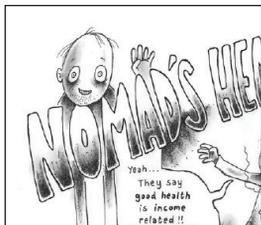


what's inside



PERPETUAL CRIMINALITY

Would you choose jail over a life on the streets?

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EMPTY BOWLS PROJECT

Local charity provides empty bowls, full hearts

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FIRST CONGO

PT Bob spotlights Food for Families program.

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MESSAGE FROM YOUR VENDOR



ON THE FRONT LINES

The Bridge co-founder spotlights friend and advocate Jim McLellan

BY JAMES EKENSTEDT
Director

James McLellan first introduced himself to me as Jim. I called him Jim then, and I call him Jim now. To be honest, it wasn't until several weeks after we began working together that I realized that not only is his real name James, but that most people call him James. So why'd he introduce himself as Jim? Simple: he knew my name was James, wanted to preemptively avoid any confusion, and so invented a nickname for himself. It's this precise intuition, thoughtfulness, and attention to detail that makes Jim such an invaluable asset to *The Bridge*. Jim is the type of man who will sacrifice his very name without thinking twice.

In the simplest terms, Jim is the glue that holds this grassroots movement together. As I type this within the warm confines of a library, Jim is embracing the cold midwinter elements at Cooper Young Farmers' Market, running a vendor table for *The Bridge*.

In fact, if you've ever talked to anyone at such an event who isn't a vendor, it's probably Jim. A born talker, he enjoys conversation, and his genuine interest and geniality can draw anyone in. Jim

comes entirely prepared to every festival, toting multiple signs promoting *The Bridge*, old *Bridge* newspapers to share with the public for free, extra current issues in case the vendors' stock runs low, tables and chairs and tape and, of course, rocks to keep his signs from blowing away in the wind (we affectionately call these "Jim's rocks"). All of these things sit in the back of his car, ready to go at a moment's notice.

But Jim does more than run festival booths. He's constantly brainstorming new places for vendors to sell, letting them know where he thinks they'd do best. Jim drives our top sellers from one prime location to the next. He knocks on the doors of businesses, churches, and police precincts to have conversations, develop relationships within the Memphis community, and share *The Bridge's* mission.

When others ask him what his job is at *The Bridge* (a question that would take pages to accurately answer), he tells them he is "like the utility infielder on a baseball team. I just do a little bit of everything." And he's right. Jim is the go-to,

always a phone call away if our primarily collegiate team needs something to happen and life keeps getting in the way.

And Jim wouldn't be Jim without his ability to connect. "I like to latch on to people," he says. "And help them out." He develops lasting and deep friendships with many of our vendors, functioning as a coach for many of them. Vendor Linda Bozant met Jim in Court Square, where he had arranged a meeting with another vendor. Jim invited Linda to undergo vendor training at St. Mary's Episcopal Church. She accepted. Says Linda, "[Jim] picked us up many times and gave us rides to the farmers' market, especially on the weekends when the buses aren't something you can count on."

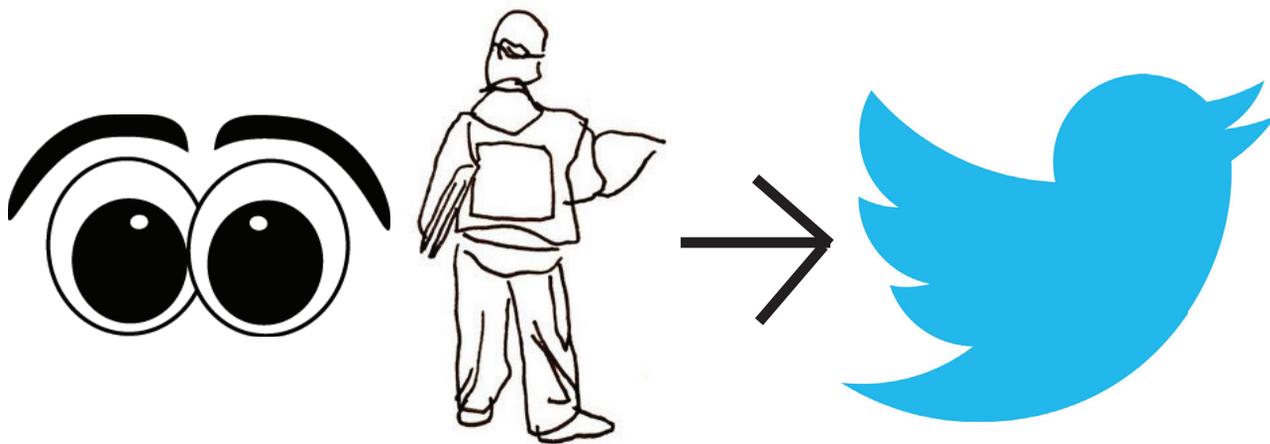
She's grateful to be one of the people Jim has "latched on" to: "Giving me a ride there and back was the biggest help I could have gotten at the time. I don't think I would be here if Jim hadn't been transporting me back and forth. And [then there] was just the encouragement from Jim to keep going."

See "Jim" on Page 14.

"Jim is the type of man who will sacrifice his very name without thinking twice."

Want your picture in the paper? Tweet us a vendor!

If you see a vendor of *The Bridge* around Memphis, take a location-tagged picture of him/her and tweet it to us @thebridgepaper! We'll print your submission in the next issue of *The Bridge*.



thebridge

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Chloe Bryan

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Monique Hagler
Olivia Hipp

Design Editors
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Sam Clark

Art Director
Monique Hagler

Homeless Editor
Aaron Banks

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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 non-profit 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.

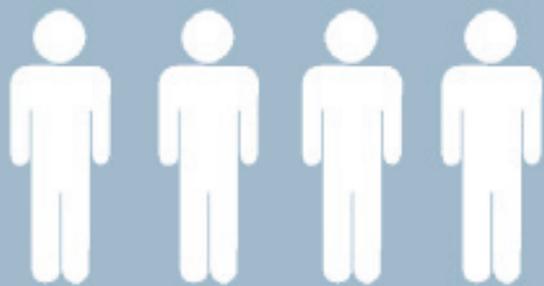
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HOW IT WORKS: VENDOR TRAINING



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



Each vendor
will receive a
**BADGE &
20 FREE**
papers



After a brief interview,
they are given the skills to
SELL THE BRIDGE

Papers can be sold on
at local events and
**THE STREETS \$1
FOR ONLY \$1**

*Additional papers can be purchased for \$0.25.
Vendors that buy certain amounts of papers are rewarded with incentives
such as messenger bags and all-day bus passes.*

Vendor Spotlight: Joe Isgriggs

BY MARIAM EBEID

Staff Writer

Joe began to work for The Bridge in May 2013 as all vendors do: with just 20 free papers. Now, he regularly sells The Bridge up to forty hours a week. Joe approaches his work with perseverance and commitment, both of which make him an excellent salesperson. But Joe also has heart.

