Health Consumer Association can be reached at 955 Woodland Street, Nashville, TN 37206 or through Facebook at facebook.com/tmhca. Their telephone number is (615) 250-1176.

H.O.P.E. pledges to hold protests in front of Beers Van Gogh at 669 Madison Avenue every week on Thursdays at noon until Williams is gone. The public is strongly requested to join in solidarity. Call (901) 527-1302 for updates.

The Community Alliance for the Homeless, a group that monitors local shelters, can be reached at (901) 527-1302. Please report any instance of abuse to the Memphis Police Department at (901) 545-2677.

The Bridge invites all of its readers to follow this story on our blog at thememphisbridge.com and participate in making Memphis a safer home for all Memphians, especially those who cannot easily speak for themselves.

HOPING FOR JUSTICE:

A homeless individual protests the blatant sexual, physical, and emotional abuse at the Beers Van Gogh Center for Excellence at a rally outside the accused organization.

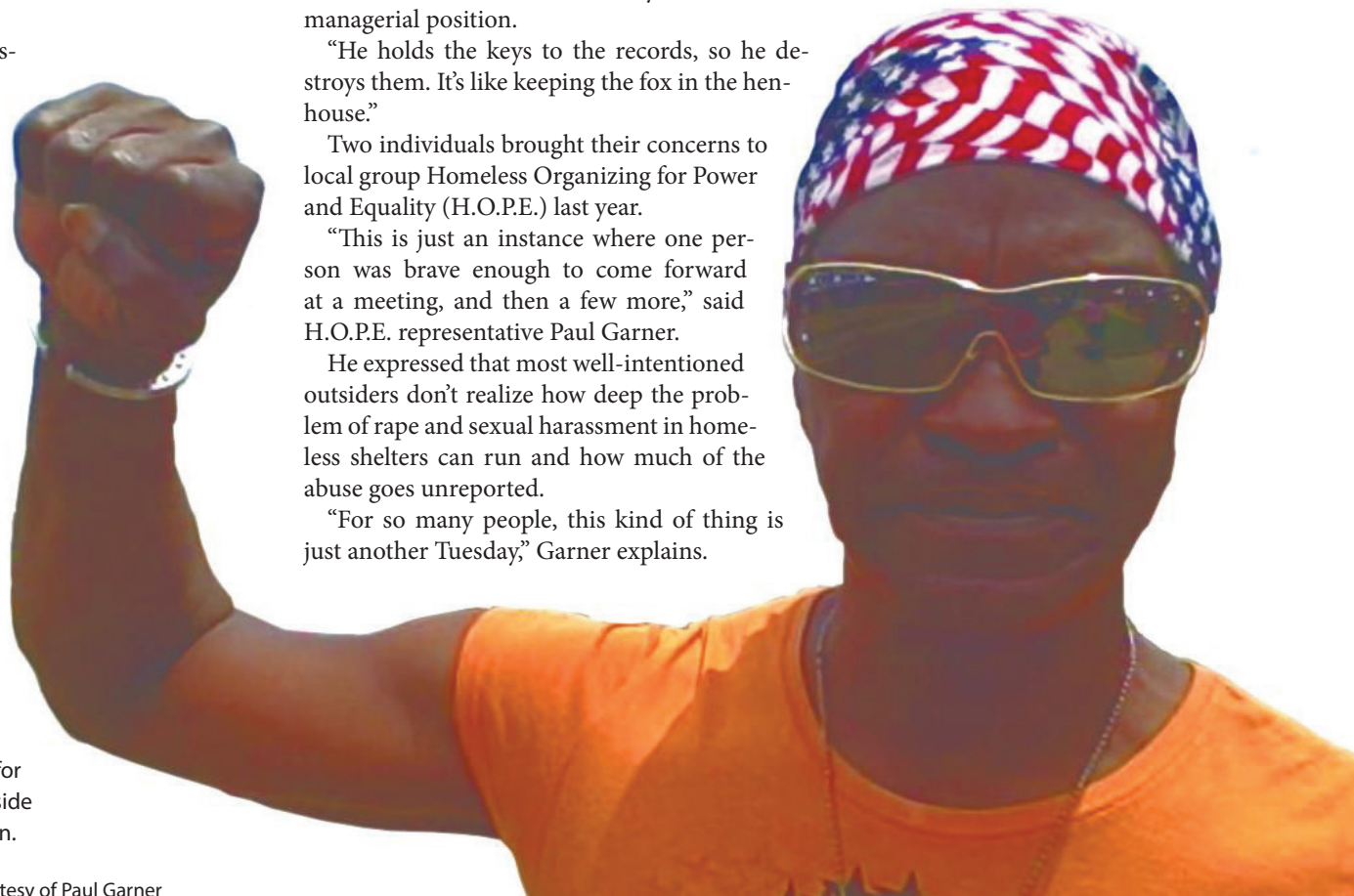


Photo courtesy of Paul Garner

Vendor training, paper distribution New Vendors Welcome

Every Thursday 1 p.m.
St. Mary's Episcopal Cathedral
700 Poplar Ave.

Mama King is one of our most successful vendors. With us since our first day, she is always happy to sit and talk. Mama King is a well-known figure on the streets of Memphis and can usually be found spending her time helping others who have fallen into homelessness themselves.



thebridge

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HOW IT WORKS: VENDOR TRAINING



People who have had an
**EXPERIENCE WITH
HOMELESSNESS**
come to a weekly
training session



After a brief interview,
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Each vendor
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**BADGE &
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papers

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at local events and
THE STREETS
FOR ONLY \$1

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Vendors who buy a certain amount of papers earn
incentives while building marketable job skills.*

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, specially-labeled 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 is a nonprofit and 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.

For advertising-related requests, please contact:
advertising@thememphisbridge.com
If you'd like to make a donation to *The Bridge*, please kindly send contributions to:

The Bridge Street Newspaper
3573 Southern Ave.
Memphis, TN 38111

Or contact:
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Letter from the Editor: It takes a village full of Memphians

BY NATHANIEL BISHOP
Editor in Chief

Rhodes College is nice. It's filled with stone buildings and lawns. It's the kind of place that could only be a small, liberal arts college or the Tennessee home of a weirdo billionaire who, I imagine, motors around in a golf cart, nursing his gout-knee. This weirdo, Chet, is very fond of plaid hats. And if he were the one enabling the publication of *The Bridge*, explaining this paper's staff and funding structures, even its ethos, it would be as easy as giving a shrug and reminding the reader that Chet's going to do what Chet's going to do.

Instead, *The Bridge* is run largely by Rhodes students. They are, by and large, hard working, organized, and amenable to productive criticism. Behind these pages, students recruit and train our currently and formerly homeless vendors, coordinate staff activities, secure sources of stopgap and sustainable funding, and marshal Rhodes resources so that the paper is attractive and able to accept online donations.

But *The Bridge* is not, strictly speaking, a project of Rhodes College, and part of my job is to erode the qualification, "strictly speaking," as *The Bridge* continues to find its place in the fabric of Memphis. While corporate management of the publication is mostly overseen by Rhodes students, they are quick to ask our lawyers (non-students) for advice. To better understand Memphis' nonprofit sector, we've co-opted volunteers from homeless outreach projects and social justice institutions. In addition to Rhodes, we draw funding from private individuals and, in the future, advertising.

Because so much of this paper's support is independent

from Rhodes College, the steady refrain of, "I've heard of *The Bridge* ... Rhodes students," for me, results in mixed feelings.

The Bridge is designed to stay in Memphis and to outlive the eventual graduation and job searches of its founders. As I'm typing this out, just past deadline, the most administrative parts of our staff are engaged in a business and startup workshop specific to Memphis. Instead of being home with their families, they are investing in their futures here. The Editor in Chief (me) and copy editor are essential to the paper's integrity of ideas and writing and come from outside of the Rhodes ecosystem, as does the head of vendor training. The college-aged volunteers working on the paper are consistently responsible, excellent communicators, and good at their jobs. They're great, but their institution and enrollment is in no way a precondition to their working with *The Bridge*.

We, the editorial and administrative heads, have always wanted more writers, general volunteers, and specialists who are full-time Memphians, regardless of whether they have ever heard of Rhodes College. This seems like a pretty good time to make that knowledge a little more public, because all of those hard-working, socially-adept college students are now home for the summer. The people we want most are those who have an idea or skill set and know what they want to do. We also like well-rounded individuals who are willing to help.

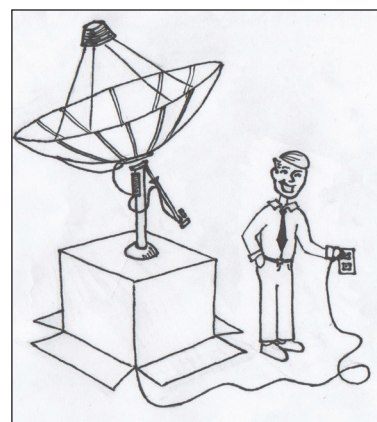
If you're more into throwing stones than building walls, I would love to hear from you. We accept letters to the editor at editor@thememphisbridge.com. There is every chance that I will respond to and/or run your specific letter in *The Bridge*. You will be performing a valuable service, making this section of the paper more about a community dialogue and less about

pats on the back.

