

what's inside



WINDY CITY STREET PAPER

StreetWise looks to provide income to this midwest city

Page 7



POETRY BY ASKARI SHABAZZ

Local man shares his story through several new poems

Page 6



DARK DAYS

Black and white documentary explores NYC Freedom Tunnel

Page 15

MESSAGE FROM YOUR VENDOR

BEYOND THE DONATION BOX

Where are your donated clothes really going?

BY HANNAH HALFORD
Staff Writer

It takes me a while to throw away my old possessions. It's not that I still use them—it's that I sometimes have a hard time letting them go. From scraps of class notes from an eighth grade English class to aging stuffed animals to outdated electronics, nothing goes without a little fight. But there's one notable exception to my fledgling-hoarder tendencies: clothes.

Like many of my friends, neighbors, and family members, as I outgrow my clothes, I either donate them or pass them down to younger friends and family. During the coldest winter months, my family, like many families, makes our annual contribution to our nearest donation box. And like many families, we sleep more soundly that night, put at ease by the thought that our old items, if not still fashionable, are at least making someone's life easier, maybe warmer, more comfortable.

But where do these donated clothes actually go? Did a little girl in true need actually come across my old grey American Girl coat with the varsity-jacket stiffness and the red star on the back? Who has it now? Why is it there?

When I started to research the answers to these questions, I was surprised by what I found. According to ABC News, less than 10 percent of all donated clothes are kept by branches of charitable organizations like the Salvation Army and Goodwill. Most of that 10 percent is sold, not distributed, at discounted prices in the organization's thrift shop. Really, anyone could buy your donated items, from a person with severe budget constraints to a college student looking for a funky party item to a Vogue editor looking for a "thrift-chic" piece. In fact, Memphis Goodwill was voted "Favorite Vintage Store" by The Memphis Flyer in 2012.

And what about the other 90 percent? These donations definitely don't stay local. In fact, sometimes they travel all the way across the world. Again according to ABC News, many charitable organizations sell the vast majority of their donated items to recycling companies. These recycling companies reuse some of the fabrics by turning them into rag cloths and other manufacturing aids. The rest—almost 25%—is funneled into a largely unknown overseas industry that works, in most cases, directly with developing countries. In this trade, which is known in some locations as mitumba, clothes are bundled by style and function—like jeans or coats—and brought



BRAD K.J. Contributing Photographer

TREASURE HUNTING: Goodwill in Memphis displays only a fraction of what they actually receive.

overseas to be sold at discounted prices. Despite the bargain prices for clothes that were originally bought for high American market value, these clothes still regularly sell for a 500% increase in value.

There are also ramifications for the developing countries in which this clothing is sold. When recycled clothing arrives from the United States, it often knocks out local clothing retailers—especially family-owned shops and other smaller venues. Why? When cheap American clothing is available, it's usually popular, especially in bulk and with additional discounts. In fact, many foreign buyers deliberately search for certain kinds of clothing (many band t-shirts are perpetual favorites).

It may be disheartening to learn that a kid in your hometown isn't making use of your discarded jacket, but there are other factors to consider. Advocates of mitumba argue that when Western charities sell their donated items overseas, they are actually better equipping themselves to serve their communities' local causes. What does this mean? Even if your jacket doesn't make it around the arms of a homeless individual, the money that jacket earns could positively impact that same person's life in others ways. Goodwill Memphis, for example, focuses primarily on employment and job training, using its funds to pay employees of Goodwill stores, donation centers, and students of Goodwill-sponsored vocational training centers. Memphis Goodwill also has a Government & Commercial Contracts division, which sponsors training and placement for blue-collar workers for clients like the Tennessee Department of Trans-

portation, Aramark, the Stax Museum, and Soulsville Academy. Here, the money from donated clothes can potentially travel full-circle.

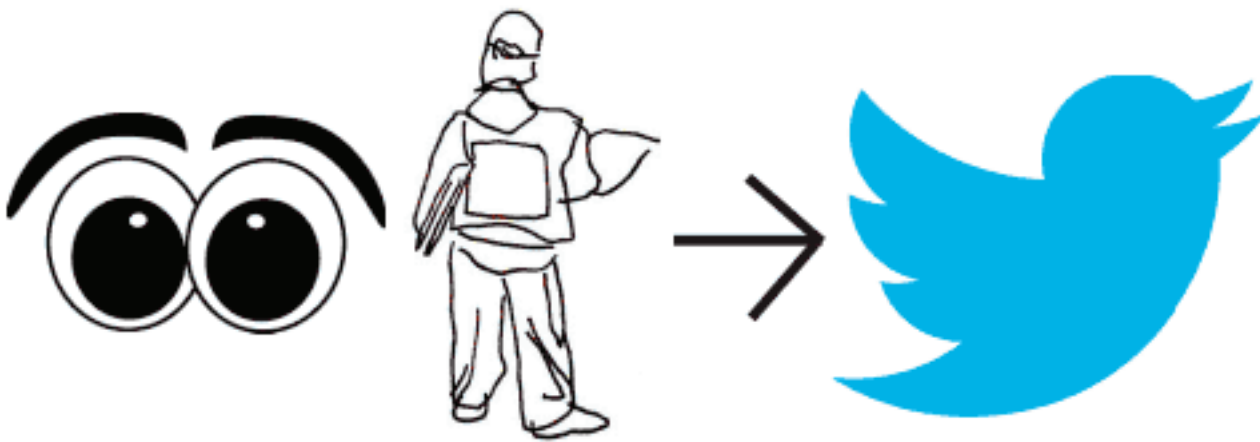
Additionally, American charities sell many of their donations because there are simply too many to use. Particularly in heavily-populated areas where pounds and pounds of clothing comes in every day, it would be very difficult to sell everything. And when the spirit of holiday giving causes donations to skyrocket? Nearly impossible. We actually donate far too much for charitable organizations to handle. Finally, local organizations working to combat homelessness may find just the supplies they're looking for at a Goodwill or Salvation Army location. Groups like Memphis' the Manna House focus extensively on providing clothing, and are always looking for shoes, hats, coats, gloves, and socks.

The moral of the story? If you want your donated clothing to reach a local demographic, it's probably better to donate them to a Memphis-only facility—not a Salvation Army or a Goodwill. If you're making a donation, try to figure out to what ends you're donating. Not all charities are created equal.

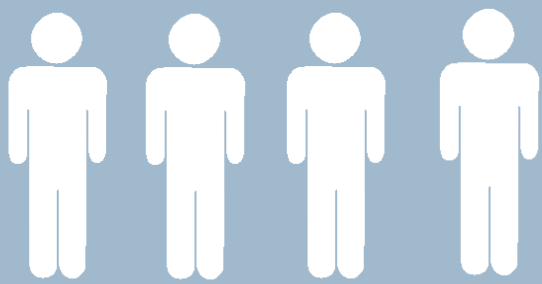
And those clothes my family leaves at the drop box every Christmas? They have taken on a completely different meaning that I'd originally thought. My old jacket with the red star could be wiping down cars in an auto dealership. It could be churning in massive tubs with hundreds of other donated items as it travels across the sea, or in a clothing store in Tanzania, waiting for its newest owner. It could be anywhere.

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.



HOW IT WORKS: VENDOR TRAINING



People who have had an
**EXPERIENCE WITH
HOMELESSNESS**



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



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

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

*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.*

thebridge

Editorial Staff

Editor in Chief
Chloe Bryan

Associate Editors
Monique Hagler
Olivia Hipp

Layout Designers
Sam Clark
McCall Hagler
Monique Hagler
Emmie Heath
Dianne Loftis

Managing Editor
Emily Clark

Design Editor
Ellie Skochdopole

Art Director
Monique Hagler

Homeless Representative
Aaron Banks

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 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.