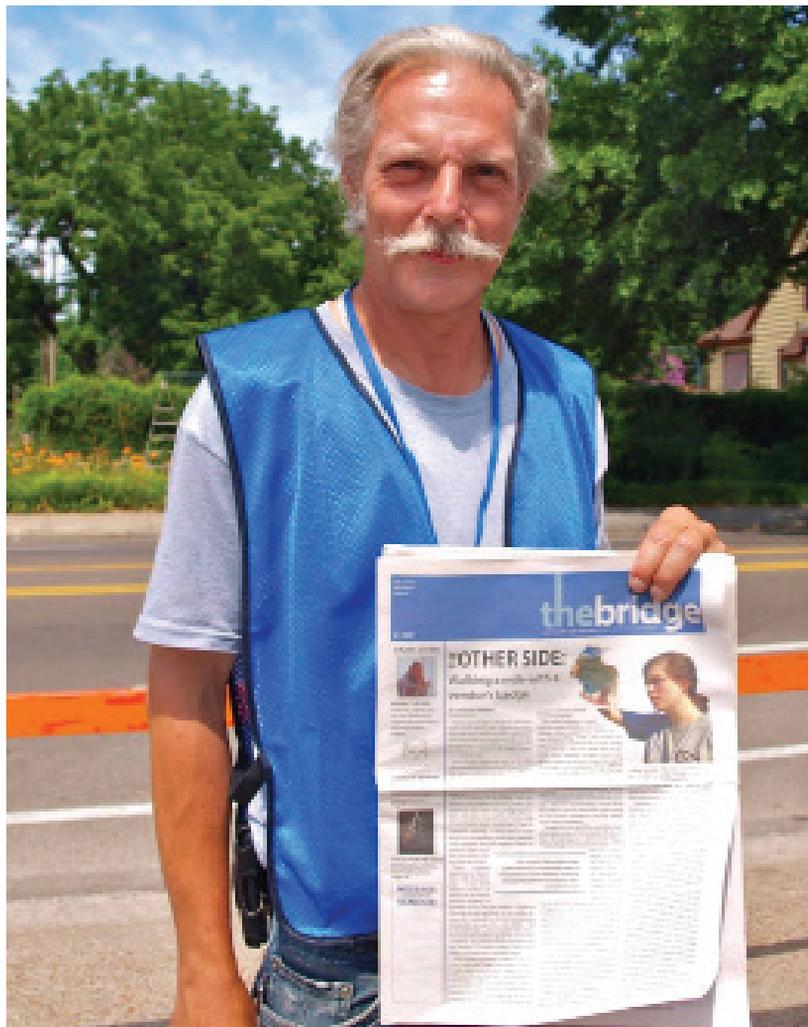
Before he came to Memphis, Joe worked as a professional chef. Even now, he credits this profession for his ability to stay optimistic even when sales are low. And that tenacity has pushed him to keep fighting for shelter. When Joe first became homeless and found himself unable to pay for necessities, he was able to stay at a mission most of the time. Some nights, however, he had to resort to sleeping in a tent. It was during these times that he learned about The Bridge through a presentation at St. Mary's.

Joe currently lives at the Memphis Union Mission's Opportunity Center. Here, his Bridge income alleviates anxiety over where he will sleep, what he will eat, and when he will be able to shower. Joe is often able to find temporary work in Arkansas, but those jobs often are not consistent. His work as a vendor, however, provides him with a solid and helpful monetary foundation.

When speaking about his work as a vendor, Joe is both cheerful and honest. If a person does not listen when he tries to explain The Bridge, he says, he does not let it affect him negatively. Instead, he focuses on offering the same candidness and enthusiasm to each person who passes by. Furthermore, Joe

is not afraid to be honest both about his experiences with homelessness and the misconceptions often attached to the homeless community. "I have had people ask me why I choose to be homeless," he says. "No one would choose that. If your source of money runs out but the bills keep coming, it's where you end up."

Joe's ability to articulately combat negative stereotypes, as well as his determination to improve his own life and the community around him, make him a well-respected, valued, and excellent vendor. Joe was fortunate to discover The Bridge—but The Bridge and the Memphis community are even luckier to have him.



Letter from the Editor

BY CHLOE BRYAN

Editor-in-Chief

The holidays have a sneaky way of cultivating a sense of belonging: in our families, our churches, our groups of friends, our former homes, bedrooms, stomping grounds. They're also a sobering reminder of those who don't have these same communities available as a source of support.

Home with my family in late December, I found myself in many conversations about The Bridge, not only with Memphians, but with people from cities across the country. I love to talk about The Bridge—especially in Memphis, where each enthusiastic conversation can lead to an even more enthusiastic new volunteer or writer. When I'm away from Memphis, these conversations are exciting in a different way. In Knoxville, I told a family friend about The Bridge and he asked me if I'd ever seen Knoxville's own street paper, The Amplifier. Old co-workers in Ann Arbor emailed to say they'd seen a Groundcover vendor outside their favorite food cooperative. A friend traveling in the Pacific Northwest knows of and loves The Bridge, so she was particularly excited to come across a Seattle street paper—Real Change—on her trip.

The street paper network is huge. Worldwide, there are 120 street papers in 40 countries. When you buy a copy of The Bridge, you join a readership of over 6 million people across the globe who have chosen to purchase from their local vendors. And when you're aware of your own city's street paper, you're more likely to purchase papers in other locales when you travel—just like my friend from Seattle.

This is one of the many things that makes these papers so special: their infinite capacity to extend, to form wider and wider communities. Each writer, whether for The Bridge or Salzburg's Apropos, is one of thousands of writers using their skills to the same end. Each layout designer, whether in Atlanta for The Overlook or Berlin for Strassenfeger, crafts a beautiful printed object with the same goal in mind. And most importantly (by far), there are the vendors. Each paper sold is not only a self-sufficient step for each vendor, but for all vendors, all papers, all streets across the globe. It's a network that spans conversations, cities, states, countries, the entire world. Now there's a community.



twitter
spotters

Alexander McWhirt

This section goes out to the Memphians who catch our vendors and share their photos on twitter. See page 2 for more information!



Subscribe to our blog at
thememphisbridge.com
to keep updated on stories about
vendors, statistics, and much more.

MEMPHIS

BY ASKARI SHABAZZ

Contributing Writer

I traveled from the West Coast to the South.
San Diego was my home
and I'm not alone.
Many of you don't have a decent
place to pee.

Yeah, you are homeless,
just like me, but don't fret.
No, don't despair, because there are people
out there who genuinely care
(I wanna give a shout out to Rhodes College).

There have been places where
you could not eat or get a drink of water
Wherever you please, our struggle
has moved from civil to universal.

There's no place on the planet
where there's no trouble.
President Obama is the best they found,
but listen to me, young college students:

it's gonna take you all
to really turn this thing around.
San Quentin, Folsom, Soledad:
there ain't no place I ain't been down.

I thank you for providing me this venue--
that's the philanthropic spirit God put in you.
Have those people in Washington gone mad?
Or have they just lost their minds?
Homelessness should be their top priority
instead of "making time."

They have shut the government down--
America is going like ancient Rome
while the homelessness increases
and we have no home.

I have a special place in my mind
where I can go.
Leave the rest up to God,
and let this blow.



THE VEIL

Grammy Award-winning Memphian reflects on social divide

BY KIRK WHALUM
Contributing Writer

From my seat at the very front end of economy class on Delta 2375 from San Francisco, I can see “the veil.” It’s a thin, mesh curtain that separates us from first class, where admittedly 8 times out of 10 my “status” as an itinerant musician—far more than a million miles flown—affords me a seat. Being a “valued customer, Sky Priority Passenger” is a sort of silver lining behind Delta’s ugly monopoly in our market. I digress. And don’t worry, I’ll endeavor not to read too much into this innocent divider curtain—just a bit of symbolism.

I usually don’t think much about the veil since it’s normally behind me. But as I consider it symbolically, I’ll assign to it two distinct functions: to blur the existence of the “class” of folks behind me when I’m lucky enough to be in first, and in today’s case, from my seat in what used to be called coach, to blur the annoying reality of the class in front of me. It’s a polite way of softening the blow to the guy like me eating pretzels while the lady an arm’s length in front of me cuts her poulet à l’orange with her funny (and frustrating) plastic knife. It also serves to create an “environment” in first class that gives the impression to these folks that no one else exists... certainly no one they should be concerned with.