If you'd like to make some contribution, and feel in any way intimidated – don't. We get stuff wrong all the time. In our first issue we directed our readers to pages that did not exist, and in our second issue sentences were duplicated as an article continued from one page to another. Even worse, I missed an email from one of our artists that was supposed to run with Chloe Bryan's opinion piece on the trend of sleep-outs.

The piece tactfully noted the actual, monetary contributions these events make, but did not shy away from thoughtful criticism, and it would have been a better-rounded article had I not let a drawing from one of our artists slip through the cracks. While I cannot go back and run it in its proper place any more than I can fix other printed errors, I can run the cartoon here. I think that it encapsulates what is often most ridiculous about well-intentioned people, the getting wrong of doing right,

something we've likely done, without irony, and with others looking on.



Cartoon by staff artist Sophie Anderson meant to run with "How to join the derelict" by Chloe Bryant on page 9 of Issue 2, Volume 1 of *The Bridge*.

YOU ARE A HERO

HOPE
is a grassroots group made up of individuals formerly or currently experiencing homelessness

JOIN US!
HOPE meets every week. for dates & times please call:
(901) 300.0006

HOMELESS ORGANIZING FOR POWER & EQUALITY

midsouthpeace.org facebook.com/homelessorganizing

COMMENT CARDS: Union Mission and Calvary

We welcome your comments...

why did you choose our hotel?

Location
 Recommended by Others
 Advertising
 Stayed here previously
 Value
 Other – Please tell us

Did our staff make you feel welcome upon arrival? YES/NO

Was your service prompt? YES/NO

Were our staff knowledgeable? YES/NO

Was your room clean and well supplied? YES/NO

Would you visit us again? YES/NO

How do we rate?

Excellent
 Good
 Fair
 Poor
 Other – please tell us

Please tell us in your own words how you rate the following:

Service A+ B
Cleanliness A+ B
Value A+ B
Quality A+ B
Decor A+ B
Overall Experience A+ B

Union Mission

They put me out

We welcome your comments...

why did you choose our hotel?

Location
 Recommended by Others
 Advertising
 Stayed here previously
 Value
 Other – Please tell us

Did our staff make you feel welcome upon arrival? YES/NO

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 Other – please tell us

Please tell us in your own words how you rate the following:

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Cleanliness A+ B
Value A+ B
Quality A+ B
Decor A+ B
Overall Experience A+ B

Calvary

Untitled

"Looken'in to the sky. Knowledge'in
"experience."
Why did the thief ask Jesus, could
he pray for him three days?
'We' walk sometimes.
We sing sometimes.
"We advice in general habits sometimes.
"Jesus how hard is we to stay a
street.
I'm ask after walken'in thoughts of
Haven-above-natures" Fight sometimes
seems obstacle."
Sometimes the ball park seems a
handful of gravity. A strix, a ball
maybe a home-run-end. Thank the
haven's above for "shinenning" down
on me.

-Theodora P. Brown Ard

Baby Sparrow

Try see down a walk side
side walk a down see Try.
Soft of a Geatte sippezers.
Holdai "God unchanging hand,
Armour of Salvation, Alpha
Plead my case; cloudied
view to salvation. Elf in a
dream.

-Theodora P. Brown Ard

Today

Born again, Rise from my grave.
Hopelessly Hopeful, something changes today.
A daily routine, I've become set in my ways.
7AM A place to be, Arrive with no delay.
Long line every time, It's well worth the wait.
Soup Sandwich goodie bag. Every day the same meal they make.
Some people complain, but I'm grateful for my plate.
When you're starving, how can you have negative things to say.
Something's gonna change, Live can't keep going this way.
Today I'll do my hygiene, It's been four months since I've bathed.
"Excuse me sir may I use your restroom"
"No" he says. Homeless folks not allowed to come in this place.

Off I go moving fast, fast as a snail crawl.
No destination in mind, still I'm walking tall.
2pm submitted an app. The manager said he'd call.
Hopeful until three blocks down.
I realized I had no phone to call.
5pm went to the shelter as rain began to fall
Without ID and six dollars can't get in at all
Tears in my eyes lord knows I try so hard
Off I go moving fast, fast as a snail's crawl

8pm I'm in the dumpster next to where I stay.
Tonight I found spaghetti w/green bean That they threw away.
I'm not hungry I'm not full saved again by grace.
Hopelessly Hopeful even though nothing changed today.
May GOD keep me safe tonight as I lay.
Give me a brighter tomorrow in Jesus name I pray.
Now I'm back to death, death in my grave.
Vision through my eyes 24 hours, today.

-Ben Armstrong



BAIRD ASHER/Contributing Artist

Three-year-old solicits money from homeless

BY AARON BANKS
Staff Writer

When I was in preschool at Calvary Episcopal downtown, we often took field trips out of our playroom and into the Memphis community. These trips consisted of short, closely-monitored walks to somewhere simple like the Peanut Shoppe on Main Street or Court Square. On one such trip, we took a walk to the spot that was known until recently as Confederate Park. While there, something for sale must have caught my eye, because I decided that I wanted a dollar.

In order to remedy this situation, I did what any 3-year-old would do: I asked the nearest adult I could find for a dollar. That adult just happened to also be homeless. Instead of scoffing at the chubby, blond-haired and blue-eyed child standing before him, he obliged. This man, who had resorted to sleeping on park benches and asking others for money, simply gave away a dollar to the first 3-year-old oblivious enough to ask him for it.

When my teacher saw what I had done, she tried to make me give the money back. He refused the dollar, insisting that I keep it. What I did with the dollar, I don't remember; I guess that detail wasn't important.

What has persisted, at least in my mind, is a nagging question as to why he not only gave me the dollar in the first place, but also insisted that I keep it. He clearly needed the money more than I did. He was missing multiple fingers, and I most likely spent the money on cheese popcorn. And while I love Peanut Shoppe cheese popcorn with every fiber of my soul, I had plenty of food and a warm bed waiting for me at the end of every day, and he was assured neither. Yet, this man, who asked others for money on a regular basis, insisted on giving his money to the only person with the complete lack of understanding of poverty and homelessness required to ask him for it.

I have never experienced poverty or homelessness, so I cannot speak for the homeless community. But this early encounter with homelessness became a personal anecdote that I have tried to use to distill some broad understanding of the

human race.

Why did that homeless man insist on giving me his dollar? Perhaps the man simply wanted to be able to give back to the community in whatever way he could. Maybe he wanted to give to someone who was more dependent upon others than he, and was able to see himself through the eyes of a child – not as a homeless man, but as a man. Perhaps he wanted to feel the oddly-warm sensation that can only come from giving to others.

When we see a homeless man begging for money on the side of the road or on some populated sidewalk, it can be all too easy to forget that he is asking for money out of dire need. So easy to forget that this man wants the same basic things out of life that you do. A man losing his home does not create a mindless, change-eating zombie (as South Park depicted it). Becoming homeless simply means that a person is now living on the streets, often without a way to get himself off the street and into a home.

Without the means to support themselves, many of those living on the streets turn to panhandling to make money. Despite reports by unscrupulous blogs of panhandlers making upwards of \$60,000 a year, most people begging for money make nowhere near that figure. Studies done from California to Toronto have found that those who beg for a living can expect to make about \$300 a month, or \$3,600 a year – not exactly a living wage, especially when one is trying to save up so that they may move into a home or apartment.

In fact, \$300 a month doesn't do much besides allowing someone to remain on a metaphorical treadmill of homelessness, even without the interference of drugs and alcohol. Starting each day with \$10 will not get you very far, literally and metaphorically speaking. Even if someone were willing to take advantage of all the free meals offered throughout Memphis, they would need to travel large distances each day just to get to them. And when a single bus fare costs

\$1.75, traveling to these free meals can be more expensive than the food itself. On top of all these costs, homeless shelters are not a free service, costing anywhere from \$6 to \$15 a night.

For many living on the streets, just keeping afloat is difficult. They beg, get some money, and spend all that money to get into a shelter or eat; all the while not really changing anything about their own lives, much less the lives of others. Perhaps luck will come their way in the form of a generous family member or an old friend willing to help them get off the streets. But for many, those resources have long since been exhausted, and the cycle will continue. And as it continues, their lives do not improve, and neither does their ability to make a difference in the lives of others.

When I say that a homeless man would like to make a difference in the lives of others, all that I mean is that he may want to do something as simple and universal as have a positive impact on the lives of his own children. Yet, if this man cannot make enough money to get himself off

of the streets, his children will most likely be left in the care of strangers.

The frustration that arises from an inability to change the world around us is a near-universal concept. We've all felt it,

whether it was when your side lost a political election or all the times rain fell from the sky when you wanted sunshine. This feeling may be at the root of my question. Perhaps, after years of begging for money, this man simply wanted to give a 3-year-old a dollar, and he'd be damned if anyone tried to stop him.

He didn't give me that dollar to make a meaningful difference in my life. But it did. His selfless act has stuck with me through the years. My hair has faded from blond to brown, my baby fat has dwindled, but time has not taken away the impression that nameless homeless man left on me 16 years ago. And here I sit, still wondering why he gave me that dollar.

Why did that homeless man insist on giving me a dollar?