For advertising-related requests, please contact:
advertising@thememphisbridge.com

If you'd like to make a donation to *The Bridge*, please send donations to:
Memphis Street Newspaper Organization
2000 North Parkway, Rhodes Box 1630,
Memphis, TN 38112

Or contact:
donations@thememphisbridge.com

For more information, please contact:
info@thememphisbridge.com
Twitter: @thebridgepaper
Instagram: @thebridgepaper
[Facebook.com/TheMemphisBridge](https://www.facebook.com/TheMemphisBridge)

Vendor Spotlight: Margaret Benton



MONIQUE HAGLER/Staff Photographer

BY LEE SILBERBERG

Staff Writer

Good stories can seem hard to come by, and even harder to hang onto. This is why people like The Bridge vendor Margaret Benton are so important. Her story is bold, interesting, authentic, and, frankly extraordinary—not one I’ll be forgetting anytime soon.

Benton spent her early youth in the suburbs of Germantown. After a brief stint around Massey Road, she moved with her mother to South Memphis. She graduated from Melrose High School a year early, as part of the class of 1976. With the end of secondary school came both a marriage and Benton’s enrollment in Tennessee Tech at Memphis; however, both these developments proved untenable. The marriage broke down—in her recount, Benton made clear it was for the better—and Benton struggled to maintain her studies at Tennessee Tech. Her track to a degree in Dental Technologies was continually marred by multiple personal difficulties, from break-ins to her home to injuries and much in between. Eventually, Benton sustained a fractured skull, which marked the end of her time at college. Since then, the consequences of the injury

have remained constant—tingling sensations, loss of sensation, pain. In Benton’s words, she felt crippled.

However, after being told about The Bridge by a friend, Mike, she decided to undergo vendor training. In her mind, she tells me, this was one of her best decisions: from The Bridge has stemmed a newfound hope. When she speaks about The Bridge, Benton’s radiant positivity abounds. Working for the paper, she says, has made her feel that she can contribute, be social, and make an impact. Most importantly, she says, her previous feeling of worthlessness has subsided. In its place is empowerment.

Benton is a truly inspiring individual. But what makes her story enduring is not the set of obstacles she faced, but the resilience with which she survived them, and frankness with which she described them to me. Her extraordinary willingness to share all the gritty details of her story isn’t simply admirable, it’s empowering. The Bridge may have, in its way, empowered Benton, but she’s certainly paying it forward.

Letter from the Editor

BY OLIVIA HIPPI

Associate Editor

Ushered in by jingle bells and crowded sidewalks, winter is often fondly called the “season of giving.” But as the holidays pass and the darker days of the season set in, the weight of living in the homeless community can take on a new, harsher chill. On page 13, staff writer Camille Smith discusses the effects seasons can have not only on physical reality, but also on emotional stamina. On page 7, staff writer Kat Millis focuses on the toll Winter Storm Ion took on the Midwest this year—particularly in her hometown of Chicago. And on page 15, in her inaugural film review, Anna Lockhart leads us into the cold tunnels of New York through Marc Singer’s black and white documentary *Dark Days*.

But with a new year, comes fresh ideas, new resolutions, new ways to help each other. Despite the frigid cold, Chicago’s pioneering paper *StreetWise* continues to push the boundaries of the street paper, allowing papers across the globe to “[evolve] into powerful vehicles of empowerment for homeless and resource-poor individuals.” On pages 8 and 9, staff writers Katie Butler and Grant Ebbesmeyer highlight positive news stories

about homelessness from all over the country, reminding us that forward motion is always possible as long as there are those willing to pedal ahead.

When home in South Carolina for this December, I walked a friend back to his hotel after dinner one night. We were right in the center of the city, and there were crowds everywhere. We were struggling to weave our way through the rush when we were stopped by a man on a bicycle. He explained to us that he was homeless

“As the holidays pass and the darker days of the season set in, the weight of living in the homeless community can take on a new, harsher chill.”

and shared his story with us. He worked up and down and the main street, he said, washing people’s cars, cleaning restaurants’ windows, doing any other odd

jobs he could find. We discovered we were both native Charlestonians and started talking about the evolution of our city and our experiences watching it grow.

When we said goodbye, he leaned over to my friend and whispered something in his ear. As we walked away, I asked him what the man had said. My friend told me he’d gently chastised him for not walking on the outside of the sidewalk—the (admittedly archaic) logic is that a man ought to protect a lady from the splashing puddles and incoming vehicles of the street. Now, as a female, I consider myself perfectly capable of protecting myself from puddles, but when I researched the tradition, I found an explanation that read, “Men walk on the outside of the sidewalk to remind others that their companion does not walk alone.” This explanation stuck with me. In effect, the man on the bicycle was telling my friend to watch out for his companion, to ensure that I had support if I needed it. As 2014 chugs along, this man, a gentleman to the core, reminds me to, as best I can, support those pushed to the outside of society’s sidewalk—even in the darkest, coldest days of winter.



A Time and Place

Homeless author Teddy Wilkes expresses himself through poetry

A Time and Place

Courtesy of Jeffrey Day

BY TEDDY WILKES

Homeless Contributing Writer

But when is the time and where is the place?
None of it's possible without God's grace.
So with His embrace,
I don't feel excluded from the human race.

When the demon below put us to the test,
that man above can restore us back to our best.

With His blessings, we can walk away with a smile,
knowing His care will keep us all the while.

The love He has for us is unlimited and it's free;
all He asks is for us to believe in thee.

So keep your faith in Him strong, and, if nothing else,
be a blessing to others as well as yourself.
And whether we're big or small or black or white,
before you close your eyes, pray for us all tonight.

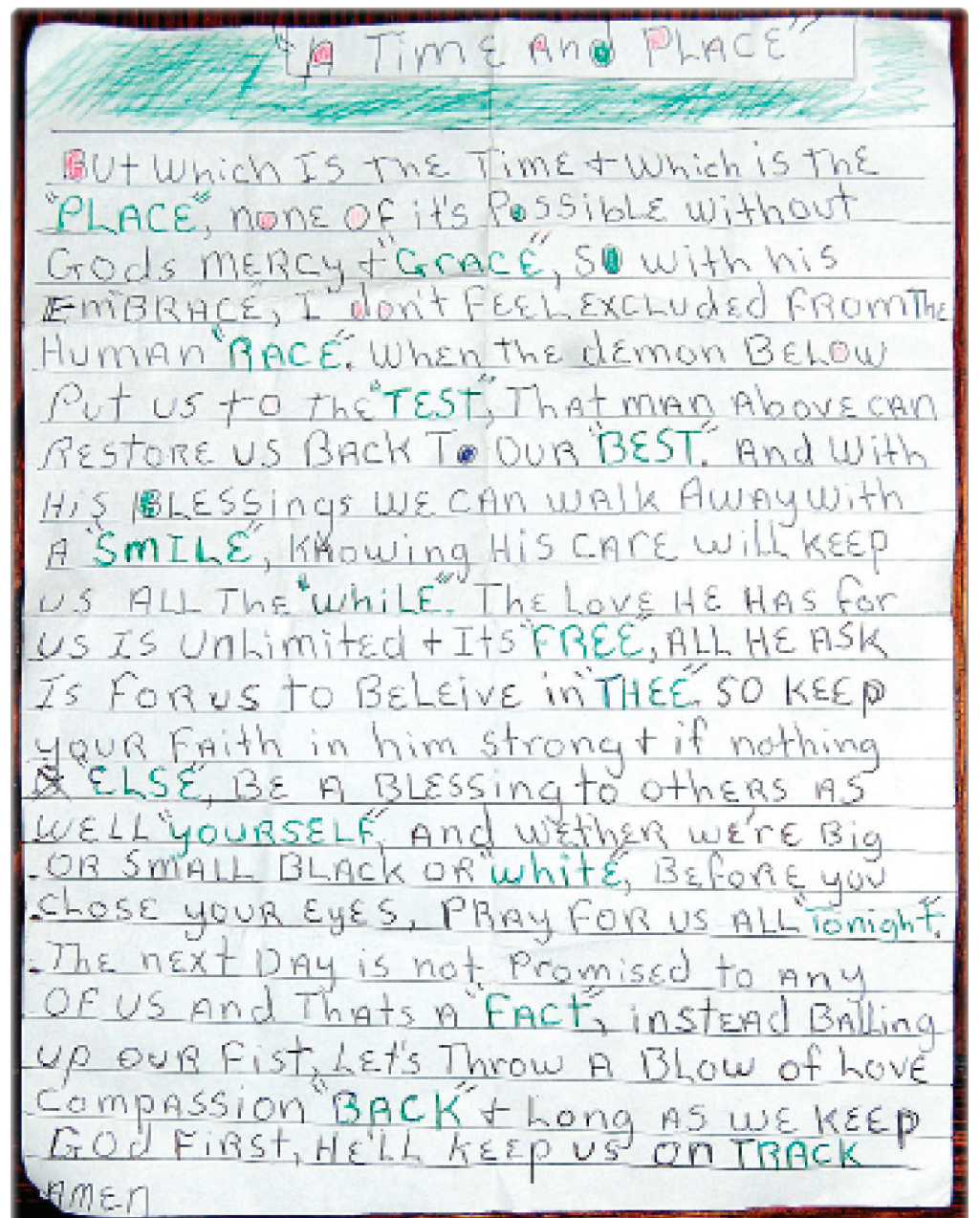
The next day is not promised to any of us and that's a fact.
Instead of balling up our fists,
let's throw a blow of love and compassion back,
and as long as we keep God first, He'll keep us on track.