So this scenario is one that speaks to something I have observed in these six years of living in solidarity with the Poor; One can simultaneously be in proximity to and practically ignorant of the existence of ones neighbor. Heck it’s bad enough that I can only name two of the folks on my street. There is a blissful ignorance to which many of us ascribe, that renders us incapacitated to lend a hand to, or even truly empathize with those whose lives dip in and out of homelessness on a regular

basis. The statistics that The Bridge regularly provides about the pervasiveness of homelessness, especially for families, veterans, and children, speak eloquently to the disconnect that persists between “them” and “the rest of us”—the majority of whom in most cases are only two paychecks away from street livin’.

My involvement as a volunteer at Manna House, a place of radical hospitality for the Poor, has taught me much more than I could squeeze into an article. But possibly the most important lesson has been my need to acquire a new proximity to and solidarity with those who’ve been made poor. This proximity forces me to look beyond the veil to actually see my neighbor (yes, Avatar is my all time favorite movie), and to learn to empathize with her/his struggles, and most importantly, to find ways to both support tangibly and advocate politically for those on the margins.

The curtain that separates us is often made of the following fibers: apathy, false justification, ignorance, self-righteousness, superiority complexes, and self-absorption. With this material between us and them, it is absolutely possible to see but not see the person walking by us, whose mission for the day may include: securing their worldly belongings—including important documentation and medications—in a secluded “cat hole” for another day, nurturing some semblance of hope that a change is on the way (it’s impossible to live without hope), finding enough nourishment to make it another 24 hours, dealing with physical infirmity/disease/pain with no consistent access to health care or medication, medicating that pain—physical and otherwise—with whatever substance available... It’s a mess. Add to this the fact that each and every person living in this situation—the morally superior and the morally bankrupt alike—has a very real story about how they got here.

Many of their stories parallel our own, complete with



KAT MILLIS/Student Photographer

disappointments, loss of loved ones or loss of employment due to downsizing, family issues, sickness, mental disease and dysfunction. The difference in most cases is that, for whatever reason, these intrepid survivors lacked the support systems (visible and invisible) that prevented us from ending up in the same predicament.

Are there folks out here who just plain blew it? Absolutely. But the more we live in solidarity, the more we discover that we have lots in common with the “just blew it” group as well.

And so it goes. I won’t lie, I like flying in front of the veil. I love first class! That big plush seat makes getting from gig to gig a whole lot less exhausting. But I desire to live an authentic life that connects me, in more pragmatic ways, with those who’ve been made Poor, especially the Homeless. And I hope that comfy seat in First never renders me so comfortable that I forget my Christian duty, my common humanity, for God’s sake, that should compel me to strive for a world with fewer veils.



BILL PIACESI/Focus for the Good

Christmas in July

BY TONI W.
Contributing Writer

I think black people celebrate Christmas in July, because the Fourth of July is when white people celebrate their independence, and—to the best of my knowledge—when all other people celebrate it as well. Caucasians came to this country and landed on Plymouth Rock. We people of color came to this country, and Plymouth Rock landed on us. And it seems that the whole world walks on top of that rock. We are still under it. For instance—we fought World War I, and when some of us, by the grace of God, made it back home, we were left to die in the streets. Just for trying

to live as if we weren’t under that rock anymore. Then with World War II came déjà vu—told to cook, dig holes, and all the manual labor that the others just wouldn’t do. Some were told to get back in their place. Others died. But overseas, they were treated better than they were at home—if you could call it home. Some were treated so kind that they stayed over there, fearing they might have to crawl back under that rock if they did go home. The rock everyone steps on. Let’s skip the Korean conflict. Let’s go right on to Vietnam: fighting and dying once again for someone else’s independence.

A Different Christmas

BY VEYSHON HALL
Contributing Writer

All the stockings are hung by the chimney with care. The angel sits proudly atop the beautiful tree. Tri-color lights shine brightly everywhere. And the sounds of “Joy to the World” dance through the air. I stretch, yawn, and thank God for this day: Christmas Day.

I think about my plans for the day. Let’s see: stand in line, fight for the shower. Dress, check to make sure that my bag hasn’t been stolen in the night. Crime takes no holiday.

OK—there are several places feeding today. Some are even handing out hygiene products and warm clothes. Whoo-ee! Merry Christmas to me. I bundle up and grab my small bundle. Gotta get going—the lines will be long and it’s cold. I’m hoping for a hat and glove set.

Christmas, Christmas, Christmas. It’s everywhere, and I love it. People are driving by in cars decorated for the holidays, filled to capacity with gifts for their family and friends. I smile as they look at me and lock their doors. I have mastered the art of looking worry-free (a necessity in the homeless world), while inside, I am very sad.

I am homeless. While others are cozy in their warm, Christmas-filled homes, I and many others are traveling from church to church, standing in lines for food and shelter. There are so many of us that some die out in the cold because the shelters were full, or because they didn’t have enough food.

Some of you might be thinking we chose to be homeless. That we don’t want any help. Stop lying to yourself! Stop trying to get off the hook! You are just as respon-



Courtesy of Jerome Whittingham

sible for homelessness as we are.

The causes of homelessness are as varied as those who suffer from it. Many of us are college graduates, veterans, productive members of society before the economy, health issues, or other unavoidable circumstances changed our lives. Most of us have no desire to be homeless. We struggle to take each step forward. We need jobs that propel us forward, safe housing. Then we can re-enter productive society.

We’re not all alcoholics. We’re not all dopeheads. We don’t all fit into whatever stereotype you choose. We

may look dirty, sure. But have you ever tried to wash up in a dirty gas station? Or tried to use the bus terminal bathroom while security just looks for a reason to kick you out? We’re homeless. Without homes, we’re also without luxuries.

Next time you see a homeless person, look past the dirt, grime, and sadness. Underneath is a beautiful human being, a child of God!

Merry Christmas to all, and to all a good night.

Country Living

BOTH PIECES BY LINDA AMOS
Contributing Writer

Unexpected storms
have their own way of coming
uninvited. It was not the rain—
it was the thunder that always
frightened her.

Ever since his return from Viet Nam,
her husband was never
the same man that she married.

Something as simple as a phone call
from a friend or acquaintance
would set off a tirade of hurt,
unleashing a fury in him
worse than booming thunder.

His outbursts
lacerated her once-pure soul,
making her feel like she was
on storm watch. All the time.
Ever vigilant!

Note from the author: This poem was inspired by my dad—why I became homeless on my 16th birthday. I slept at school, bathed at school, ate at school, worked odd jobs...no one knew.

Unclaimed Blessings

Every day when I awaken I just know
in my heart of hearts that my Father God
has unclaimed blessings in store for me today.

On a spring day,
it could be an unexpected flower
blooming in the most unlikely place

or a bird’s song carried on the breeze
that brightens a gloomy day,

or a warm breeze that kisses my cheek,
or a pink and orange sunset.

On a summer day
it could be an unexpected bouquet
of lilacs given to me by a neighbor,

or a gaggle of geese waddling down the street
to a nearby pond with goslings all trailing in a row,

or a cool patch of grass on which to lay my head
while I watch clouds form in the blue sky,

and a refreshing glass of fresh mint tea
To quench my parched throat.

Each and every thing that is good
is a gift from my Father above,
who treats me like I am His favorite child.



LIFE IS BIGGER THAN ME

KAT MILLIS/Student Photographer

Tommy Payne reflects on the individual's spiritual potential

BY TOMMY PAYNE

Contributing Writer

In my dreariest times of addiction, depression, and loneliness, it seemed like the whole universe conspired to make me into a loser. My life was full of tragedies until, eventually, I lapsed into homelessness. Suffering from bipolar disorder only amplified my self-pity. I gave up on life. Suicide often entered the back of my mind. I tried desperately to maintain a certain level of self-respect, so that jumping off the Memphis bridge or putting a bullet in my head remained too gruesome to fathom. But I lived in filthy, empty houses. I wrestled with roaches, unrelenting mosquitoes and beady-eyed rats, while the overwhelming silence and the stench of urine and feces filled my nostrils. Like it or not, I was being nudged closer and closer to the edge.