INTERVIEW WITH GENE WILSON:

Formerly-homeless man now employed as a vendor for *The Bridge* sheds light on his transformation from hopelessness to success

BY ERIC DAITER

Contributing Writer

I sat down with Gene Wilson, a previously-homeless citizen of Memphis who currently works as a vendor for *The Bridge*, to talk about topics of family life, hopelessness, and reformation while homeless. Wilson built a looking glass into the impoverished lives of many Memphis dwellers while vividly recounting stories of his travels as a homeless American. Wilson's passion for helping reconnect the impoverished with active and promising jobs sheds light on a gloomy subject.

Eric Daiter: Have you ever been homeless?

Gene Wilson: Yes.

ED: For how long?

GW: This past time was the longest. I lived in Memphis since January 27 of this year and for the past 14 days I've been off the streets, so just over three months.

ED: So you've had multiple periods of being homeless?

GW: Yes.

ED: Was this caused by anything in particular? Money problems?

GW: Actually, job loss. This occasion was totally different than the others. It was a choice of not having anywhere to go because I was taking care of my 19-year-old son. He made a mistake and the family pretty much disowned him. He got stuck with a label, 24 months in prison and he will be stuck with a label for his life. The family didn't want him around. He came to where I was staying (Ripley, Mississippi) and the people that I was staying with didn't want him there so we had nowhere to go except Memphis. When we came here in January we automatically went into being homeless and I started trying to find work, which didn't pan out. I began talking to my ex-wife and told her how it is hard enough for one person to be homeless. It is hard enough for one person to actually watch out for themselves, but now I have a 19-year-old boy with me who has never been homeless in his life. She said she couldn't help me, and I thought to myself "great." He has been gone now for about a month and I am glad he is back with his mom. He's made it a lot easier for me to get off the street because I was working and keeping him safe all at the same time but when he left it only took me two weeks to get off the streets.

ED: That was a very honorable move on your part.

GW: I had a choice ... he was only 17 going into prison and came out when he was 19. I told my family, "Look, he is my son." Regardless if he was in prison for murder, I can't turn my back on him.

ED: Everyone makes mistakes; he is your son.

GW: Exactly. So I chose to do what I did. I didn't want to go homeless but we had no other choice.

ED: I really respect that. How good is Memphis at supporting homelessness in terms of getting citizens back on their feet?

GW: Memphis is about 25 years behind. Seriously, 25 years behind.

ED: In what respect?

GW: We only have two missions down here. The churches are fun, but there should be nobody in Memphis going hungry. Period. There are so many places to feed. You can eat three times a day, seven times a week and never go to the same place twice. And work for the homeless, like day labors, [Memphis] sucks at it.

ED: So, in your opinion, what could Memphis do differently or better to help the homeless?

GW: Open more temporary places. I was living in Denver when I worked as a truck driver. I gave up driving the truck on the road back in 2007. I couldn't find a job and I couldn't afford my rent so I went homeless for two days. The reason it only took me two days is because Denver has about 2,000 homeless people. That is a lot of people. But they have 60 different day labors. They pay cash every single day.

ED: And Memphis doesn't have that kind of support?

GW: Memphis has three. Labor Finders, which is at Knight Arnold and Hickory Hill Road, West Memphis. There is Command Labor, which is at Tilman and Walnut Grove Road, and the third is Labor Ready, which is out on Lamar Ave, also West Memphis. The people downtown who are homeless don't have any opportunities. Command Labor is a good company. I've been with Command Labor and Labor Finders for a very long time. Those main companies were the ones to keep me off the streets in Colorado. Yes, I only made \$300 or \$400 dollars a week but it was enough to keep me off of the streets and secure a motel room. I never did move into a house. When working at Command Labor I stayed in the same motel for about two years and the man told me he wanted me to become the manager. I said, "manager of what?" He meant the manager of the hotel. I went straight from labor into a manager position. The man paid me \$500 a month, which isn't a lot of money, but he bought all my groceries from grocery lists I turned in every week. He moved me into the front office, took all the furniture out, bed and everything, which belonged to him. He left me with basically an empty apartment and by that afternoon I had a brand new bed, brand new dishes, and a 48-inch color TV that he went out and bought with his own money. At that point I was cool with \$500 a month. I didn't need anything. But I met a lady and moved to Ridgley, Tennessee then to Mississippi; I stayed there for a year working for ranchers and spawns until my son came to me. We had a choice, Memphis, Tennessee or Jackson, Mississippi.

ED: What is the difference between being homeless in Memphis as compared to other cities? Is it easier or harder?

GW: It is much harder. When I was driving a truck, I



PHOTO COURTESY OF JAMIE YOUNG

THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL: After a tumultuous beginning, Gene Wilson is back on his feet. He is a successful vendor at *The Bridge* and has reconnected with his estranged son, Glenn. Two weeks ago, they finally got off the streets.

looked down on the homeless. I did. Now since I have become homeless and I was homeless for a while, my opinion has changed. I want to give back to the community. On Wednesdays, we go out and we feed the homeless. On Saturdays, we pick up the homeless and bring them to the church and feed them and give them services. We try to give them clothes and all, but that is just twice a week. Food is nice, it keeps the homeless alive, but it doesn't fix the situation. Their situation needs more opportunities for employment. It might be temporary for them but it is still putting money in their pocket and we'll start seeing less and less homeless.

ED: I really value the support you show Memphis' homeless community. I appreciate you taking time out of your day to actively help and update the rest of the community with what is going on.

GW: That is why I became a vendor. When I first started working for the paper, it was my only source of income. God smiled down on me and got me off the street but that doesn't end my problems. I want to continue on. I made a lot of friends out there and I want to help them as best as possible. The one thing I am slowly discovering is, you can only help those who want to help themselves. That's harsh but some of the homeless are comfortable on the street because they don't have to make choices. They know where to find food, free clothes, and usually where to sleep. It doesn't cost them anything. There has got to be more to life than that. I keep praying. The opportunities for the homeless are abysmal. There aren't as many opportunities as there should be. I think it's because most people are aware of the homeless but they have the mentality that they are homeless because they are drug addicts or because they are alcoholics. That's not the case. Most of the homeless people in Memphis say that they have families that are local here that have turned their back on them. They have nowhere to go. That is the biggest problem is getting the family to actually agree, ok so you made a mistake but I want to help you anyway. Part of me told me to turn my back on my son, but I brought him into this world and I have to help him. Everyone makes mistakes. We're going to grow up from it. That's why I had to look back at the homeless and say, "maybe I didn't give them a fair shot."

VOICES OF THE PAST:

Members of the homeless community reflect on their experiences with life on the streets, offer advice and warnings

Leaving the McLemore Clinic behind

There used to be an old, decrepit, peeling building across the street from Stax Records on McLemore Street in South Memphis. In its prime the building housed a mini-hospital called McLemore Clinic. There were about 30 rooms in the clinic staffed by about 12 nurses and interns plus two or three doctors that treated minor ailments and injuries.

I remember being a patient in McLemore clinic when I was about 15 years old. Once for a snake bite and once for a bad case of the flu.

My family lived on College Street about a block from the clinic. We had a nice three bedroom brick house in a somewhat quiet neighborhood. My father worked for Firestone and my mother as a nurse at the old John Gaston Hospital. I enjoyed all the benefits of a black, middle-class child and I was very industrious. Being a busboy at the Peabody Hotel, having a shoe shine stand, delivering morning papers and sales.

I was an Honor Roll student until depression set in and I became a gang member in Le Moyne Gardens housing project and the College and McLemore Crew. My family eventually lost our home due to my father's alcoholism and my mother's drug addiction and gambling habits. We moved into a much less comfortable house on Trigg Street and I became associated with the Lauderdale Subdivision Gang. The breeding ground for future criminals and pimps.

This was the 60's and homelessness was something I could never imagine as being my future condition. I married one of the smartest girls in the entire school system, became a civil rights activist as well as a "gangsta playa." Homelessness? Never! I had too much game to ever fall that low.

Eventually McLemore Clinic closed when the head doctor died. The red brick building began to slowly deteriorate.

When powdered cocaine hit Memphis in the early 80's, it became a shooting gallery and makeshift home for drug users and homeless vagrants. I was once again a patient in McLemore Clinic when my addiction and mental disorders caught up with me. Ruining my marriage and any hopes of a decent lifestyle. I supported my drug habit by shoplifting, burglaries, selling drugs, and whatever it took, besides dating homosexuals, to gain that instant euphoria.

The Honor Roll student, the snappy, sharp dresser, the charming rogue had now become a hopeless, pitiful vagrant searching for a vein by candlelight in the dreary, forsaken gloom of the old McLemore Clinic building. Human and rat feces littered the shadowy hallways and tiny rooms. Old, rusted iron, beds, some with molded mattresses sat as a stark reminder of the hell created by homelessness, addiction, and mental illness. The fate of fallen angels and the socially dysfunctional.

I had to experience homelessness in order to understand it. Homelessness is not a question of choice, although it may seem to be. The stench of old urine and human waste is never a pleasant fragrance, but one that must often be endured to last another hopeless day in the netherworld of social outcasts.

The old McLemore Clinic was eventually torn down. I had lived there about two months. When I pass the site I am reminded of my struggle to survive a sordid condition. I shudder, but I thank god.