Amen

Ever wonder what happens to submitted work?

Teddy Wilkes is one of The Bridge's most prolific poets. His most recent poem, "A Time and Place," was submitted in handwritten form, as is most of our work from homeless and formerly homeless contributing writers. Notice that Teddy manages to fit his poem on a single page, using quotation marks to delineate line breaks—it's because paper is scarce!

From Teddy's original submission, our editing team transcribes the poem and performs light grammatical edits, taking care not to distort the original character of Teddy's work. The result is what you see in this printed version and in every issue of *The Bridge*.



MONIQUE HAGLER/Staff Photographer

THE ORIGINAL: Teddy shares the original copy of his poetry

'Understanding Neighbors' panel seeks to change public opinion

BY NICOLE HUGULEY

Staff Writer

On November 5, 2013, Christ United Methodist Church (CUMC), located on 4488 Poplar Ave., hosted an interactive panel titled "Understanding Our Homeless Neighbors." In addition to investigating the weight of that title, the ministry leaders and panel members orchestrated an interactive forum involving several targeted discussions about the specific problems homeless Memphians face.

Upon entering Seabrook Hall, church members and community participants are offered food and refreshments. We're then guided to round tables, which would later host the smaller group discussions. A small pile of handouts and information packets provided to each guest contains information from CUMC about various volunteer opportunities that range from assisting at a ballet class for 4-5 year olds to sponsoring an orphaned child from Shepherd's Field Children's Village in China. Also included is a 35 page "Serving Guide" booklet with additional contact information, descriptions of service opportunities, and resources for further independent action. From the get-go, it is apparent that the members of CUMC take community service very seriously.

Featured members of the "Understanding Our Homeless Neighbors" panel include Marlon "Big Dog" Brown of SOS ("Service Over Self"), Jamey Lee of Jacob's Well, Lemar Walker with Christ's Community Church, Tana Vanderhooft of Ruth's Heart, and Emily Rachiele with the CUMC Benevolence Ministry. Each panel member speaks about their personal experiences as leaders of well-respected nonprofits and community service initiatives in Memphis.

Bob Whitsitt, Executive Director of Serving and Outreach at CUMC, begins the panel discussion with a prayer, reminding the audience that, according to Christian principle, "We were all homeless once." The time has come, he asserts, to spread the word of God's love to those who need it most desperately.

Mr. Whitsitt segues into a general introduction of the intended goals of the panel, explaining CUMC's use of the title "Understanding Our Homeless Neighbors." The word "understanding," he tells us, corresponds to one of the main objectives of the panel: to provide understanding (or to educate) the public on the false stereotypes associated with homelessness that often deter them from providing aid. "Our" along with "Neighbors" reminds the participants and panel members that the homeless too are brother and sisters in Christ, and that they deserve the same treatment that one would give a neighbor or friend. Finally, Whitsitt explains that CUMC chose the word "Homeless" in lieu of another, more politically correct term like "unsheltered" or "displaced" because it is the way most people in Memphis refer to those living on the streets or under overpasses. The members of the CUMC panel want to eliminate fear of a word, he explains, in order to facilitate open, uncensored dialogue. "Tonight," says Whitsitt, "we begin a conversation."

Marlon "Big Dog" Brown begins this conversation with a story of his personal journey to and through homelessness. In his adolescence Big Dog found his sense of value and belonging on the streets, not at home, and eventually, under pressure from drug involvement and completely alienated from his home life and the students of his predominantly white High School, he



NICOLE HUGULEY/Staff Photographer

CHANGING THE CONVERSATION: CUMC speakers share their expertise.

became homeless. He experienced a twenty year run of homelessness, drug addiction, and jail time before converting to Christianity and turning his life around for the better. Inspirationally and humbly, Big Dog describes what motivates his service work after scraping his way off the streets: "Go and do what wasn't done for you," he says, echoing Christian values. During those twenty years Big Dog received neither encouragement nor shelter. Once he found his way out of homelessness, he dedicated his life to working with boys and girls who find themselves in a similar place of isolation during adolescence and young adulthood. He explains that a state of deep hopelessness is hard to break, and he works daily to make such people "hopeful rather than hopeless." As a key member of the staff at SOS Memphis (Service Over Self, Inc.), an organization originally created by a member of the youth ministry at CUMC, Big Dog fights individualized and institutionalized racism, delivers food to the poor and homeless, leads work groups, and even answers Q&A questions on the online SOS Memphis blog series "Ask Big Dog." (Anyone may follow his personal ministry, Big Dog Street Ministry, on his public Facebook page at www.facebook.com/BigDogStreetMinistry).

At this point in the discussion the panel takes a moment to answer this question: How close are we to homelessness?" Emily Rachiele reminds the audience that many middle and lower-class adults can become homeless after a loss of job or a divorce, that homelessness may be closer than many would think. Ms. Rachiele invites one of her close friends, Lashandra Burnett, to tell her story as a formerly homeless single mother. Lashandra explains that she grew up with parents, in particular a mother, who made her feel worthless and devalued. She told the audience that her mother's brainwashing left her convinced that she was "stupid" or "dumb." Raised by her grandmother after her father left and haunted by her mother's abuse, Lashandra suffered the effects of extremely low self-esteem and eventually became involved in an abusive relationship. In 2007, she left home with her young daughter in order to escape her abusive partner, and upon arrival in Memphis, Lashandra was officially homeless. She and

her daughter lived in a homeless shelter until she, like Big Dog, used God as a guiding light toward a better future. Lashandra is no longer homeless, and she enjoys writing in her free time about the harrowing effects of homelessness. To Lashandra, writing is the best way to express the powerful personal effects of her time as a homeless single mother. She hopes that one day she can be featured in newspapers like The Bridge that spread awareness about homelessness via first person accounts.

After Ms. Burnett relays the story of her slow descent into homelessness, Jamey Lee of Jacob's Well continues to challenge the audience's perceptions of homelessness and encourages them to get involved in the community. As a 19-year-old recovering from addiction, Jamey realized, like others before him, that the act of responding to God's grace would lead him away from harmful substances and toward a future of service. He began working in the Summer Avenue/Highland area to help those suffering in close proximity. Now, through his work with Jacob's Well, Jamey organizes food drives and deliveries, hosts Saturday night worship, coordinates volunteers, and contributes to the Jacob's Well website blog. Tana Vanderhooft, another featured panelist, learned about this particular nonprofit through her church involvement, and she and her husband met Jamey when they began volunteering for Jacob's Well.