Were I not an intelligent and creative person, perhaps I could have endured this dismal situation. After all, many people resign themselves to hopeless, desolate lifestyles. They are unable to focus their energies on self-redemption, unable to put forth an effort to rise about a hellish condition. The result is a cycle of drugs, alcohol, soup kitchens, missions, bus stops, empty houses, cold winters, vermin, and diseases: pneumonia, tuberculosis, hepatitis. And insanity.

But finally, something important stuck in my wandering, enfeebled mind: life is so much bigger than me. Unless I put forth a genuine effort to be so, I am not inherently special or unique. Compared to the disease-ridden huts and cardboard houses in other locales

across the world, my life is relatively a blessing.

It's not all about me. God is not my personal valet or my mindless benefactor. It's about all of us here on Earth—the whole scale of humanity. This isn't to discount my individuality. My individuality can lead me to success as well as failure in my life, depending on what you consider to be success or failure. I have failed as a student, father, husband, and good citizen. But I've finally found some success by working to combat my own mental disabilities and realizing that life is bigger than me.

I am only an atom in the mind of God, but I fulfill a definite purpose in existence. There are no big people or small people. Neither wealth nor poverty dictates the quality of the soul. We exist in the material world for a short period of time, but we have a connection with the spiritual one forever.

No abysmal condition can ever nullify our spiritual potential. There are countless intelligent and creative men and women sleeping on the streets, sleeping in missions, sleeping in prisons. I am not unique in that aspect of my life. I have traits that I have seen frequently in other members of the homeless community: social dysfunction, even a tendency toward being antisocial.

Now, dysfunction has many components, and it shows itself in different ways. There are many drug and alcohol users who are able to hold jobs, pay taxes, even raise families. They may be dysfunctional, but it has not affected them to the point of homelessness. There are many mental patients who, under good supervision

and with proper care, are able to lead a normal lifestyle.

Often, homelessness occurs with the help of mental illness or addiction. In many cases, both play a part. But some homeless people are just victims of fate. Through no fault of their own, they became stranded in a social underworld.

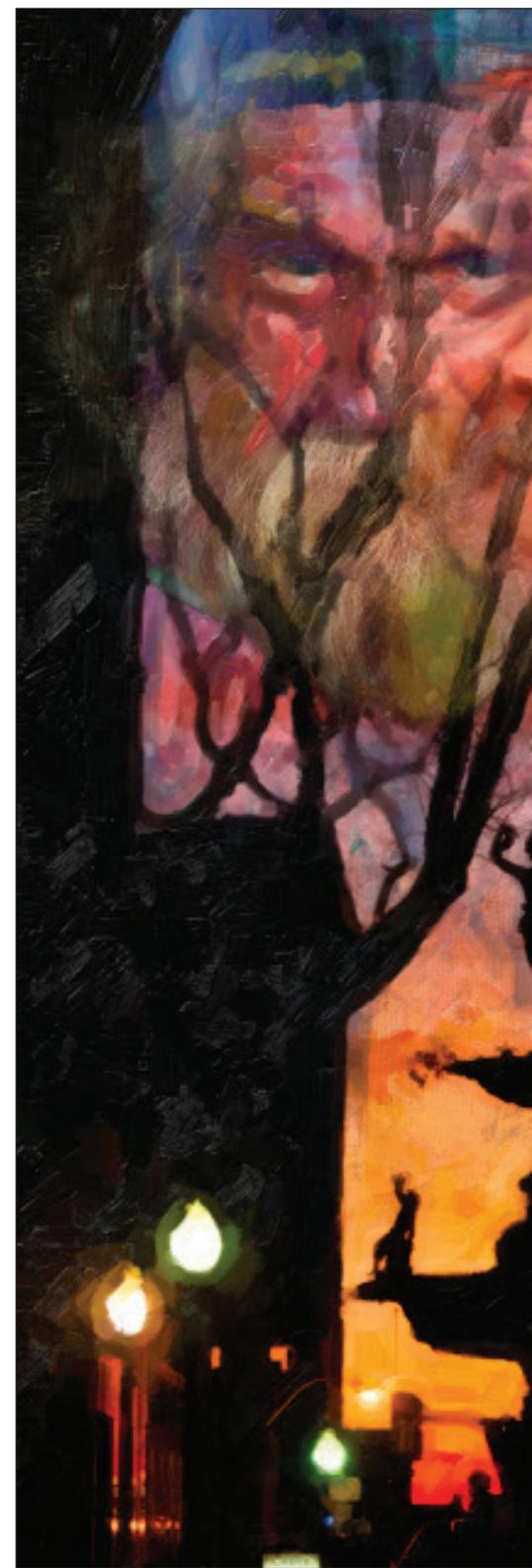
God has provided us with the needs to sustain existence: food, water, air, and the human creativity that has led to modern civilization. We exist individually and collectively in the embrace of a loving God. So why are some people rich and others poor? Why do wars and crime exist? Disease and pestilence? Deformity, insanity? Why, if we live within the love of God? These questions can be answered by God alone—I'm by no means his mouthpiece. It's all so confusing, so frustrating. Is God oblivious to His creation? Are we really left to fend for ourselves in a cruel and arbitrary world? Do all prayers, all religious practices, simply disappear into the skies?

The Bible says that the Kingdom of God is not of this world. We do not exist in it. Yes, we exist at the whims of fate, but God has granted us the mental abilities to face finite existence and fend for ourselves. If we are trifling or irresponsible, that is our choice.

Still, life is bigger than any individual. Life goes on while we drift along like bubbles in the ocean: soup kitchen to soup kitchen, shelter to shelter. Because of this, the strong are obligated to help fend for the weak. Life is much bigger than me, but in my experience and my ability to relate, I can give back to the world. That's how I make myself special and unique.



BILL PIACESI/Photo Credit



Bill Piacesi changes lives thro

BY GRANT EBBESMEYER
Staff Writer

When I asked Bill Piacesi if he had any good recommendations for where we should meet up to talk, his suggestion of Caritas Village—a joint coffeeshop and cultural center in the Binghampton neighborhood—seemed fitting for a man who is so obviously dedicated to helping others and working for the greater good in this city. Piacesi moved to Memphis with his wife four years ago from Virginia. Although both of them had spent most of their lives in suburban settings, they decided when moving to Memphis that they wanted to live in the city. “Because we did that,” Piacesi says, “we came face-to-face with the under-served and homeless communities, which is pretty hard to miss on certain parts of Poplar Avenue and other parts of town. I had always wanted to work for the greater good, and so when I saw the homelessness and

poverty in this town, I wanted to get involved.” He explains that because he had no background in social work, he turned to what he did know how to do, and had been doing professionally for the past 27 years: photography.