Many in my generation did not survive homelessness plus addiction to alcohol and drugs. Some died of pneumonia or tuberculosis in empty houses. Some went totally insane and became frozen spectacles of hostility and disenchantment. Many waste away in prison and work houses. All for a way of getting out of the streets and having a warm bed and some decent food. God has no greater love than for those who weep for the poor. This city could become an example of humanity and compassion. Let no person go unhoused or mouth go unfed. In the name of love. In the name of god.

I was never a beggar. My instinct to hustle always remained. Although homeless, I kept a neat appearance and a clean body. Even if I had to bathe in Quick Stop stores. Using their hand soap of course. Drug rehab and shelters didn't curb my appetite for drugs. They were just places to rest and gain some weight. My major problem was depression. The mental disorder that leads to suicide in many cases. Alcoholism and drug use were only symptoms of a suicidal mentality. Homelessness followed an inner feeling of worthlessness, of being of no account. Even in the face of the student I once was.

I figured I was a unique person. Cursed by god to be a shiftless vagabond. But once I read about manic depression I was relieved to find out that I was not unique. Just a typical major-depressive. There are millions of us roaming the dark alleys like phantoms in the night. Mentally-disturbed people seeking humanities' graces but never finding them.

Should all homeless people be rounded up and placed in mental institutions? That would be Hitlerism. They need opportunities and a chance to cure themselves. Some will make it and some won't. But just give the opportunity and the grace of god.

- Fat Tommy

It helped me to have structure

Living on the street is an experience of a lifetime. You have to do things that you wouldn't do otherwise. Living on the streets ... like an abandoned house or sleeping on the heater downtown to stay warm in the winter time. In the summertime living on the riverfront and sleeping on a hard bench. Even in the park. Or sleeping over at people's house for some of your food stamps or alcohol or drugs.

You become dependent on your hustles like panhandling or asking for money and stealing. You decide to sell your body and do more things you wouldn't ever imagine doing.

Living in shelters is hard. Some shelters are nasty with bugs and ladies leave things in the bathroom unsanitized.

All shelters are not alike. I went in the Salvation Army Shelter. It's well-disciplined and run right by the director of the single woman side.

We would get up in the morning at 6:00 a.m. We had a cleaning assignment to do and about 7:30 or 7:45 everything like your bed and the chores had to be done. Breakfast was at like 7:00 or 7:15. Once a week we had to see a counselor so she could talk to us about our plan for the week.

At 8:25 we were out the door and would come back at 4:30. Dinner time was at 5:00 in the evening. At 10:00 it was lights out. It helped me to have structure in my life, and I thank God for the shelter helping me.

- Robbin Kindell

We stayed at the casinos, in our car for almost a year

The day I became homeless was Dec. 23, 2009. I lost my job in Oct. and was evicted from my apartment two days before Christmas.

Myself and my daughter put what clothes and personal things in the my car that we could, and we began living in my car, sleeping in parking lots and anywhere we could, and eating whenever we could find someone to give us something to eat.

We lived in my car for about three months, and then we were told it was against the law to stay in your car in Memphis. They told us we could go to the casino and stay in our car in the casino parking lots, so we did. We went into the casino to get warm and to get something to drink and to use the restrooms. Sometimes people would give us free buffets and other people would give us small amounts of money which we used to put gas in our car so we would not freeze. It was very cold that winter. Some nights were 13 degrees and colder. We stayed at the casinos living in our car for almost a year.

I met a lady who talked to me and I was telling her how I was homeless, and she listened to me, and she went away for about two hours, and then she came back. She had gone and got two buffets for seven days and had a room key she had got for me and my daughter, and it was also good for seven days.

I was so surprised and grateful. I didn't know what to say, so I just thanked her, and she left. I never saw her again, but I will always remember what she did for us, and how much it helped us, because we had no place to stay and nothing to eat, so we were alright for the seven days.

When I became homeless, I first lost all my household furniture and all the material things in my house. I lost all my clothes and shoes except for the ones I had on. I also lost all my pictures of my children and my family. I lost all my jewelry. I lost everything I had and had accumulated throughout the years I had worked.

Now I have started building my life back and am trying to get everything back on a somewhat normal track. Door of Hope has tried hard to help me accomplish my goals, and things are slowly getting better and things are beginning to look much better. I'm starting to feel like I have a life after two years of being homeless.

When my homelessness began, someone gave me a list of shelters and I started calling them because I was homeless. The first number I called was Door of Hope. I talked to a lady there, she told me she would come to get me and my daughter because we were stranded and homeless. She came to pick us up and the first thing she did was ask if we had eaten anything. We had not, so she immediately took us to get some food. Then she went to work on finding us a place to stay for the night. The kindness she showed us was wonderful and made us feel like someone was there for us and we weren't alone anymore.

I had been homeless a year and a half before I found a place to stay. Then, I needed furniture for that apartment. Then I needed dishes and pots and pans and household goods. I needed personal items and clothing and food. Then I needed a purpose for being because I had lost that and got to the point where I really did not care what happened.

- Smith

I've sat on both sides of the desk

It would benefit the homeless people to be treated with dignity and respect. We should not just be titled "the homeless." We are more than that. We are individuals with the basic right to be treated with kindness. We should not be stereotyped as this or that. We are individuals with complex needs. I would like to see all individuals who work in these shelters to realize this and treat us with kindness, dignity, and respect. Every individual is entitled to this regardless of a person's life circumstances.

When I found myself homeless, I felt devastated. I found myself with many obstacles to overcome. With that in mind, I had to deal with rude staff members sometimes. Often you deal with staff who are not even trained in any way to deal with the homeless or their needs. I have personally encountered rude treatment of myself and others in these situations.

I would change shelters so they would give people the basic human need of kindness a person needs when they become homeless and displaced.

There are case managers in these shelters who really do care about the people. I can tell who really does care and who doesn't. I am blessed with a truly awesome case manager who cares and helps meet my needs and others. She goes out of her way to listen and give her time to a person who finds themselves in great need. I thank God for the people in these shelters who really do care about others. There are many staff members who really want to help in every conceivable matter and they do.

It is known that a lot of people are only one paycheck away from being homeless themselves. Maybe they will have to learn, like I did, to dismiss their judgmental attitudes about the homeless. People need to consider how they would like to be treated if they found themselves alone and desperate.

I never dreamed in a million years I would now be homeless. I did not drop out of school. As a matter of fact, I graduated college, but our dreams don't always turn out like we planned. That has been the harsh reality of homelessness for me.

One of the first shelters I was in was a religious place. I thought it was so terrible and how had I ended up in a homeless shelter anyway? One of the requirements for having a bed that night was that you attend chapel every night. Often we had Bible study or church in the morning. I started asking God what was I supposed to learn there.

I finally got my answer one night. I had become hardened in my heart towards others. My heart had to be opened towards other people again. I began to open up toward others and see where I could help. I was happier than I had ever been. Homeless and happy. Does that seem possible?

It became that way with me. I saw such a love come from so many different people for me and others like me who were homeless. I saw so many people give of their time, love, food, faith, and kindness towards the homeless. I didn't feel judged at all. All of my needs were being met.

If I could change things in shelters here, it would be to have more activities that involve volunteers. People could come from different churches to show the love of Christ through contributing their time to others in need. I would also encourage the staff in these shelters to be more encouraging toward the homeless. I say this because I need lots of encouragement. There are days now that I think not one more thing can I handle on this day. I must admit I have days I just want to give up and that's usually when God puts someone kind and understanding in my life.

One word of encouragement might make a world of difference when a person in these shelters are one step before giving up and saying I quit, life is too hard. I can't take one more minute of this and how did I ever end up here anyway?

So kindness, and a right to dignity and respect, can make a world of difference in shelters for the homeless.

You may find yourself in my shoes one day. I have been on both sides of the desk referring to counselor and client. So I hope that you see that I am homeless but I am more than that. I have a need to be understood. A person with dreams, hopes, and a future.

So be kind but not full of pity for me, but empathy, yes, indeed. As someone once said, "Don't walk in front of me or behind me. Walk beside me and be my friend." One day you might need a kind word and I'll be on the other side of the desk with a kind word for you. One day when your world falls apart maybe I will be the one to help you through it.

- Anonymous



Homelessness in Memphis is more than tough

BY SHIVEN SAMANT
Staff Writer

Some of the most common causes of homelessness are foreclosure, poverty, a decline in available jobs, cuts to public assistance, and a lack of housing. All of these are inexorably tied to the economic recession which caused thousands of Memphians to lose their jobs. As of March 9th, there are 3,091 homes in Memphis that are being foreclosed. This means that there are 3,091 families in Memphis in danger of suffering through the resulting credit fallout. Furthermore, once a home has been foreclosed, it is much harder for a family to re-purchase a home, since Fannie Mae recently upped the time it takes for a borrower to get a new mortgage on a property.

This is why there is an urgent need for a bump in public assistance — especially in Memphis.

According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) 2008 Annual Homeless Assessment Re-

port, single, non-white males above the age of 31 make up the majority of homeless people. In a city where the presence of diversity has never been questioned, this statistic rings especially close to home. If you take a closer look around, you'll notice that the majority of homeless people in Memphis are African American or Hispanic males. Only 30 percent of homeless individuals in Memphis are Caucasian, according to a study done by the Mayor's Task Force on Memphis and Shelby County Homelessness.