Tana began her efforts as a driver for CPR, which is the program run by Jacob's Well that delivers food to the homeless. Through this activity Tana became more and more involved, and she learned how to reevaluate the stereotypes associated with the homeless. Tana leaves the audience with a bit of eye-opening advice: "Perception is reality until someone changes your mind," she says. "Just ask somebody their name." She explains that for a homeless person, it could be months or years before someone, another human being, asks for his or her name. This question reminds the person that they have an identity, a personality, a worth and a value. Big Dog and Lashandra both focused on their feelings of worthlessness during their stories about homelessness and addiction.

continued on page 12

Freedom

BY ASKARI SHABAZZ
Contributing Writer

Don't play. If you got the Truth, then say it.
Always pray that the days get better.
Sometimes there's stormy weather.
Don't matter where, when, or how,
I'm gonna make it somehow.
Where you Rome,
A prophet is never honored in his home.
Yet we strive, stick-n-drive, to make it to our
goals,
Focused to overcome.

This is the One!
We need not look for another,
Our convictions make us Brothers.
Like our Strength-n-Pride,
We got God on our side. Let's ride.
Tonight, the future looms bright.
Don't worry about the fight.
He's got us,
We must trust ourselves more.
What are we here for?
Say it: Freedom!



MONIQUE HAGLER/ Staff Photographer

This Christmas

BY ASKARI SHABAZZ
Contributing Writer

Just another day, no sunshine, no rain. Just kool people to kick it with and lots of change. Wasn't thinking about a white one, but a dark one instead. We smoked kush and made some bread, reminisced on times past and thought about some loves you could never make last. Some people remain; others have passed. One thing's for certain, this year went fast; don't mean to sound cynical, but my art will reach the pinnacle.

Born rich beyond all measure. When a man truly has a woman's heart, he has found a treasure. Stay out of jail and away from the penitentiary. Cells have money and prosperity; I'm doing swell, didn't miss much.

And that's how we did it this Christmas.

Last Night

BY ASKARI SHABAZZ
Contributing Writer

All the valiant black troubadours that I would have loved to be numbered among. Billie Holiday sung me one of her "Blues Songs," Paul Robeson belted out on his "Baritone" as Esther Phillips sang "Junkie walking through the twilight, I'm on my way home..." Yeah, I cried last night, but the tears cascading down my face couldn't erase the years and fears. Tears that rolled down so erratically that visions appeared, couldn't trace the tracks that resonantly guided me through the maze and flux of propaganda. I cried last night, but the tears were flowing as the Nile does, so astronomically fast. I envisioned Tupac and Biggie as they shared a renewing brew and spoke of lines from one of their latest pieces of verbal dexterity, yet to be revealed.

Yes, I cried last night, but the tears were not for me.

Chicago street magazine works to alleviate Windy City homelessness

BY KAT MILLIS
Staff Writer

In the late 1980s, the rate of homelessness in the United States began to increase and thus, the prevalence of street newspapers rose as well. Today, street newspapers can be found in major cities across the U.S. Street publications, as well as the global community, including Canada, Africa, South America, Asia and Western Europe. Street publications have evolved into powerful vehicles of empowerment for homeless and resource-poor individuals in many communities. These organizations allow individuals an avenue to gain employment and rebuild self-esteem, while bridging them with a host of other important resources.

Few communities are more vulnerable in the wake of a natural disaster than the homeless community. With winter storm Ion recently sweeping across the Midwest, many victims of homelessness were forced to brave the subzero temperatures without shelter. Major cities such as St. Louis, Chicago, New York City, Indianapolis and even Atlanta reached temperatures that had not been recorded in decades. Growing up in the Chicago area, one is accustomed to seeing homeless people seeking shelter under bridges, in parks, and on public transportation. However, with the recent storm, even the trains were shut down in the city of Chicago, forcing more people out into the cold. With wind chill temperatures dipping as low as -50, spending the night outside became a potentially life threatening situation.

Among the major U.S. street publications in circulation today, StreetWise, located in Chicago, Illinois, helps to provide income and stability for underprivileged men and women in the Chicagoland area. With roughly 116,000 Chicagoans below the poverty line (11.8%) in 2010, and over 192,000 at risk of falling into poverty (15.2%), StreetWise has had their work cut out for them. (2010 Report on Illinois Poverty, Social IMPACT Research Center of Heartland Alliance). The benefits of StreetWise are especially crucial during the cold winter months and give many people the opportunity to afford a shelter by offering them instant employment. StreetWise also provides vendors with social services such as housing and food assistance, medical aid, job training and other needs people may have to help ensure their health and safety.

StreetWise examines larger current national and even global problems, focusing primarily on social justice and humanity issues and finds a way to apply them locally. Their publications include stories of homelessness, poverty, education, healthcare, and human rights problems in the Chicago area. They have also expanded their focus and include articles about cultural activities in Chicago, such as theater, art, music, festivals and other events. The writers/contributors also include features about other non-profit organizations and the work they are doing to improve the poverty rates in the area. Articles, art, poetry and other forms of expression created by the vendors are included, giving the publication a personal connection to the people who are selling the magazines and those who are buying it.

The StreetWise Company has grown exponentially since its establishment in 1992, and is now recognized as one of the largest street publications in the United States. The staff is constantly making improvements and changes to further the potential of the company



and their impact on the community. One of the first problems, which the company had to address, was their original location in the West Loop of Chicago. The location of the company headquarters made it difficult for vendors to access and purchase their papers for distribution. In 2010, Jim LoBianco was appointed executive director and took over management of StreetWise. Under his supervision, the company moved their office to North Broadway Street in Uptown, located in the north side of Chicago. Brittany Langmeyer, the Director of Marketing and Communication for StreetWise, reports that the new location is much more accessible via public transportation and closer to the population they aim to serve. The new office is also surrounded by other non-profit organizations, who, in turn, offer other services that benefit their vendors.

More recently, StreetWise has made improvements in order to keep up with the fast growing digital world. Their website has been redesigned in order to maximize search engine results, like Google and Bing. The company has also capitalized on social media networks in order to connect with more people to spread awareness of their mission and gain supporters. Their most recent technological advance was making their magazine issues available to purchase through PayPal via Smartphones. Every vendor is given a four-digit vendor code, which correlates to a specific online link; from there, step-by-step instructions are given to carry out the transaction. Langmeyer reports that this has been helpful for the company in order to keep up with digital trends and insure the value and relevance of their product in the community.

The company has also recently added new employment opportunities for the StreetWise vendors by installing the Neighbor Carts program. The program is a collaboration between Neighbor Capital and StreetWise. Neighbor Capital is also a Chicago based business concerned with economic problems like underemployment, but also aims to improve the availability of healthy and nutritious foods. Participants are trained in marketing techniques, customer acquisition, and customer service before becoming active vendors. After training, the vendors sell fresh fruits and vegetables throughout the Chicago area and 50% of the vendor carts are distributed in areas termed "food deserts", or neighborhoods that do not have direct access to fresh produce. This collaboration helps to face the issue of unemployment and malnutrition, two major problems in Chicago today.

StreetWise has faced many of the same problems The

Bridge has encountered along the path to success. Although it may seem simple, a major challenge for many street papers is effectively informing the community about the aim of the publication and defusing some of the stereotypes associated with missions to help the underprivileged. Langmeyer states people often are under the impression that the vendors receive the publication for free when in reality the vendors are "true entrepreneurs". Just like any business owner would buy their own inventory to sell, StreetWise vendors are required to purchase their set of magazines from the company. The vendors buy the magazines for 90 cents and sell them for \$2, keeping the profit. Each vendor is assigned a specific location to sell their magazines and just like a regular job, have established hours to work and must meet a certain selling quota to keep their badge. Langmeyer also states that many people believe all the vendors are homeless. However, any adult who lies below the poverty line determined by the Department of Health & Human Services is eligible to become a vendor. This includes people who are unemployed, receiving public assistance, disabled, homeless, previously incarcerated, receiving low-income pay or residing in public housing.