Focus for the Good, the nonprofit of which Piacesi is currently the President, was created two and a half years ago with three main goals. The first is to use photography to bring attention to underserved communities here in Memphis. By creating fine-art photography with the homeless community as its subject, Piacesi hopes that viewers will not immediately recognize that his subjects are homeless; instead, he hopes that they will be struck by the power of the images themselves. The goal, says Piacesi, is for viewers to realize that homeless individual(s) “are not just statistics or numbers on a ledger. They’re actually human beings.” Piacesi cites as inspiration the photography of the Dust Bowl and Civil Rights eras—photog-

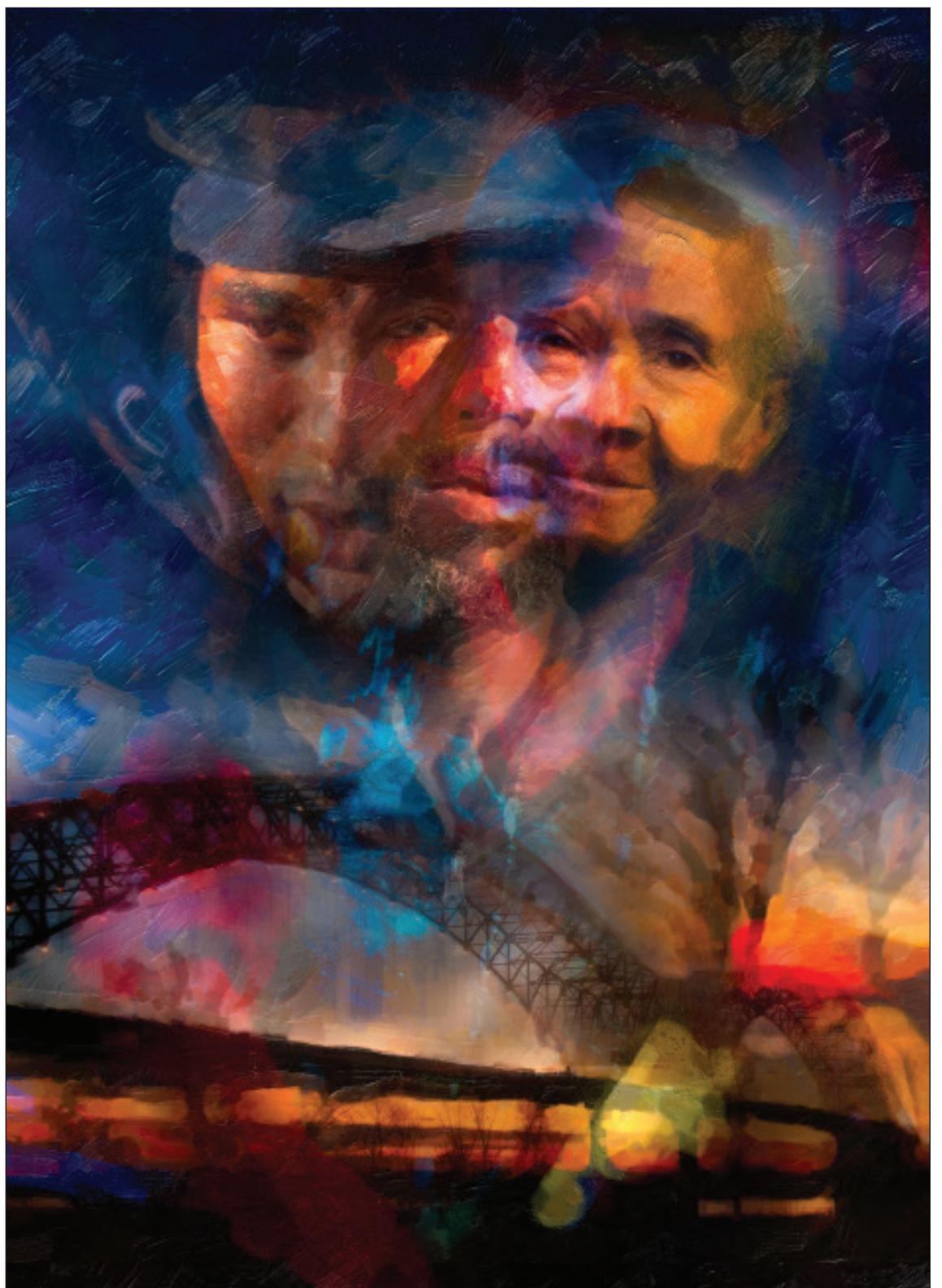
raphy that helped catalyze social change for the overlooked parties of the time.

The second goal of the organization is to teach photography skills to individuals, especially kids and teenagers from struggling communities. Allowing kids to develop their own artistic voices, Piacesi says, will not only assist in their personal development, but will allow the true stories of their communities to emerge. Finally, Focus for the Good provides professional photography services at discounted rates to other nonprofits in the Memphis area. The idea is that if more organizations are able to afford effective marketing strategies, they will be more able to spread their message across the community and reach more individuals in need.

In the two and a half years since founding Focus for the Good, Piacesi has worked with multiple nonprofits across the city, including Door of Hope, Center for Transforming Communities,



BILL PIACESI/Focus for Good



BILL PIACESI/Photo Credit

ough art at Focus for the Good

Families of Incarcerated Individuals, and Community LIFT. Recently, Focus for the Good assisted the Community Alliance for the Homeless at an event called Project Homeless Connect, which helps link homeless individuals with care providers and resources across Memphis. Piacesi sent a delegation of photographers to capture the event for the Alliance's future promotion. He also set up a portrait station for everyone present—and provided all subjects free copies of their own portrait. Although he only spent a few minutes with each individual, Piacesi says, the opportunity to connect directly with the homeless community was both fulfilling and heartwarming. “Many of these individuals had never had their portrait taken. Just the fact that somebody wanted to photograph them—you could see their eyes light up. They were excited.”

Piacesi has an exciting year planned for 2014. He was recently notified of his selection as Cari-

tas Village's 2014 artist-in-residence. During his residency, he plans to create a contemporary portrait of the Binghampton neighborhood, with smaller projects ranging from portrait services to documentations of the places, houses, and events that make the neighborhood unique. “I'm excited to explore and create the story of the neighborhood,” he says. Also in 2014, Piacesi will display some of his work in Memphis' Kroc Center art gallery. In addition to showing some of his older work, Piacesi also plans to stage photographs that recreate famous artwork using homeless Memphian subject. He has already completed a recreation of Leonardo da Vinci's “Last Supper,” which appeared in the October issue of *The Bridge*. Piacesi plans to pay the models a portion of the images' proceeds.

While Piacesi says he has been pleasantly surprised by Memphis' energy as it attempts to assist the homeless community, he wishes more people

would get involved. “It's tough,” he says. “Everybody's busy with their own lives, and they've got their own struggles,” he admits, but also says he's tired of “reading comments on Facebook that say homeless people are lazy, or that they just want a free handout. It's just so heartbreaking that we as a society have chosen to value other things over creating a stable safety net for [the homeless community] among us.” Piacesi is hopeful for what's next in Memphis, however. He adds that Focus for the Good is always looking for volunteers to teach photography courses and take photographs. He is eager to grow the organization, and even more eager to use art to reach out in Memphis—always with a focus for the good.

Piacesi starts as the Caritas Village artist-in-residence January 1st, and will be doing a year-long “portrait” of the Binghampton neighborhood. To learn more, visit www.focusforthegood.org or email Bill at bill@focusforthegood.org.

ONE ON

with

Leroy Scott Jr

Man discusses life on the streets, describes those who hurt and those who help

BY HENRY MORRIS

Staff Writer

This is a reprint of an article featured in the inaugural issue of The Bridge. Shortly after the publication of the issue, Leroy passed away. We would like to publish this article in remembrance.

MORNING/AFTERNOON

LS: Okay, well, you never really go to sleep.

HM: Why?

LS: Out of fear, you know I've seen homeless people sleeping... you got these wise guys, psychotic guys, that'll come set you up with gasoline, light you on fire-

HM: No!

LS: That's a big joke. They do this just for laughs. It's pure entertainment. You could be asleep, balled up in a blanket or something, and they'll beat you with baseball bats. Put the pit bulls- let the pit bulls test you out. You know, all that kind of stuff. And some people think 'cause you out here on the streets you might have some money; you might be holding some narcotics for people. You always getting robbed or frisked, and then you got Memphis' finest. They love to practice on you too.

HM: Oh my god... Alright so you don't sleep, so then what do you do?

LS: Well now you hungry as hell, you gon' beg for something to eat... luckily they got a rail station down here. You get to walkin' around, you meet people. You'd be surprised at some of the people you meet. You say "You going to get something to eat around here?" "Oh yeah there's this place around here serves lunch every day around 11 o'clock." "Where's that?" So you go there-

HM: Start your day out.