An overlooked cause of this phenomenon is redevelopment and gentrification in urban areas. In this process, low-income neighborhoods are declared sub-par and are demolished to make way for projects that incur higher property taxes. This benefits the overall infrastructure of local governments by stimulating cash flow for them, but it creates a shortage of affordable housing.

To make the problem worse, there simply are not enough resources to benefit the chronically homeless in Memphis. While places like the Manna House, a volunteer organiza-

tion that provides amenities to the homeless three times a week, are fighting to combat homelessness, the city is severely lacking in permanent, supportive housing for men and women in the low-income bracket. Comparing our facilities to other large cities is particularly sobering - Memphis has no free shelters for men, even though more than three out of four homeless people in Memphis are men. For example, the Shepherd's Inn in Downtown Atlanta houses upwards of 400 men per night, offering a hot meal, a warm place to sleep, and resources to help men get back on their feet.

Places like Lighthouse and the Memphis Union Mission do their best to combat the homelessness that runs through our city. Lighthouse is a faith-based recovery support service and transitional housing program. They offer a shortened period of temporary emergency shelter. After this period, they offer the opportunity for the individuals

to enter a long-term work program in order to contribute to the cost of their care. On the other hand, the Memphis Union Mission offers a significantly more comprehensive facility, albeit for \$6 a night. According to their website, they provide 250,000 meals a year for the hungry. They offer beds, clothing, hygiene kits, an extended-stay service, and even a free clinic through a partnership with Christ Community Health Services. However, permanent supportive housing for homeless people in Memphis is sorely lacking. Soup kitchens and free meals are important, but we can't forget that there are close to 2,000 people in Memphis with no roof above their heads. For this reason, the need for more efforts like the Memphis Union Mission must be addressed.

Nonetheless, the backbone for adequate homeless care exists in Memphis. According to a count conducted by the Community Alliance for the Homeless, Memphis has experienced a slight decrease in the homeless population as of February 2013. Katie Kitchen, Executive Director of the Community Alliance for the Homeless, attributes this to

the HUD recognition of the problems outlined above.

They've started to send more money and resources to help support permanent supportive housing for the homeless. This nascent trend will continue to grow, and the Project Homeless Connect event at the Cook Convention Center hopes to expose Memphis to the issues associated with homelessness. This forum will allow for volunteers to assist the homeless with problems they may be facing. Furthermore, the Community Alliance for the Homeless received a grant last year to build 169 housing units. They have already built 20 and plan on opening many more in the coming year. Despite the seemingly myriad and insurmountable obstacles facing local homeless people, Memphis shows exciting potential for winning the fight against homelessness. Advocacy groups are striving to address the issues that Memphis' infrastructure causes.

There's no shortage of meals and miscellaneous resources provided to the homeless, but more housing must be implemented in order to bring an already decreasing number down even further. To put things in perspective - a greater emphasis must be placed on addressing the root causes of homelessness. A good example to follow is the Atlanta-based Nicholas House, which prudently structures its mission on three tenets: earning a living wage, maintaining physical and mental health, and maintaining safe housing. They offer counseling, case management, and other resources to slowly assimilate homeless families back into sheltered life.

They understand that providing basic sustenance of food and shelter is not sufficient for preventing homeless people to stumble on their climb back into sheltered life. A community united in helping the homeless is the most powerful way to usher local homeless people, our fellow Memphians, back into sheltered life. As Memphians, we have the power to advocate increased grants for homeless missions that tackle the root causes of homelessness and allay some of the deep-set problems associated with Memphis. According to the most recent local study, the number of homeless people in Memphis is set to decrease ever so slightly. A united, vocal community demanding solutions is the best way to ensure that this trend comes to fruition.

Soup kitchens and free meals are important, but we can't forget that there are close to 2,000 people in Memphis with no roof above their heads.

-Shiven Samant

One man's trash is another man's hustle

The quest for a man with a shopping cart

BY HARRISON WITT WITH NATHANIEL BISHOP
Staff Writers

In our American culture of materialism, many people attach possessions to their identity. Some people collect so many things that they are even considered to have a condition. Then there are some who can carry all their worldly possessions in a shopping cart.

In my quest to find a Memphis man with a shopping cart, I found there aren't as many as I thought there would be. I searched most of downtown hoping to find someone pushing their life along the sidewalk. There was one man, but he had no personal possessions in the cart. Instead he used it to hustle cans, the act of collecting scrap metal and glass for their deposit value.

I've seen him several times before. He regularly makes rounds through my neighborhood, and while he was gracious enough to let me know how it was he went about his hustle, he did not want to be named. Call him Clarence.

Clarence sometimes stays at Union Mission but finds it difficult to get there by six in the evening. He starts his day at 7 a.m. hauling one of two carts collecting cans and other valuable items thrown out including copper, iron, and toys. He follows this routine between eight and twelve hours a day, three to four days a week supposedly covering 40 miles in a day. This might be a little optimis-

tic but possible, he has the physique of a distance runner and does walk briskly while he makes his rounds.

The cart he is using when I run into him is orange without a clear store label and in good working order. He tells me that a certain police officer has a fondness for certain carts (particularly Cash Saver and Kroger), and pushing the wrong cart near the wrong officer may very well result in a citation for theft.

Lighter, less dense, and soft items such as aluminum cans and clothes are tied to the back of the cart (side of the handle) in bags. Both large trash bags and smaller grocery bags are used. The large basket of the cart is reserved for less predictable items. It is good for scrap metal and other miscellaneous items he finds in residential and commercial trash cans.

He doesn't trust good samaritans with trucks; he insists they often want too big a cut of his haul.

It's raining steadily, but not hard, and I'm having trouble keeping my ink from running as I take notes. He knows where they're feeding well tonight, and is planning on making his way up that direction. He has to be quick, his storage unit closes at 8:30, and it's beginning to rain harder.



COURTESY OF NATHANIEL BISHOP

CARTING CANS: Shopping carts serve as a vehicle to transport cans, a tough job with long days.

TO GIVE OR NOT TO GIVE:

Memphian struggles over moral responsibility to others, potential consequences of giving to panhandlers

BY KATIE CANNON
Staff Writer

In downtown Memphis, I don't worry about being mugged. I don't walk in fear of my cash being carried off in the hands of a purse snatcher, bounding away before my girl-screams for help elicit the aid of some chivalrous passerby. Nonetheless, I think of Memphis as the dangerous city my parents warned me about when I made my college decision: there's a high crime rate, and I don't strike such an intimidating figure.

Instead of being robbed, I willingly divest myself of my cash, dollar by dollar, sidewalk to sidewalk, to the homeless. Each pair of sad eyes, every haggard smile I meet. They always say "Thank you," or "God Bless," and as I stride away, I feel a little better about myself. For a minute. Then the doubt creeps in.

I just gave money to a homeless person. Nothing substantial – but I gave with the hope that it might go toward their next meal or finding a place to stay for the night. I tell myself my intentions were pure, that I was doing the right thing, but when there are so many others out there ready to tell me differently, it's hard not to wonder: *Am I helping or hurting?* The issue of whether or not to give money to panhandlers has always sparked public debate, and I find myself lost in the moral gray area, stumbling along the line between pessimism and hope.

The sight of homelessness upsets me. Having grown up in a middle-class suburb, I didn't have much experience with homelessness before moving to Memphis. On the few trips I made with my family to big cities, I was always dumbfounded at the sheer amount of unsheltered people. Moved and disturbed by makeshift signs and forlorn faces begging for food, I could never pass a panhandler without giving at least some change.

Many urbanites will tell you not to give a cent to a panhandler. I've had cabdrivers in New York and Chicago tell tales of people who make a killing on their panhandling routes – that, in fact, many are not actually homeless at all. Just freeloaders looking to make easy money, they say. Don't give them a dime. Opinions like these, however, are hard for me to swallow. Can we really be so quick to suspect and judge, to believe the worst of others? It isn't fair to judge an entire population of homeless individuals based on the decisions of a few people who decide to take advantage.

Besides, isn't it worth it to try to help, even if your efforts are fruitless? So perhaps the person asking for spare change is a con man, perfectly able to work but choosing instead to his support drug and alcohol habits by panhandling on street corners – an income dependent on the kindness of a few suckers with soft hearts and fat wallets. This is an image that many people are willing to embrace: a means of justifying their own selfishness and cynicism, of elevating themselves above the supposed immorality of those who ask for their help. Maybe they're right – maybe that panhandler on the side of the road isn't really in need. But what if he is? What if he hasn't eaten in days, if he's sick, if he needs a place to stay the night (most homeless shelters have a small fee) and he truly requires your help? It's only a few dollars, but for all you know, you could be saving this person's life.