At the end of 2012, StreetWise had a total of 187 vendors and is steadily gaining more employees to this day. The incredibly positive response from the public regarding the company's efforts continues to impress the staff of StreetWise. Langmeyer shared some responses from a recent readership survey distributed to find out what people really think about the StreetWise organization and why they continue to buy the magazine. When asked, "What is your main motivation for purchasing StreetWise?" one person responded, "Two reasons... First, the vendors are terrific. I enjoy chatting with them and they are hard working with the goal of having a home of their own. If I buy the magazine, I can help them and I'm happy to do that. Second, StreetWise is an excellent magazine. It has the best calendar of any publication in Chicago and some good reviews, particularly of the arts. I love reading the vendor profiles." Another respondent wrote, "Because I want to support an organization which provides job skills, training and stability to the disadvantaged." The magazine helps poverty-stricken people regain respect from their community and give them a voice in society. Says Langmeyer: "We respect them and, in turn, they can learn to respect themselves by working hard and—as the coined phrase would say it—by pulling themselves up by their bootstraps."

Here's the Good News: Small steps

BY KATIE BUTLER AND GRANT EBBESMEYER
Staff Writers

At Our Fingertips

At the end of 2013, the New York Times' website featured an opinion page called "Your Suggestions for 2014." In it, writer Nick Kristof listed readers' opinions about the most pressing issues of 2014. One such response addressed homelessness, reading "More attention needs to be given to homelessness in America. It's truly unsettling that in the land of freedom there are those whose living condi-

tions parallel those in displaced persons' camps tens of thousands of miles away." It raised an important question and one that isn't asked often—what can we do about the issues that already touch our fingertips instead of the ones we have to reach for?

Source: Nick Kristof, "Your Suggestions for 2014." On the Ground, The New York Times.

Best Things, Tiny Packages

It often happens that the younger you are, the more helpless you feel. The smaller your hands, the less you can hold; the smaller your legs, the less you can run; the shorter your height, the less you can see. But a group of elementary school students in Bowling Green, Kentucky have proved that the smallest children may just have the biggest hearts. Under the guidance of their leadership teacher, Keely P'Pool,

these students have been working tirelessly to knit scarves for Bowling Green's homeless community. "It's good for them to be involved," says P'Pool, "especially when they can see the impact that they have." According to student Emma Simpson, 10, "the best part is thinking [my] scarf will help a homeless person stay warm in the winter months."

Source: Associated Press

Oh, Christmas Tree

Let's face it: there's always that one present we hope to see under our Christmas tree. But for homeless mothers and fathers, Christmas often brings with it a different hope: that they have anything to give their children at all. In Memphis, this is where organizations like The Salvation Army's Angel Tree, the Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association, and the Mid-South Food Bank come in. In Memphis, these organizations help provide resources to those without shelter, food, and other resources during the holiday season. They also provide assistance to those families who may not ordinarily qualify for assistance, but whose needs increase during the winter months. In

any case, these groups helped put smiles on the faces of those who might not have felt like smiling otherwise.

Source: Bill Dries, "Needs of homeless change during holidays." The Memphis Daily News, December 3, 2013.

Leading by Example

It's sometimes difficult to learn about efforts to combat homelessness in other cities unless you read their local news. One of 2013's standout cities in homeless advocacy was Atlanta, Georgia. Home to over six thousand homeless individuals, Atlanta has forged ahead with the "housing first" initiative, which provided 131 people with homes last year (surpassing its goal of 100). In addition, Atlanta has aligned with the federal strategy "Opening Doors," a project that aims to end veteran and chronic homelessness by 2015. Atlanta is just one of many cities that serves as an example of the impact possible through effort and hard work. Hopefully, Memphis will follow suit, and with perseverance, will soon be recognized as a city that leads the fight on homelessness.

Source: Associated Press



LUKASZ DUNIKOWSKI/Contributing Photographer



Jericho Project keeps participants out of prison and on the right track

BY LURENE KELLY, Shelby County Public Defender's Office

Staff Writer

In Shelby County, a program providing comprehensive services to indigent clients has been quietly changing lives for more than a decade. It's called the Jericho Project.

The program was created to serve individuals living with serious mental illness and substance use disorders cycling repeatedly through the justice system. The Jericho Project builds links to community treatment and services that are tailored to the particular needs of the incarcerated client. The Jericho team is composed of specialists from both the Shelby County Public Defender's Office and a local mental health services provider.

The team develops "community linkage plans" that are presented to the court in support of community-based, alternative sentences. Recovery Support Specialists on the team support clients for four months after release and help them transition to life in the community.

Since its inception, nearly 60% of those participating

in Jericho have successfully completed their recovery plans; they have also avoided further contact with the criminal justice system. While some may focus on the 40% of participants who are arrested again, consider this—the average recidivism rate among the seriously mentally ill hovers around 80%. Jericho cuts that number in half.

What began as a grant-funded experiment has matured into a permanent part of Shelby County's efforts to address the needs of some of its most vulnerable citizens. Its success has made the Jericho Project a national model for how criminal justice systems can better serve people struggling to survive with serious mental illnesses.

The chief architect of Jericho is also Shelby County's Chief Public Defender, Stephen Bush. He started the project under the direction of then-Public Defender AC Wharton. Today, Bush is a national expert on jail diversion strategies for those battling mental illness.

"The Jericho Project proves that when you build a plan with your client, one that connects them to the services they need to be successful, lives can change for the better. The public defender's office can serve as that criti-

cal link," said Bush. "This approach saves resources—it means fewer arrests, court appearances, and less incarceration time. There is no reason this model can't be replicated for other clients with special-needs people who are homeless, those battling addictions -- who are better served by help, rather than punishment for actions for which they often have little control. It makes fiscal sense for taxpayers and from a moral perspective, we must develop more just alternatives to simply locking people up."

To learn more about the Jericho Project, visit www.voicesofjericho.org, produced by independent Memphis film studio, True Story Pictures. You can go to the site to hear client stories, testimony from national experts about this comprehensive approach to jail diversion and watch their award winning documentary about the Jericho Project.

You can read more stories of justice from Memphis and beyond at www.justcity.org. This column is produced by the Law Offices of the Shelby County Public Defender.



Sideways
M E D I A

Is There Room in the Inn?

BY CYNTHIA CRAWFORD

Contributing Writer

Imagine riding for miles upon miles on a donkey's backside. You're exposed to the elements. You get so tired you don't even want to ride anymore, much less walk. Now imagine that you're also nine months pregnant. Your baby is pressing down on your bladder and kicking your ribs. You arrive at a quaint little inn alongside the road. It looks so cozy you are barely able to keep your eyes open. You're anticipating a soft, warm bed and water to wash yourself up. All you've eaten on your journey is bread and water.

You knock once, then twice. Finally, in the dark of the night, you hear floorboards creaking from inside the house. An older gentleman with a soft, kind face says, "There are no rooms available, but if you want, you may sleep in the stables downstairs."

You walk in, see the various animals staring back at you. There is a lone empty stall with a feeding trough in the middle. The cold of the night clings to you all the way to the bones. You lay down in the hay. After some hours of pain, blood, sweat and tears, you hold up your newborn, then gently lay him in the hay-filled trough. The family is only able to keep warm from the body heat of the animals. You sleep off and on between nursing the baby and being awoken by the animals meandering around.

Although I do believe that everything that happened that blessed day was in God's perfect will, I often wonder... What if that innkeeper had been harassed by neighbors or fined by officials? Would he have been so kind and accommodating?