LS: Yeah start out. If you're really hungry you wait 'til everybody's been seated, and you talk to the guy that's running it and you say "Excuse me, these two sandwiches is cool, but I'ma need something for tonight. Can you help me for tonight?" Now its only one bag per person, but if you do it right, you talk decent, they'll say hold up-

HM: Give you a bag to go.

LS: Well, they'll ask you to clean up, offer some services, and they got you covered. Either that or they'll tell you about these churches and give you slip on what feed time, what day it is, what time it is. And they call it a "Tramp Trail." The guys that do this stuff. You go by the list, say St. John's on Monday 4 o'clock, over by the Peabody, you'll see



BAIRD ASHER/ Contributing Artist

KICKER: Leroy has had many experiences with theft and violence from his fellow homeless and even the police.

a bunch of people headed that way. Sometimes you get cool with somebody who's decent- now you got your folks and everything, a lot of the time, when you get homeless, you get your own family going against you. People start thinking that you're lazy, gave up, and that's regardless of your past history. Once you become homeless, you become too bothersome. "Every time I see you, you got your hand out," you know. And you need your folks talking to you. But you stop messing with them, okay. And you get better friends with the so-called tramps.

Note: Leroy was hospitalized for a period of time after suffering an aneurism and a subsequent stroke during initial surgery, after he got out, he attempted to reconnect with his daughter.

LS: I went to her house and stayed there (only) a couple days, because what am I going to be - a burden, you know - she tried to help me out but it was too much and I wasn't comfortable anyway so I said "I'll see you later." And I got to make it some kind of way, you know? So, back to the streets.

HM: The tramps became your family.

LS: Really. Yeah but you can't have trust. Always trust nobody, cause they'll turn on you too. Get close to you just to take you out. So you can't blink on that. I mean you're just always on edge. Basically, you're paranoid. And it starts working on your psyche. Then you start hearin' voices and sh-t. And you just, you got to hold on. Some people come out of it, some people don't. That's why you'll see people walkin' down the street talking to themselves, that's a broken person.

HM: Well when you're going from kitchen to kitchen, that probably takes up a big part of your day-

LS: Yeah it consumes your whole day, really, trying to get something to eat.

HM: So is there never any time, if you don't have a job, when you're just on the streets sort of hanging out?

LS: Well once you've achieved your eating schedule, well now you've got a little downtime.

NIGHTTIME

LS: Now comes alcoholism and drugs. You need to release to feel at ease for a minute. Because otherwise you'll go crazy.

HM: How do you get the alcohol and drugs?

LS: You find somebody and sit around and they offer you a drink. You go to the park and somebody's got something, they stole it, whatever, begged for money, asked for money. You can come upon money in weird ways. Sometimes you actually find it, because you're walking around looking at the ground all day. And people lose stuff like crazy. Then you find little odd jobs. So you see some people moving, "Hey you all need help?" Just scuffling and hustling. Then you have to relax at one time, for a little while. So you get you a drink and just, don't drink too much cause here it goes. They waiting on you to go out. So you have to watch that. Because if you get drunk and you wake up in a cold sweat, "Woah! Am I okay? I got everything? Okay, won't do that no more."

HM: It seems like getting a meal is not nearly as hard as finding a place to stay at night that's both safe and comfortable.

LS: Yeah realizing the danger is what saved me. That's what enabled me to think better. So I found out about the Manna House. You can get a change of clothes, turn in the clothes you're wearing, and they'll give you fresh clothes. I got in good with the ladies over there, and the head guys, and they had me in something fresh. I was wearing Tommy Hilfiger. They would say wear this, wear this, and I said, "Man I'm sharp!" Brand new converse tennies, cool rain boots. So on a Monday and Thursday I'd be one of the sharpest guys you'd see. And I didn't have a job. So I would do that, and they would have little odd jobs for me and stuff. So then, I just go hang out with certain people in the daytime that wasn't homeless. That way I'd guard my little spot. Drink a little beer, smoke a little weed until nightfall, did that for about three or four months.

HM: All right, but when you're on the streets you don't sleep, you move from meal to meal, and you've got your downtime where there's alcoholism and drugs- and then what about that period between that and when you start your morning?

LS: Some nights you drink and drug out, but the majority of them you go to sleep.

HM: Where? Do you have a typical place?

LS: Wherever you can, cause you just be so dog-tired.

HM: Just being so aware will tire you out.

LS: Yeah, and you need to rest. Because only God

THE HOMELESS OF 2013

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

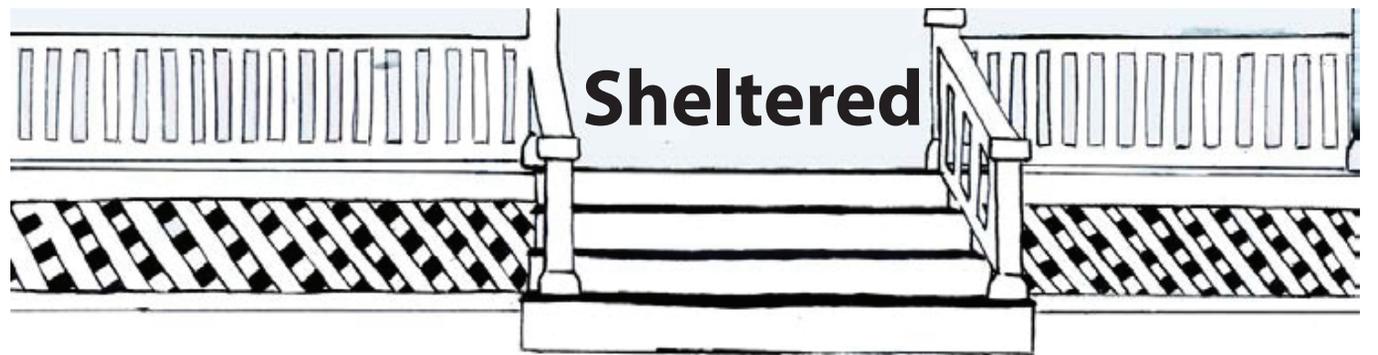
3/2000 people
in Memphis

have lost their homes,
a 20% increase
SINCE LAST YEAR

LET'S WORK
TOGETHER
to change the rate
OF HOMELESSNESS
IN 2014

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

COMPILED BY MEGAN BARNES



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

BY OLIVIA HIPPI
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 Bridge* 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. 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.



Courtesy of Thomas Leuthard

The Bully

BY ROBBIN KINDEL

Formerly Homeless Contributing Writer

I remember a run-in I had with a bully in high school. I was in ninth grade, and ran track at the time. A few times a week, we'd have to go into the weight room and work on our arms and legs.

One day, the seniors were in the weight room too. I was lifting at a leg machine. One of the senior guys came over and demanded that I get off the weights. But I wasn't finished yet, so I told him no. Then, he kicked me real hard in the leg, hard enough to make it bleed.

My second-oldest brother came to pick me up from track practice. When I told him what had happened, he went into the weight room and found the senior guy. My brother just asked him one question: "Why did you kick my sister?" You can probably guess what happened next.

You have to be very careful who you mess with. The next day, when the bully saw me at school, he walked in the opposite direction. Because the person he kicked was my brother's little baby sister.

Joy, Peace, & Happiness

BY VEYSHON HALL

Contributing Writer

Life is funny. God works in mysterious ways. This too shall pass and other clichés may seem to fit life at precisely the right time, but they still don't explain it fully. I'm not talking about everyday run-of-the-mill life. I mean happiness, joy, and peace.

Where do these things come from? How can I keep them? These are the million-dollar questions that even millionaires don't know the answer to. And I'm not sure everyone's ideas are right.