Still, when I hear these seasoned city-dwellers preach to me about these "faux homeless," I cringe in shame at my own naïveté. Have I been conned? Are my attempts to help those less fortunate the result of empathy, or misguided self-righteousness? Certainly, giving a few bucks to a homeless person is a quick way of assuaging middle-

class guilt. Without putting in any real effort or thought, I can feel as though I've done my good deed for the day. One homeless person can buy one-quarter of a fast-food burger with the money I've given them – what great kindness on my part! What charity and goodwill! I've definitely got some good karma brewing now. No need to spend my precious time volunteering at a soup kitchen or shelter, or maybe actually attempting to help these homeless individuals make a real life for themselves, as so many charitable organizations strive to do. No, with my dollar donation to that panhandler's cup, I am truly making a difference. I'm practically a philanthropist.

Many of us feel this way about giving to the homeless – as if by sacrificing a few hard-earned dollars to the less fortunate, we can justify our own excesses. However, giving money to panhandlers isn't necessarily wrong, and neither is choosing not to: it's our way of thinking about it that's flawed. We can donate our spare change to panhandlers, and I'm sure they appreciate it, but in doing that, we're not solving their problems. As per the cliché, we're just treating the symptoms, not fighting for a real cure. In fact, we could just be making it worse.

Many people refuse to give money to homeless people because they believe that they will waste it on drugs and alcohol – and honestly, it's a very real possibility that that is exactly what they'll do with it. Drug addiction and alcoholism are huge contributing factors to many people's homelessness. It's how they lost their homes and it's what keeping them from being able to support themselves to find new ones. For many people, withholding their money from panhandlers is merely a form of tough love: if no one gives them anything, they'll have no way of funding their habits, and they'll be forced to sober up and get back on their feet. People who succumb to panhandler's pleas are enabling them to continue a destructive lifestyle.

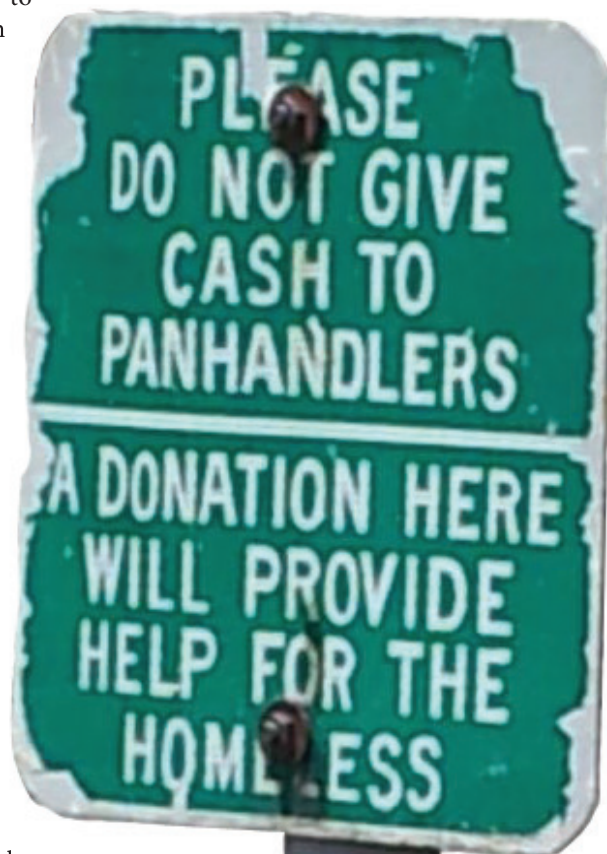
So what are we to do? In the current job market, we can't assume that every homeless person we meet has a drug problem; it's just as likely they've just fallen on hard times. It's easy to look down from our pedestal at the unemployed and struggling and call them lazy. It's easy to label every homeless person as a bum without considering how they may have ended up on the street. It's easy to say that if we had been born into poorer economic backgrounds or more difficult family lives that we would have picked ourselves up by our bootstraps and succeeded in spite of it all. What's difficult for us to contemplate is the idea that every homeless person is trying as hard as they can – and they still find themselves without shelter, without stability, without respect.

A few days ago I was walking downtown with a few friends and a homeless man asked us if we could spare the time and money to buy him something from the

Denny's on the corner. We were hurrying to make our own dinner reservations, so I just gave him \$2, the only cash I had on me. His face was solemn and heavy-browed as he thanked me, and then we went on our way. I was beginning to allow the familiar guilt overtake my thoughts when I remembered that the homeless man was simply that: a man. An individual with a name I did not know, a person with his own virtues and flaws, his own history and his own future – none of which I dictated.

It seems natural to lump an entire group of people in a similar situation and try to discuss how to "handle" them. How to improve their lives. How and why they ended up this way. The truth is these questions have no answers. There is no panacea that will cure the problems of every homeless person, though there are individuals and organizations trying to help. The real issue with panhandling is our attitude towards the panhandlers: it's condescending, paternalistic, self-aggrandizing. Each of us is always looking for other humans that we can say are worse than us, and in doing so, we are stripping them of their humanity. We think we know what each of them needs, without knowing them, whether it be your version of "tough love" by withholding your charity, or your "compassion" by emptying your wallet on every street corner. The truth is, your dollar will not save a panhandler anymore than it will condemn him. The pit you feel in your stomach as you walk by a homeless person has nothing to do with him and everything to do with you.

So should we give money to panhandlers, or stride by while trying not to make eye contact? We don't know the people we're giving money to. We don't know the effect our donation may have. We are in no place to label them as addicts who'll use the money to buy drugs and alcohol, nor can we be sure that they won't do exactly that. What we can do is look at homeless people for what they are: individuals, fellow humans, instead of some grand "issue" that needs addressing. This person does not have a home to go to, a house to call their own. They are asking for your kindness. Obviously, giving a few dollars to a homeless person won't give them a home. But it may provide them a meal, and some shelter, and maybe that's all we can do.



Believers backpack burritos on bikes

BY YOONKEONG CHI

Staff Writer

A number of college students, high school students, and adults are committed to working together to build a stronger community in a unique way.

Urban Bicycle Food Ministry is a nonprofit organization created in August 2012. It functions through a combined effort of ministry, bike advocacy, fellowship, and friendship. The group meets every Wednesday and breaks into smaller groups to supply people affected by homelessness with food and useful items.

The organization first began as a pet project of Tommy Clark, a seminary student and a regular churchgoer.

His first missionary work for what would become Urban Bicycle Food Ministry began with 15 homemade burritos and a bicycle. On his ride through Memphis' streets, he handed a burrito to whomever he came across that looked in need of food. He took care to approach each person respectfully by asking if they had had any dinner that night. Unexpectedly, the responses he received were positive and accepting of Clark's aims: "Whoever it may be, I will stop, introduce myself, and just talk to them. The response I got back was great: they were very receptive and responsive to what I was doing. People even gave me hugs."

Clark discovered that a specific strategy to approach people was crucial for a successful mission. Clark realized that bicycles worked best because they provided transportation and a casual way to approach people. Bikes were a more "friendly" method compared to driving up to a person in a car and asking if he or she is "hungry" or "homeless."

Volunteers find that the bike places them on an equal footing with recipients, allowing for a more intimate interaction than distributing food from a vehicle.

"We do not want to imply that [recipients] appear to be homeless or be disrespectful in any way," said Clark. "I discovered that the most polite way to approach whom-ever appears to be in need is to greet them and ask them if they had dinner tonight."

The positive response from people affected by homelessness was not the only heartening feedback Clark received. As more of his friends learned about his expedition and his goal to help his community, they too became interested. Soon, large groups of friends and members of Clark's church began to join him in his missionary work every Wednesday.

From that point on, Urban Bicycle Food Ministry was created. Today, it is sustained by a group of people willing to serve their community. Relationships are formed out of teamwork, and lives are less burdened as people show affection and care for one another.

Donations for people who need jackets, socks, and pants are provided. Money is continually raised to buy ingredients for burritos.

Urban Bicycle Food Ministry is quickly becoming well-known in the Memphis community. The more people who contribute by coming together and connecting with peers and strangers in need of a meal, the stronger the community becomes as a whole.

"We do not seek out people who are affected with homelessness; we serve anyone and everybody. If we come across someone hungry, whether a medical student or a teenager, we will give that person a burrito. It is not a matter of a person's class. What we are trying to do is give people of our city an opportunity to come together, heedless of each other's differences, and build strong relationships amongst each other with support and love," explains Tommy Clark.

Urban Bicycle Food Ministry



TOMMY CLARK/Urban Bicycle Food Ministry

Every Wednesday Night @ 7:30 p.m.
124 Roberta Drive, Memphis TN 38112
Bring your bike and a loving heart if you would like to help.
www.ubfm.org
Contact: tommy@ubfm.org

Panhandle like a pro, or not

BY TRAVIS ALLEN

Staff Writer

The year is 2013. The Mississippi Delta clings to life; safely rooted among the bustling cityscape and even deeper still within the jungle regions of the Southern purchase, a select few are reportedly amassing impressive wealth. They're a different type of 'one percent:' average-enough people with enough patience to rival any Pope, delivering passersby from their pockets of heavy dole. Economists call it panhandling. It's an old trick, perfected today using a bit of modern technology, and what can surely be described as voodoo-like charm in order to navigate a largely-untapped industry of karma. And so, draped in equality and with your fiscal interest decidedly in mind, one humble staff writer took to the cold, February streets to bring you the latest on this cash cow.