You Lost the Land, But Won the Air

BY DELORES WASHINGTON

Contributing Writer

Life has passed you by.
Now, you're a ship afloat on
a sea of souls, going where, who
knows?

You pray to God to let you go,
To leave this earthly prison;
Or to unfold a manifest,
A reason for this treason.

Did you call this pain upon yourself?
Who's to blame?
Life? A beautiful blessing and worth
living, or

Choices—made by you or some un-
foreseen
Unfortunate circumstance

The hands of time keep spinning and
turning;
So do you give up, or recommit and
win?
Smile, and keep on keeping on until
the end.

To reap the benefits,
Unseen and unknown by the masses;
The castles in the sky, wings/wine/
time
Untold and unseen by the unjust
classes.

The blue and golden-light white
Half/full-moon delight

The stars, milky-way bright,
The universe and the planets too
Will all be yours in the time to come.

So hold on,
The land you lose
In the deep snooze;
but the air you win;
With a genuine heart of no sin
So, let's all say Amen



DAVID BLACKWELL/ Contributing Photographer

Untitled

BY ASKARI SHABAZZ

Contributing Writer

The Game has taken me further than I was willing to go.
It cost me more than I was willing to pay,
and it's most definitely kept me longer than I was willing to
stay
So I ask you,
Do you wanna be in the Game?
Cause it's gonna cost you for real.

Freedom Means

BY DELORES WASHINGTON

Contributing Writer

Let Freedom Ring.
Resound the bell of Liberty,
Oh ye children of inequity;

No more Jim Crow,
Let the cotton and the grasses grow,
Who said I would be there,
To plow and toil forever more.

That fancy Southern gentleman;
Oh, a fancy beau indeed,
With his long yellow gal beside him
Will soon know;

That Mr. Lincoln, Malcolm, Martin;
And Kennedy too, paved freedom road
years ago.

So let freedom ring,
And let Miss Liberty sing,
For surely that's what freedom means

Sound your bell and hear the thunderclap as
well
The day is over for abusive/misusive
Servitude of hell

Freedom is calling; ring, ring, ring.
For whom the bell tolls.... Answer

5 things to know: Property foreclosure in Tennessee



Photo Courtesy of STREET ROOTS

BY ERIC DAITER
Staff Writer

When dealing with a foreclosure in our state of Tennessee, we all want to avoid unforeseen fraudulent activity like bad contracts and unqualified inspectors. This means that being well-educated in Tennessee foreclosure policy is very important—without the proper knowledge, it's easy to sink into financial or residential trouble. A few important things to know:

1. Tennessee has a state-specific policy on foreclosure.

There are two types of foreclosure processes available:

judicial and nonjudicial foreclosures. A non-judicial foreclosure applies if the deed contains a “power of sale clause,” which gives the trustee the power to foreclose on the home outside of court. This process is special because it allows the borrower to pay off the balance of a loan in the event of a default. Otherwise, the foreclosure must go to court.

2. Residents are notified if a property is on the verge of foreclosure.

When a property is on the brink of foreclosure, the landowners or current residents will receive a mail-registered letter notifying them of the state's right to foreclose the property. Two of these letters will be sent to make sure the recipient receives this information. Additionally, letters must be sent either 20 days or 30 days before the sale of the land. This allows the landowner enough time to prepare for the actual foreclosure.

3. In most cases, eviction is the result of a property foreclosure.

After the notification and trial process has been completed, there is a high likelihood that whoever is living in the affected house will be forced to leave. Fines will be assessed after the eviction and after an evaluation of the landowner. In the event of a bankruptcy, \$10,000 will be awarded to a person without a significant other and \$20,000 will be awarded to married couples. For more information on this specific subject, be sure to check out Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 35-5-101 to 35-5-111,

66-8-101 to 66-8-102.

4. 1 in every 3560 homes are foreclosed in Tennessee.

In a recent study published by PBS' Patchwork Nation, Marshall County's foreclosure rate surpassed all other Tennessee counties, with 3.3 out of 1000 households being foreclosed in the past year. Shelby County was in close second with 3.2 out of 1000. In third place was Sevier County, with over a 3 per 1000 ratio. Maury County registered below 2 per 1000. Surprisingly, Tennessee's 2011 ratings identified a 33% drop from 2010 in its foreclosure department, and a 36% percent drop in 2010 from 2009.

5. When buying a foreclosed property, it's imperative to hire a reputable inspector.

When assessing a formerly-foreclosed house for purchase, it is important to hire an inspector to analyze the home's safety and quality. Houses linked to foreclosures have often had past experience of unpaid utilities—this means the chance of mold, broken appliances, and unkempt living environments are high. These conditions may go unnoticed to the untrained eye. Hiring a well-reviewed, trustworthy inspector with a positive history is important because the future of your living conditions rests in his/her hands.

To learn more about Tennessee foreclosure procedures, visit <http://hud.gov>.

'Understanding Neighbors' panel seeks to change public opinion

continued from page 5

By asking a homeless person for his or her name, a person can make an incredible effort toward changing the person's self-worth. In response to an audience member's question about what would be helpful to give a homeless person, Tana suggests bus passes. A bus pass, unlike cash or gift cards, can be used exclusively for mobility and could carry a homeless person just a few extra miles to a better facility.

Tana, after leading the Good Samaritan Team at Jacob's Well, created her own outreach ministry in Memphis which she named Ruth's Heart. At Ruth's Heart, Tana operates under the mentality that some people's needs are not always things that money can buy. She explains that although there are many resources for the homeless in Memphis, those resources are not necessarily accessible for someone without a computer or a smartphone. Therefore, Tana and her husband work to gather resources for people seeking assistance from homeless shelters, job assistance programs, food pantries, rehabilitation programs, and childcare, among others.

After Tana spoke about her experience at Jacob's Well and now Ruth's Heart, Mr. Whitsitt prompts table discussions among the audience with this question: “How has your perception of the homeless been challenged?” Appropriately, after the audience had a few minutes to discuss this question, another previously homeless guest speaker, Alec, offers a few words of advice.

Alec, who lived on the streets of Memphis for a long time, explains the realistic, natural skepticism with which most homeless people regard the sheltered. After a discussion about the power of the human touch, and a suggestion that a person might approach a homeless man just to hold his hand, Alec notes bluntly, “We're going to think you're nuts.” He explains that many people make false promises to return with more

food or money. After so many experiences with such lies, a homeless person loses all trust in those offering to provide help.

“We get spit at,” he says.

“Get rid of all of your preconceived notions,” Alex asks the audience. He explains that the plight of the homeless is much more complicated than a sheltered person can even hope to understand. He explains that many previously homeless people feel an intense guilt for getting off the streets and leaving their street families behind. They might ask themselves, “Why am I so special?” For those struggling to understand why a homeless person might pass by an opportunity to get off the streets, Alec provides insight into the bonds that keep street families together in their desperate struggle to survive.

Alec ends his story on a happy note, though. He tells the audience that there was one person, a girl, who gave him more hope than anyone else. Her name was Maddy, he says, and she was nine years old. She approached Alec with a smile, gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek and said, “I love you, Mr. Alec.” Her selfless act of gratitude changed his mentality forever.

At this point in the presentation Jamey Lee discusses some obstacles and challenges of serving, including entry barriers, money, time, energy, race, cultural differences, unconscious bias, and most importantly, fear. Jamey explains that fear and frustration can be so overwhelming that they can make a person want to stop serving the community. However, fear can help a person understand and dispel myths or rumors about the topic at hand. If a person recognizes what he or she is afraid of, he may take the proper steps toward managing that fear—even using it in positive ways.

Here, Big Dog chimes in to remind the audience to work with, and through, frustration. He tells a story of a woman he knew working for 5 years to get herself

out of prostitution and homelessness with his aid. Service, he says, is like a relationship between two people: it doesn't happen overnight, and it takes more than a few months to mean something. Developing a relationship with the people you serve is crucial to meaningful service.