Since I'm not God, I'm going to embrace each ounce of joy, peace, or happiness that comes my way. But be forewarned: I will be happiness, joy, and peace everywhere I go as well. It will spread a lot faster than neighborhood gossip. My prayer is that it'll last a lot longer, too.

Yes, life is funny. And God works in mysterious ways. I just hope that "this too shall pass" will take its time when it comes to joy, peace, and happiness.

Memphis Grassroots Groups Engage in Dialogue, Advocacy for Citywide Police Reform

BY CHRIS MARTIN

Contributing Writer

Local hip-hop artists gather on a street corner in Downtown Memphis for a free-style cypher event, part of the South Main Arts District's monthly Trolley Night. When the impromptu show goes after hours, police intervene: cellphones are confiscated, performers are slammed against patrol cars, nightsticks and pepper spray come out, and two of the event's organizers are arrested for disorderly conduct. At a faith-based hospitality center for the homeless in Midtown, volunteers ask to see a warrant when police come looking for one of their guests, and film the encounter. Again, police confiscate cellphones, and arrest the volunteers for disorderly conduct. According to staff members at Manna House, it's not the first time this has happened.

At a privately held park maintained by a local church, police find men experiencing homelessness in the area and run them out for trespassing. They have permission to be there, as part of the church's street outreach. Recently, two vendors for the Bridge were arrested for

disorderly conduct and malicious mischief, or operating a business without a license. After spending a night in jail, the charges were dismissed, but now vendors are wary of police in their area. Volunteers with The Bridge are looking into licensing to protect their vendors, and attorneys from the Public Defender's Office have represented vendors who get picked up.

All of these events, just from the past few months in Memphis, bring a new sense of urgency to a growing coalition of grassroots groups seeking reforms in local law enforcement and criminal justice. Mid-South Peace & Justice Center recently convened a panel discussion with some of these grassroots partners to put the issues in context.

In a quiet coffee shop in Binghampton, activists with the new group Memphis United discuss plans for a day of action on December 17th to create a safe space to discuss community-police relations and advocate for more training and civilian review of local law enforcement. Starting with a Know Your Rights workshop with volunteers from the Public Defender's Office, the event will feature a march to deliver a letter calling for law enforcement reforms to City Council, culminating

in a hip-hop cypher outside City Council, and followed by an evening of music downtown. With participation from MSPJC, Homeless Organizing for Power & Equality, Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Network, and several other grassroots groups, the December 17th day of action promises to bring Memphis into the fold of a larger national movement for criminal justice reform.

Already, the Memphis Police Department and Shelby County Sheriff have engaged with local neighborhoods in a series of Community-Police Relations forums, where officers meet with community members to discuss their experience with law enforcement, good and bad. After laying the groundwork through these collaborative efforts, activists with Memphis United hope local government will be receptive to calls for reform.

You can learn more and get involved with the ongoing efforts to organize criminal justice reform in Memphis www.midsouthpeace.org.

For the Love of Tent City:

Community-minded Nashville settlement remembered in 2012 film

BY MCCALL HAGLER

Contributing Writer

Recent economic hardship has caused increasing homelessness across the nation, and made-for-TV documentary *Tent City, U.S.A.* (Stephen Cantor, 2012) offers unique insight into the difficulties encountered by a homeless individual. The film tells the story of a group of around 80 homeless people, who, with nowhere else to go, gathered under a bridge in Nashville, Tennessee and built a community. Throughout the film, these group members attempt to get back on their feet and reintegrate into society.

Tent City existed for a total of more than 20 years. In 2007, Otter Creek Church stepped in to make the site a better place for its residents. Doug Sanders and Jeannie Alexander, two ministers with personal missions to help the homeless community, took charge of Tent City, helping to improve the lives of more than 100 residents. With Nashville's homeless population approaching 30% over the national average, Tent City expanded continuously. And despite the nontraditional housing at Tent City, the residents were still able to foster a sense of community that would otherwise be absent from the often-lonely homeless experience. In the documentary, Sanders refutes the notion that people are forced into homelessness because of medical, financial, or addiction issues. Instead, he says, the underlying reason for homelessness is people's tendency to isolate themselves. In these cases, when tragedy does strike, they have nowhere to turn. Throughout the film, Tent City helps to fill this void.

The documentary follows the lives of four homeless people with different backgrounds and reasons for becoming homeless. Wendell, an unemployed carpenter and resident of Tent City for 6 years, was forced into homelessness after a DUI charge left him unable to find work. Stacy, 35 years old, became homeless after escaping an abusive relationship. Tee Tee became homeless at age 17 and was the victim of rape while on the streets. Macgyver, previously addicted to cocaine and meth, used the community created by Tent City to become clean.

As the number of residents grew, community meetings were held once a month to discuss issues around the camp and to set rules. Tent City had a strict no-drug policy, and drinking could only be done inside the tents. However, the community still retained substantial control of community guidelines and regulations—a concept foreign to many Tent City residents used to police harassment and the stricter regulations often enforced at homeless missions and shelters. Slowly, Tent City became a functioning “city” of its own.

Here, the film takes a turn. The land for Tent City was owned by the Department of Transportation, which informed the residents they would have to evacuate the area by November 2010. However, on May 1, 2010, a devastating flood hit Nashville, prompting Mayor Karl



Courtesy of Nelson Minar

Dean to declare a state of emergency. Tent City did not escape the destruction: it was covered in over 10 feet of water and sewage. Finally, the area was condemned as a biohazard. The residents of Tent City lost the few possessions they'd had. Once again, they found themselves with nowhere to do. While Jeannie and Doug struggled to find a new location for Tent City, the current residents stayed in hotels using temporary FEMA vouchers. But these fixes wouldn't last long.

Finally, a private citizen in Antioch, Tennessee, roughly 15 miles outside of Nashville, offered temporary land for Tent City. This fix didn't last long either—the citizens of Antioch called for the residents' removal. Tent City, U.S.A. makes a point to convey that the Tent City residents understood the community's concern; however, they also wished to prove that they weren't simply dangerous drug addicts with no desire to work.

To spread their message, Jeannie, Doug, and several Tent City residents attended a meeting of the Homelessness Commission in Nashville. The commission was created in 2005 with the goal of housing 1800 homeless individuals within 10 years. By 2010, only 20% of this goal was met. And to the Tent City group's dismay, there wasn't a strong homeless presence on the committee. With this gap in mind, Jeannie and Doug volunteered to facilitate an election for a homeless representative on the commission, which would then be approved by the mayor.

Wendell, Stacy, Tee Tee, and Macgyver all ran for the position, all making presentations to Nashville's homeless community about the dire need for homeless representation and voice in governing bodies. Although the vote was close, Stacy won the election.

But the story of Tent City doesn't have a classic happy ending. Shortly after Stacy's election to the commission, the pressure from Antioch forced the Tent City residents to leave their recently-donated plot. Unable to find new land, the residents were forced to split up. Stacy and her fiancée, Bama, were able to move into government housing. Stacy started school to become a medical assistant, and her commission position was approved four months after her election; however, she was unable to garner enough support to create a legal Tent City (roughly 30 illegal versions of the camp have popped up since). Wendell was able to get a small construction job and has since been able to move into an apartment, although he still struggles to make ends meet. However, his passion for helping homeless people has not subsided—Wendell gives out necessities to the homeless on the weekends. Tee Tee was approved for government housing for a year, but is still struggling to find work. At the close of the film, Macgyver remained unsheltered, but still hopeful for a better future.

With Stacy's position on the Homelessness Commission, the homeless community was given a voice that it did not have before. Stacy communicates the importance of issues such as underfunding for homelessness projects and the pitfalls of temporary housing. Although the government provides a short-term place for the homeless to live, most people are unsure of where they will go once their time is up. With Stacy's first-hand experience, there is hope that the issues of homelessness will gain more awareness and will eventually make significant progress.