Downtown, while most of the city still sleeps, for the hungry and the determined, it's business as usual. Inhaling the aroma of engine sweat like the smell of baking bread, our courageous neighbors, our veterans and coworkers, rise to meet the routine hardships of a typical day.

If you don't believe that the homeless occupy a sadly-growing demographic, consider that families with children make up over 40 percent of individuals without a permanent residence. The trials of living hand-to-mouth are immense; uncertainty permeates nearly every aspect of life. A scruffy-looking guy makes his way up the sidewalk to where I am, surveying town-houses on the far west side. "I only got 28 cents till I can get me a cup of coffee," he grins. And I guess I can't help but smile either, not knowing whether I was smiling because he was smiling, or smiling because it seems like everyone's always just about 30 cents from something.

Moreover, these were not the dark alleys – not the projects, or the hovels, the bar traps. Looking out over the DeSoto Bridge it was becoming pretty apparent that I hadn't moved much from ground zero.

Later, after spending some time talking to a few other folks, I felt like I was just beginning to understand more and more of the complexity involved in an odd lifestyle that mostly amounts to begging. Panhandling is tough. It's work, plain and simple. Far from a lucrative career – even long hours tend to yield frustrating results. "It's a day job; it's a night job," remarks one man who tells me his name is Jake, sitting perched on a lawn stool too close to the curb. "What's with the mutt?" I'm curious. In one hand is a cardboard sign that reads 'Please Give' and he's clutching an orange leash in his lap with the other. "Oh she's a sweet girl... loves people," Jake insists.

From what I can discern, those people love her at least as much. Nearly everyone who stops to pet the dog drops a few dollars in the can. I reckon if you have something to offer that other panhandlers don't, you're more likely to receive donations. Besides money, toiletries, gift cards, and especially food are also commonly given out.

Asking for handouts or loitering is illegal in some areas, so it's important to pay attention to city ordinances. But above all, vigilance is key to turning an effective profit on the street. Putting aside all the distractions you have to compete with: the billboards, people twirling flashy signs, inflatable dancing tubes, Chick-fil-A... you learn to keep from getting discouraged. Learn to keep your eyes peeled, because truly, if you're not seeing anything, you're probably not paying attention. Vehicles may appear as obvious targets but they're hard to chase down. Your best bet is the friendly-looking guy walking his dog on the other side of the street. If pedestrians make eye contact, talk to them. Be respectful;

address them as "Sir" or "Ma'am." And if at any time someone nearby slows down or stops, offer him or her a hand. "You don't be afraid to get down and shine their shoes," Jake laughed, "Everybody's got dirty shoes." Thoughtfully, I glance down at my own feet and sure enough, he's right.

The larger lesson here is a wise one: Performing a helpful service won't guarantee compensation, but by holding to a set of principles, having a good attitude, and adopting a willingness to do odd jobs for people you don't know, there certainly stands a better chance that you won't go hungry.

Two separate people who choose not to be named warn me thoroughly about the most common "rookie mistake," being that you can't panhandle very well from behind bars. People in jail don't have money, you see, and begging is not a team sport.

By nature, successful panhandling is a passive endeavor. People are wary of strangers, and this goes doubly for strangers who are invading their personal space. When speaking to people you do not know, for both your safety and theirs, you must keep a far-enough distance to put others at ease.

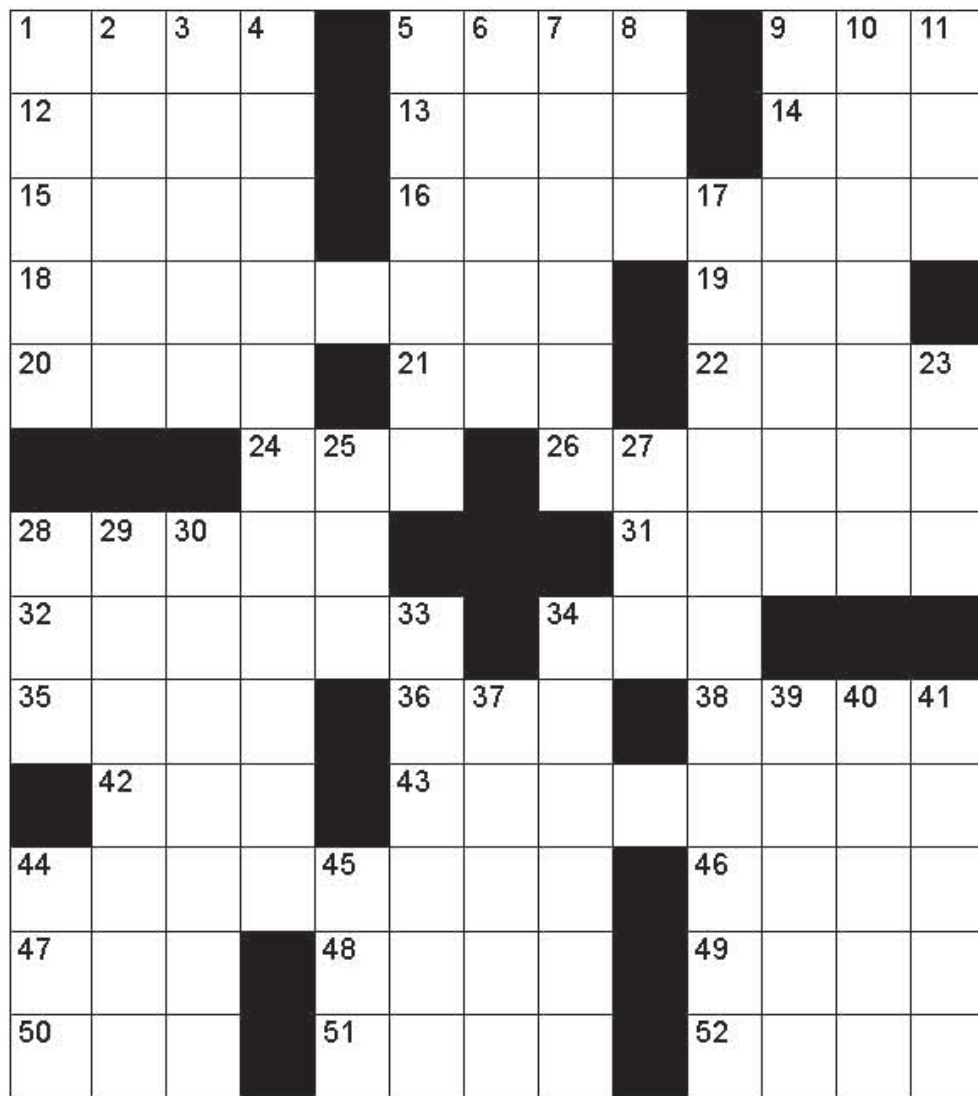
With that being said, make your presence known. Take into account your surroundings, and understand that it is very unsettling to be confronted. Don't attempt to panhandle in residential areas or within 1,000 feet of a school. (As mentioned before, laws will usually prevent you from doing so anyway.) Do not stalk or follow anyone. Exercise discretion and tread lightly. Don't wave your arms or act crazy to attract attention to yourself. Above all, never resort to using any form of aggression or intimidation. Law enforcement would rather not split hairs. The difference between asking and mugging is usually left for a jury to decide.

But I digress. Though I can't say my business venture has been successful as I had hoped, at the very least the horizon is a bit brighter, or else it seems that way, owing in part to a low-hanging sun – I don't know. It's hard not to be appreciative of the little things; after all, bus fare is a fortune in nickels.

Learn to keep your eyes peeled, because truly, if you're not seeing anything, you're probably not paying attention.

-Trevor Allen

“Found Sound”



ACROSS

- Corpse
- Ancient Korean kingdom
- Terrestrial mollusk
- Designated freebies
- Mean kid
- Medieval bullet
- Complains
- Late nineties band, briefly
- Word with “good” or “cookie”
- Takes _____ (examines)
- Again, quickly
- Perilous pastry?
- Some trains
- Beachy landmass, briefly
- Bitter beer units
- Computer’s brain
- Dangerous current
- Woody
- Lighter result
- Egad! in Australia
- Lesion

39. Change

40. Wheels, to a Roman (acc.)

41. May refer to a kid or an activity

44. Ink, briefly

45. Candidly, on the net

DOWN

1. Snake sound

5. Tea or trash

9. Not near

12. Fey or Turner

13. Pirate’s painting?

14. ___ Miss, SEC team

15. City and county in Iran

16. Faucet feature

18. Shoe selection

19. Label of Alabama

Shakes and Gogol

Bordello

20. Autumn

21. Word with “shucks” or “shock”

22. To microwave

24. Festival, for an Imam

26. Beacon

28. Edible plant

31. Red roots, green shoots

32. Rudder hinge

34. Mutt

35. _____ no good

36. Turkish range

38. 21st century outbreak

42. Victorious third

43. Street trot sound

44. Second sound

46. Germany’s first

chancellor

47. Lemon- or Gator-

48. A (former) goddess, to Charlie Sheen

49. Not far

50. Smart slide show event

51. Candy bar O-

52. ___ while

COMPILED BY NATHANIEL BISHOP

Lack of privacy on the streets takes a toll

BY OLIVIA HIPPI
Staff Writer

Homelessness is often characterized as a state of invisibility. Without the stability of having their own property or, often, the proper picture identification that is necessary to enter basic financial agreements, or even be admitted into a shelter, the homeless community is one whose voice is difficult to hear. In a society whose function hinges on private property, the homeless population is easily swept to the margins. They are exiled from the private domain, and their existence is thus forced into the public realm. In this line of thinking, to be on the streets is the furthest thing from being invisible, especially in a city with levels of homelessness as high as Memphis.