Near the end of the presentation, CUMC's final panelist, Lemar Walker, speaks about the difference between “empowering” and “enabling.” Enabling, he says, suggests that an assistant might give the person in need the raw materials to aid in his or her recovery, then exit the picture entirely. Mr. Walker suggests that instead of simply enabling a homeless person, those who wish to truly help should empower that person. Through empowerment, the two people may develop a working relationship that changes the mentality of the person in need. “No hand outs, but hand-ups,” he says. Collaboration is key, and approaching a person in need with patience and a nurturing attitude will be much more beneficial in the end.

After a few short table discussions and a Q&A session, the panelists depart. Audience members are left with a powerful message: there is no foolproof method to ministry. A true minister of service must be willing to let everything seem like a waste until months of hard work begin to pay off. Every single panelist agrees that although the road was rough, in the end, their efforts truly make a difference in the Memphis community. Ministry is like a planted seed; it needs time to grow—and with the right amount of care, it will develop into something truly extraordinary.

Want more information about service opportunities in the Memphis community? Contact any of the organizations listed in this article. For more information about other presentations hosted at Christ United Methodist Church, please visit www.cumcmemphis.org.

Out in the Cold

Winter months prove hardest for homeless community

BY CAMILLE SMITH
Staff Writer

As the seasons change and hot Memphis summer days become freezing (and below-freezing) nights, life gets even more difficult for homeless individuals. Not only can their financial burden increase in the face of frigid temperatures, but their physical risk level also elevates considerably. By being attentive to our homeless neighbors' needs during these cold months, the sheltered community will be in a much better position to offer the appropriate support.

According to the National Coalition for the Homeless, the homeless population is far more likely to develop hypothermia and frostbite during the winter. This is due to increased exposure to the elements: walking in the wind and sleeping outdoors without proper clothing. As many as 700 unsheltered individuals die annually in the United States from hypothermia—a life-threatening drop in body temperature to under 95 degrees Fahrenheit. And other physical conditions that are common symptoms of homelessness—malnutrition, a weakened immune system—only make the body more susceptible to the cold.

And the cold doesn't just affect the body. The winter months also put the homeless population at a greater risk for depression and loneliness. It's no secret that the weather often takes a toll on mood, especially during the winter, when cold temperatures and longer periods of darkness can cause mental lethargy. Many people suffer from Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), which prompts symptoms of depression during the winter months. Then there are the holidays to consider—the pressure to be in joyful spirits during the holidays may only further the winter blues, particularly due to the brutal “oth-

ering” the homeless community already faces.

So what's the best way to support our homeless neighbors in light of these statistics? First, shelters prove even more vital during the winter months to combat both physical and mental distress. Many shelters increase their hours during the winter; some even provide extra cots and mats to increase their maximum capacity. But these “expanded” shelters also have downsides. Because more people need temporary housing during the winter, shelters often become overcrowded. Cases of theft and abuse tend to become more common among guests—sometimes prompting individuals to choose the cold

It's no secret that the weather often takes a toll on mood, especially during the winter—cold temperatures and longer periods of darkness can contribute to mental lethargy and sadness.

outdoors in lieu of a potentially dangerous night at a shelter. And despite expanded hours, most shelters are not open all the time. Some require their guests to leave as early as 6 o'clock in the morning, when it's still cold from the night and not many other businesses have opened their doors. And because shelters become so crowded, it is often unrealistic to rely on them for support. Inconsistent hours between locations, overcrowding, and entry requirements make actually gaining admittance a struggle. This is particularly troubling for potential patrons who have been drinking: most shelters won't admit them, but their risk for hypothermia is much, much higher.

So how can the sheltered community best serve unsheltered individuals out in the cold? First, donate gently-used warm coats, scarves, hats, gloves, and socks. This may seem like a small gift, but warm, quality clothing—particularly socks—may provide the heat that keeps someone from freezing. Services like Goodwill and Salvation Army accept these donations nationwide, but you can also make sure your

donations stay local by visiting the Memphis Union Mission, an organization founded in 1945 that focuses extensively on alleviating the homeless condition. The Mission accepts clothing in “reasonably good condition,” and donations can be brought to 383 Poplar Avenue anytime.

Finally, it's important not to underestimate the value of simple human contact and conversation. Often, physical concerns are only half the battle in times of distress: the more that people are reached out to and treated as individuals, the less alienated they are likely to feel. In Memphis, programs like Outreach Housing & Community, Door of Hope, and many citywide soup kitchens allow volunteers to spend time with their guests—talking, eating, and even attending worship services together.

If you're looking for somewhere to start, First Presbyterian Church offers a hot meal to guests every Sunday at 2:30. To get involved, contact the church office at info@firstpresmemphis.org. Door of Hope, a local nonprofit working to address homelessness in Midtown Memphis, hosts a shared meal between guests, volunteers, and staff every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday.

Learn more at <http://www.doorofhopememphis.org>.

Bridge Vendor and Poet, **Delores Washington**, has published her own semi-autobiographical e-book detailing her Journey into Homelessness, as well as a volume of her stunning poetry.

You can purchase her e-book and support her efforts for only \$3.00!

<https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/371085>



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.

Here comes the Green Machine!

PT Bob spotlights 'mobile food market project

BY PONYTAIL BOB
Contributing Writer

I am truly blessed to be sitting in my own apartment as I write this Spotlight column. It is a January morning and we are in the middle of a frigid cold snap—seven degrees before wind chill!

During this time of year, we all have to work harder to stay healthy. And staying healthy starts with a proper diet, including plenty of fresh fruits and vegetables. Now, for many Memphians, access to fresh foods comes without a second thought. They just hop in the car and head to the local supermarket!

But there are fifteen neighborhoods in our great city that qualify as food deserts: urban areas in which it is impossible for residents to buy healthy, quality food. This means, of course, that fresh fruits and vegetables are nearly impossible to find. And four of the most common causes of death in both Tennessee and the United States—obesity, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and respiratory ailments—can often be prevented through a healthier diet. In Memphis, these life-threatening conditions are probably the most common in food deserts.

Here's another thing: these food deserts tend to be the same areas most dependent on public transportation. What does this mean? Not only is it harder to get to a supermarket, but it's also nearly impossible to cart home enough groceries for a whole family when you have to take the bus.

In response, a local church, St. Patrick's Catholic, in collaboration with a group of partners, sponsors, and supporters, has created a Back to the Future machine that even Michael J. Fox would be proud of. What's it called? The "Green Machine."

In my childhood neighborhood of Bethel Grove, an old man named Henry and his mule Pete traveled through the street on a weekly basis, always bearing a farm wagon full of fresh vegetables. These vegetables were grown and harvested by Henry himself in his large garden on Ketchum Road. A visit from Henry and Pete was always cause for the neighborhood mothers to gather together. They haggled prices with Henry as the kids—including me—fed Pete apples. Great memories!

Folks, the Green Machine is a high-tech, twenty-first century version of Henry and Pete. It's a refurbished,



Courtesy of Unknown

retired MATA transit bus, the interior stripped of its seats and bars. In their place, wooden bins and racks are installed to hold fruits and vegetables. In-season produce is purchased from local Mid-South farmers. Other produce comes from Easy-Way warehouse at wholesale prices, and is sold at a retail price comparable to that of Easy-Way brick-and-mortar stores.

About a quarter of the bus' interior is devoted to a Health, Wellness, and Fitness Center. This area provides easy-to-follow guides for healthy food selection, preparation, presentation, and storage. A flat screen TV is used to present health videos produced by Baptist Memorial Hospital and narrated by local Channel 5 news anchor Joe Birch. The Memphis Grizzlies also support the Green Machine by donating healthy recipes to the Machine's collection. Go Grizz!