Tent City, U.S.A. uncovers the misconceptions of homelessness and raises awareness for the need for change. The insight into the lives of Stacy, Wendell, Macgyver, and Tee Tee prove that homeless people are hardworking, deserving individuals and should be treated as such. While it is not an easy fix, the homeless community yearns to have their voices heard and deserves to be treated like part of the citizenry. Films like Tent City help move the country toward these ends.

“Doug Sanders refutes the notion that people are forced into homelessness because of medical, financial, or addiction issues. Instead, he says, the underlying reason for homelessness is people's tendency to isolate themselves”

-McCall Hagler

Alone, Forgotten, Lonely, Out Of Sight, Out Of Mind

BY MARK EDINBURGH

Contributing Writer

Dedicated to all homeless and street people throughout the world

Alone, forgotten, lonely, out of sight out of mind
Neglected by our society, rejected by mankind
The mentally ill, the homeless, the vulnerable, human beings are everywhere
Dozens dying daily. Drugs, drink, disease, deprivation, despair.

Languishing in the hostels, bedsits, dumps in need of repair
In places of oblivion where no one seems to care
Exploited by corrupt, unscrupulous landlords who look on with disdain
Their only real concern is of how much they can gain.

For others not so “lucky,” who are looking for a bed
They’ll turn to any place of comfort to rest their weary head
Alleys, stairwells, doorways, basements, any place will do
So long as there is shelter for one night, maybe two.

Another day is dawning, another day of doom
Where to move next from the cold, the rain, the gloom?
Wandering about aimlessly, searching for a clue
To find a place of refuge for the many, not the few.

“No room” in such places, “Full up,” closed doors all around

It’s back to that place of misery the previous night they found
Danger, cold, wet, abject squalor beckons yet again
For the thousands in our society; vulnerable, teenagers, young women, young men.

But just how many make it to see yet another day?
Some will not awaken, found dead, frozen where they lay
Another lost, forgotten statistic which no one cares to keep
Figures of huge numbers, enough to make you weep.

And what about the others that those dead friends leave behind?
If you look in the right places, this is what you’ll find:
Sickness, destitution, chronic ill health are matters of fact
Deterioration of bodies, lost souls, minds about to crack.

Misery, dejection, deep depression is the norm
However strong the individual, whatever shape or form
Existing mental illness; minor, moderate, severe
Will clearly be exacerbated by torment, uncertainty, fear.

Confused, weak, weary, frightened, very much alone
Another day of hopelessness, another day unknown
Too tired to go on any more with illness, apathy, despair
It’s time to say “Goodbye cruel world, no one really cares.”

One more death, a suicide, caused by complacency, neglect
Isn’t it time to treat our fellow man with a little more respect?
Help, care, understanding would certainly be a start
Act now to prevent more deaths, Those-With-Power. Compassion, heart.

Let’s start to radically rethink, review our “Community Care”
We must stop leaving our vulnerable unassessed, unmonitored, unaware
Two years have now slipped by since the start of this disastrous Act
It’s time to change this “system”, which is failing, that’s a fact.

So come on health staff, social workers, politicians across the divide
Get your acts together to stop this rising tide
Of needless deaths, human suffering, tragedies that put you all to shame
“A national disgrace, disaster, scandal”: who will take the blame?

Author’s Note: This is a poem based on vast personal knowledge and experience. It was written in 1995...has anything really changed in all those years?

Jim

Cont. from Page 1

Outside The Bridge, Jim lives a full, rich life. He moved to Memphis six years ago from the Northeast, and immediately got involved at the Calvary Episcopal Soup Kitchen, helping to prepare meals once a month. That’s where he heard about Hospitality Hub, a local nonprofit and resource center for people experiencing homelessness. Today, he still volunteers there as an intake counselor one day a week.

Jim often comments on how much more common volunteering is in the Mid-South than where he has previously lived—yet before he even set foot in the Volunteer State, he liked helping others. “I like to help people,” he says. “And I like to learn.” And in Memphis, Jim has found an environment where those who want to help can flourish.

Jim McLellan is on the front lines. And it’s people like him that make the actual difference in communities like Memphis. Jim doesn’t give a damn about his name being in articles. He doesn’t care who gets credit for his often-brilliant ideas. Jim only cares about people—vendors for The Bridge, patrons of the Hub, the homeless community, friends—and seeing positive, tangible results for people who have fallen into hard times. These aren’t things he’s told me. Honestly, he probably never will. Instead, he will continue to display these qualities through his actions, his compassion, and his choices as to what to put first in life. Humans like Jim are rare, but let me tell you this: when you find them, you know they’re the ones worth latching on to, the ones worth investing in. They will give you all of themselves in return.

Thanks, Jim.



Community Security provides monitoring for residential and commercial alarm systems. We can install a new system for you or work with most existing alarm systems.

Not Homeless for Christmas

BY ROBBIN KINDELL

Formerly Homeless Contributing Writer

Well, this is my second time not being homeless for Christmas. My first time, I was in the women's lodge. It was special to me because I didn't have to worry about getting my next meal, and I didn't have to worry about where I was going to sleep. I was blessed with gifts, love, hope, and a bed to sleep in. We had a nice Christmas dinner at the Salvation Army. That year, I also gave my first testimony on the radio.

For next year, God has blessed me with my own apartment through an agency called Door of Hope, as well as furniture. It's still a good feeling to sleep in a bed and fix holiday meals. What I'm trying to say is that God can do anything in your life. Just keep the faith and believe. I wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!



Courtesy of Laura Bittner

It's Time

BY DELORES WASHINGTON

Formerly Homeless Contributing Writer

To James, Ian, and Jamie too
of whom I've grown fond—

they felt/heard my soul holla
holla holla

They came to my rescue
before I declined.

Like a puma in the dark of an
African night, holla-ing

for meat/for me/and a departed loved spirit.

From the smallest of mite (organism)
to the largest of the like (mankind)

From the whitest to the blackest,
we all pine/whine/dine.

We all seek glory/fame/shine
from time to time

until it's yours to claim.
They felt my pain.

To James, Ian, and Jamie—it's time.
Holla, holla, holla.

Thanks, Mrs. Kim

*P.T. Bob spotlights
inspirational Memphian*

BY PONYTAIL BOB

Formerly Homeless Contributing Writer

Greetings, friends! By the time this column is printed, we will have celebrated another Christmas season and the birth of my personal savior, Jesus Christ. The new year is upon us, and with it comes our hope for better times. Let's try to hang on to that hope as the year progresses, and let's work hard to create positive change in our own lives as well as for those around us. Remember, everyone benefits this Earth. Some do it by living, others by freeing up space when they leave. You've got to make the choice!

This month, I'd like to introduce you to a lady whose energy and passion for service seems boundless. Mrs. Kim McDaniel's compassion draws others to her outreach projects like moths to a flame. Just ask her family—they'll all agree, as all of them have joined her efforts.

You can find Mrs. Kim on Monday afternoons at the Manna House, helping to serve dinner to those in need. For those who don't know, the Manna House is a hospitality house in Midtown for the homeless community. It was named after manna, the bread of life, that God provided for the Israelites when they were lost in the wilderness. I don't think they could have named it any better. Mrs. Kim also helps to provide winter coats to those in need around Memphis, a project she took on last year and continued this season. I know of many, many people she has helped into jobs, housing, and recovery programs—so many that it would be impossible to list them all here!

Simply put: Mrs. Kim, we love you! Thank you for your efforts, the positive influences you've had on others, and your constant efforts to make Memphis a better place. You are a great example of what we need more of in this world. This month, the spotlight is on you!



My name is Joe.
This is my voice.
This is my livelihood.

#bridgethegap