Census data gathered by Memphis nonprofit organization Partners for the Homeless showed that there were 1,800 homeless people in Memphis on any given day. The problem is that that number is far from accurate. The program Executive Director, Pat Morgan says, “We know there are more than that, but we can’t find them.” The nature of homelessness makes having a stable location to know where to check in on people nearly impossible. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that there is no free shelter in Memphis. Contrary to the common understanding that the typical homeless person has always lived on the streets, the actual duration of time someone in America experiences homelessness is usually two weeks. Chronic homelessness is much more rare, but rarer still are people who only experience homelessness once. It is a constant battle.

Gene Wilson and his 19-year-old son Glenn were living on the streets for a little over two months, and he took every factor into consideration to ensure that he and his son had as much privacy as possible wherever they were sleeping. When questioned about his experience living on the streets, Wilson pinpoints this issue of constant visibility living on the streets as one of the most exhausting aspects of life on the street. Safety is the number-one priority. They sought out secluded environments away from the streets, ideally with a roof, but

if not, at least in a secluded environment with low activity. The duo also sought safety in numbers. After the owner of their old location changed his mind about them living on his property, the Wilsons moved to a new spot together with the other people experiencing homelessness with whom they had been sharing the space. For the most part, the newly-reunited father and son pair focused on looking out for each other, but they made sure to stay with their same group wherever they set up camp. Gene added that he was happy to have gravel surrounding their most recent locale, because it helped him to hear when someone was coming along. When you live on the streets, to be a heavy sleeper is to be vulnerable, so they took shifts sleeping to watch over each other.

Though there are shelters in Memphis, most of them cost an entry fee after a certain number of nights spent there. “It could be \$12 or \$1,200. It wouldn’t make much of a difference,” Wilson explained, “Either way, I can’t pay it if I’m not employed.” One of the largest shelters in Memphis is Union Mission on Poplar Avenue. It provides overnight shelter, showers, meals, and changes of clothes to currently homeless individuals. However, while they also have a rehabilitation program with housing for women and transitional programs to provide short-term transitional housing for homeless families, their shelter cannot accommodate women or children. The men must have picture identification, and each night after the first four free stays costs \$6.

There is also Calvary Rescue Mission, which offers overnight and temporary shelter, as well as counseling and two meals a day, but they also only have facilities for men. The Door of Hope, where many of the homeless writers at *The Bridge* do their writing, offers long-term housing to chronically homeless and disabled individuals and serves lunch throughout the week. St. Mary’s Episcopal Church, Calvary Episcopal Church, and St. Mary’s Catholic Church all serve weekly meals. First Presbyterian Church offers an ID renewal service, hygiene kits, and a weekly Sunday soup kitchen. Hospitality Hub services the homeless with counseling, hospitality services, phone and computer access, and locker space. The list goes on. It is not as if there is no initiative to reach out

to the Memphis homeless community, but there simply is not enough shelter for the staggering numbers.

In Gene and Glenn’s case, they found their shelter in community. According to their experience, people tend to group together based on habits or lifestyles, as they would in society before experiencing homelessness. Though homelessness and the resulting lack of privacy is the common ground shared among a group, its value often comes from appreciating the contrasts between the shared spaces and the individual experiences that constitute a private life. As a result, privacy can actually contribute to a sense of community. That is why Charles, contrary to the safety-in-numbers approach the Simpsons employ, keeps his sleeping spots secret. I met Charles at the Calvary Episcopal Sunday Soup Kitchen, and upon being questioned about the possibility of privacy in the homeless lifestyle, he maintained his privacy comes through adherence to a “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy among homeless people. He has kept his current location secret for several months now, and he would never dream of asking anyone else living on the streets where they were living. Several friends at his lunch table supported him saying that even they would not ask each other where they went for the night. There is a code on the streets. Private space is an extension of your identity, and this need for privacy is heightened when your possessions are brought to a bare minimum, as they necessarily are when you are living on the streets.

Practically, there are options for shelter in Memphis. From the restrooms and showers open at Manna House to Calvary and Union Mission overnight shelters, there is a movement to ease the strain of life on the streets in Memphis. Yet these efforts only go so far, and at the end of the day most are left to their own devices. The psychological effects of having to maintain an endless watch for danger are harrowing, but, as is the case within societies, privacy is maintained by unspoken boundaries established within the community. There is a strength that is found in community, be it through solidarity with the homeless community by keeping sleep spots secret, or through the security of moving from makeshift shelter to makeshift shelter with a set group of others.

UNSHELTERED: UNSEEN

Earlier this year, activists provided cameras to currently homeless individuals in an effort to capture their day-to-day experiences. The photos were featured in a gallery late April to raise money for area shelters. These are additional photos from the collection to provide a glimpse into the realities of homelessness.



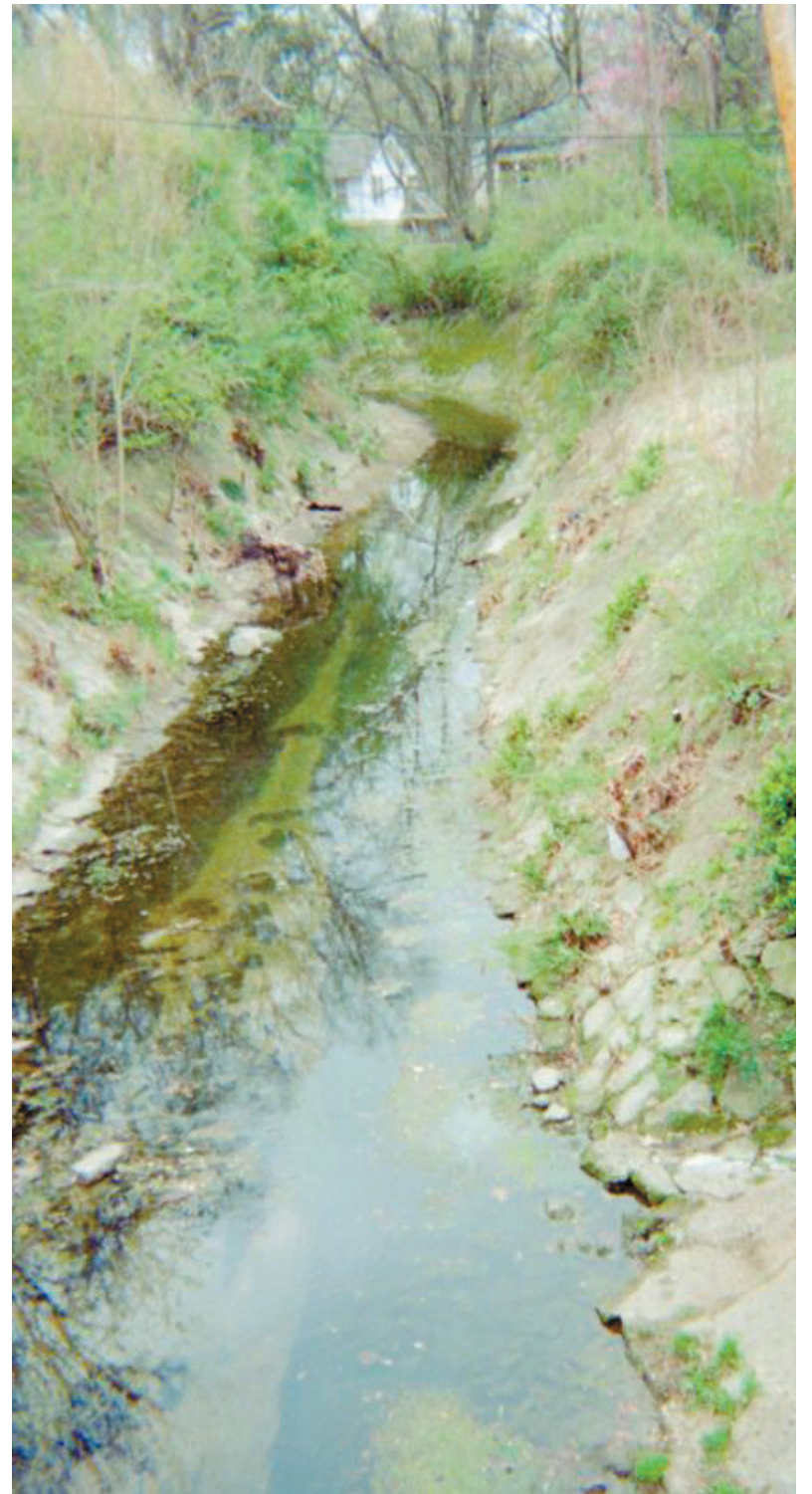
THOMAS WINBUSH/Unsheltered: Unseen



VIVI LONG STREST/Unsheltered: Unseen



THOMAS WINBUSH/Unsheltered: Unseen



THOMAS WINBUSH/Unsheltered: Unseen