The Green Machine was initially brainstormed during a community meeting hosted by St. Patrick's Choice Neighborhood program in July 2011. Dr. Ken Reardon, a board member of St. Patrick's Community Outreach, explained to me that when local residents confirmed the difficulty of accessing fresh produce, fellow parishioner Cathy Winterburn took it upon herself to research solutions.

This research, he said, led her to a Chicago-based nonprofit called Fresh Moves, which operates its own mobile food-bus service. Mrs. Winterburn traveled to Chicago to meet with the organization. They not only taught her about their own origins and operations, but also shared the blueprints they'd used to convert their own bus!

Dr. Reardon, a professor at the University of Mem-

phis and the director of its graduate program in Urban Planning, worked with Antoni Reciti, a visiting professor from Italy, the Reverend Eugene Champion, Ann Walsh Le Martin, Jane Hampshire, and Anne Stubblefield, along with numerous other members of St. Patrick's Community Outreach, to make this project a reality. At the time of writing, the Green Machine has been rolling for six months, has served over five thousand customers, and has sold over \$25,000 of produce. Great job! And one of the best things about the program is that it's a win-win: not only is more produce sold from local farms, but this produce goes to low-income senior citizens, the disabled community, and people without reliable transportation—those who need it the most.

In fact, the Green Machine's very first customer was a 104-year-old woman who had not been able to shop for herself in over five years. This wonderful lady was raised in the Mississippi Delta—she's probably cooking those vegetables along with a cast iron skillet of fresh cornbread! May God bless you, young lady.

Folks, this project is a great example of a church cooperating with secular institutions to address a serious humanitarian concern. Let's use the Green Machine as a beacon of light to follow in other areas of need!

The Green Machine currently makes eighteen stops around Memphis, Monday through Friday. For more information, visit The Green Machine at:

www.facebook.com/TheGreenMachineMobileFoodMarket.

God

THEODORA P. BROWNARD
Contributing Writer

Attitude toward the Lord.

My son, forget not my teaching,
Keep in mind my commands,
For many days and years of life
and peace will they bring you.
Let not kindness and fidelity leave you;
Bind them around your neck.
Then will you win favor and good esteem
before God and man.
Trust in the Lord with all your heart.
On your own intelligence rely not.
In all your ways, be mindful of Him.
And He will make straight your paths.



CHRIS VARZABI/Contributing Photographer



Dark Days shines humanistic light on NYC tunnel community

BY ANNA LOCKHART

Staff Writer

MARC SINGER/*Dark Days* (2000)

Marc Singer's debut documentary *Dark Days* (2000), filmed entirely in black and white, is predictably grim, but it navigates the murky territory of homelessness gracefully. Documentation of unsheltered communities can often slip into ethnography, with cameras pointed at homeless men and women as if to analyze a foreign culture from an outsider's perspective. Yet such an approach obscures the fact that the homeless population of America is a real part of our culture, with a shared language and means of communication. This is not to say that the homeless population should be maintained in an act of cultural preservation, but that unsheltered men and women should not be fenced off as the "other" because of the unpleasant reality of their living situation. Instead, Singer's film sets out to unite viewer and viewed, the housed and the homeless, under the umbrella of human experience. The film does not draw lines between us; rather, the men and women on screen are people first, and homeless people second.

Though he didn't realize it at the time, Singer's documentary project began when he befriended a group of men and women living in the "Freedom Tunnel," an abandoned section of New York City's underground railway system. He soon felt called to capture their lifestyle on film in an effort to raise awareness of the homeless condition. Singer collected footage for two years, all the while living in the Freedom Tunnel himself. He integrated himself completely—even his crew was made up of homeless men from the underground nest. It is no surprise, then, that Singer was able to balance the individual identities of his subjects with the larger, systemic issues the film seeks to explore.

Of course, *Dark Days* presents a relatively uncommon example of homelessness in America due to the stability of the men's and women's living arrangements. The film opens with one man, Greg, disappearing down a manhole and descending into the dank Amtrak tunnels of New York. We meet the subjects of Singer's documentary not on the street, but below it. As we follow him further down the abandoned corridors, Greg notes that when he first traveled down here, he was scared. But he kept going. He was desperate "to get out of the public eyesight," he adds as we reach his makeshift house. And thus, Singer

calls out shared experience #1: a desire for privacy. Most of us immediately consider physical discomfort—usually hunger and temperature sensitivity—when attempting to empathize with homeless individuals, but we rarely consider the psychological implications of never having our own space. Living on the streets involves the paradox of being seen by strangers on a nearly-constant basis while also being overlooked: visible for censure but invisible for assistance. The quickest escape from this in-between state is simply finding privacy, and the *Dark Days* community has found just that.

The desire for permanence and some degree of consistency marks common human experience #2, and the residents of the Freedom Tunnel have responded to this yearning by erecting their own forms of shelter. Each individual has his or her own space, with walls made of upright mattresses and plywood planks. Some employ the existing concrete walls of the tunnel for additional structural support. Every homeless man and woman has the opportunity to create a comfortable and familiar space that reflects his or her specific desires. Additionally, the community forms daily routines that mimic (perhaps even parody) the patterns of the middle class. Several men compete to have the most well-decorated home; a group trades recipes while arguing about the difference between butter-milk and whole milk; one man shaves with an electric razor (then an aside to the camera, "We don't have to pay bills!") before heading up to the streets to collect recycling for money. A younger man paints his cement wall and argues, "I don't consider myself homeless, because a homeless man ain't got a home."

It is never that simple, though. Henry, one of the oldest residents of the Freedom Tunnel, rebuffs such statements. Those who have convinced themselves that they have a home, or that they are somehow ideologically separate from the homeless population living above ground, simply "aren't ready to cope," he believes. Greg, the man who first led viewers down into the tunnel, states that he's "real comfortable down here in this dump, [and] that's why I'm pissed at myself. I lost five, six years of my life being down here." His phrasing captures the dilemma perfectly: the men and women are comfortable, but only comfortable enough. They are

still without homes, without jobs, and sometimes (due in part to the improvised shelters they've constructed for themselves) without ambition to move above ground.

In all this, Singer's own voice remains admirably absent. There is no voice-over narration or intrusive questions called out from behind the camera, and the director allows the homeless to speak for themselves, both literally and figuratively. It is tricky to create a film that is both compelling and objective, but *Dark Days* seems to walk that tightrope very well. Singer is most intrusive in his editing techniques, which occasionally bear the markings of a preacher, heavier-handed filmmaker. One scene, for example, which depicts a man decorating his shelter, is bookended by clips of rats pillaging through piles of trash.

The largest issue in the documentary's construction, however, is its conclusion: after Amtrak issues an eviction notice for the "residents" of the tunnel, New York's Coalition for the Homeless acquires new housing for all the documentary subjects. All the men and women take hammers to their previous homes with an unsettling elation, given the care which we just saw being poured into their decoration. The entire sequence feels tacked on, as if the entire systemic issue can be shut down by a man with a movie camera. Yes, for those individuals who we follow for the film's 1.5 hour runtime, Singer's presence changed their life. And that should not be undersold. But perhaps the documentary should have called for additional action, or left some conflicts unresolved. As it stands, the film ties the horrors of homelessness into a neat little bow, a settled discourse to be tucked away as we move on to the next subject.

Ultimately, though, it is best to focus on what *Dark Days* does right. It is a subtly constructed documentary which does not oversimplify homelessness. It unifies the unsheltered without essentializing them, and it unites human beings without sugar-coating harsh realities. Most importantly, it acknowledges that while homelessness does present a problem, the individuals themselves are not problems. Greg is not a symptom of corruption, and Henry is not a negative side-effect of a wounded economy. The homeless are not problems, they are people. And *Dark Days* lets them speak.



**My name is Askari.
The police didn't change me.
My family didn't change me.
My friends didn't change me.
I changed myself
with the help of God.**

#bridgethegap