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MESSAGE FROM YOUR VENDOR

PAPERS BY THE HUNDREDS

Meet our top telling vendors, Andre and Florie



Courtesy of CHRISTOPHER BLANK

TOP SELLER: Andre Ervin flags down a potential customer near corner of Summer/Highland Avenue.

BY MARY BETH TURNER

Staff Writer

Since *The Bridge*, life has not been hard," says Andre Ervin. He's *The Bridge's* top-selling vendor, and thanks to some encouragement from Florie, his girlfriend, he now has a full year's worth of work under his belt.

Initially, Andre was hesitant to look into the program. He and Florie first heard about the opportunity to sell *The Bridge* at St. Mary's Church as they enjoyed a free meal. Prior to joining *The Bridge* vendor workforce, Florie and Andre accepted sporadic service work involving manual labor and other odd jobs. Florie, in particular, was embarrassed about her family's lifestyle before she joined *The Bridge*. She comments, "I had to put shame aside for my kids. It's not easy for homeless families to sleep in a car or on the streets, and *The Bridge* can help." Florie and Andre currently live in a hotel with three children, and without the income provided by selling the newspaper, the family would have been evicted.

Initially, Andre purchased only ten papers to sell. This quickly grew to one hundred papers, then to one hundred and fifty. Now, Andre buys papers by the hundreds on a regular basis. He prefers to sell his papers early in the morning. Sometimes, he will venture to an intersection around 1:00 PM to sell and he doesn't leave until all the papers are sold, which, he says, is normally around 6:00 PM. Andre normally sells his papers at the intersection of Highland and Summer Avenue, and although he may move around occasionally, he likes to stick to his favorite spot. When Andre first began selling the newspaper, he had some trouble with the police

and was arrested for selling them on the street. However, those issues have since been resolved, and Andre, along with the other vendors, have permits that ensure the legality of selling *The Bridge*.

Andre sells around four to five hundred newspapers each week. He interacts with his enthusiastic regular customers as well as those who choose to stop by on a whim. Although there are some cynics who do not support the cause, there are also people who admire the vendor's hard work. Andre and Florie, along with the other vendors, have learned to deal with both types of customers. Rude encounters, although obviously not ideal, don't discourage Andre because he knows there are "some supporters out there." Andre sells *The Bridge* every day and enjoys being able to sell at his own leisure.

For Andre, selling *The Bridge* is a lifetime job because that's what he loves doing; he recommends it to everyone. The income is steady and the self-employment is preferable.

The job is very flexible because vendors can sell on their own schedules and their profit depends solely on their effort. When asked about his routine and record-breaking sales, Andre commented that he merely explains the purpose of the paper and hopes for a sale.

What really means a lot to Andre and the other vendors is when they receive big tips from customers. People that admire the vendors' work ethic tend to be more financially supportive.

Florie Ogarro, another top-selling vendor, supports her children with the income she makes selling the newspaper. She lives with Andre in a hotel with her three children, and purchases the

paper by the hundreds in order to sell it at her own leisure. Florie moved to Memphis from the Virgin Islands because she had friends who lived in town. "I moved to Memphis," she begins. "Life was good, but things change. It only takes seconds to [become] homeless."

After hearing about *The Bridge*, Florie kept urging Andre to look into the program. Although he put up a fight at first, he eventually relented. Both saw something special in their newfound work, and before long, *The Bridge* became both of their livelihoods. Since that fateful first day, Andre has been selling for one year. Florie has been a vendor for five months. Florie is particularly thankful for the support she has received from *The Bridge*, she says, because she is able to provide a place for her family to live and send her children to school with some of their necessary school supplies. "It's all thanks to *The Bridge*," she says.

Both Andre and Florie express enthusiasm for the continual growth of *The Bridge*. Since this is a full-time job for both of them, they are striving to gain more supporters and more vendors. Andre and Florie realize that some people are not able to get a job because of their social background, so selling *The Bridge* is a perfect opportunity for many homeless people in Memphis. Although they are the two top-selling vendors, Andre and Florie attribute—generously—all of their success to the support of *The Bridge* and its staff. It is obvious that these two truly love what they do and have genuine hope for the projected success of the newspaper.

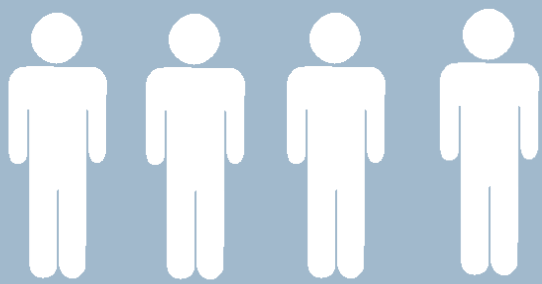
Do you want to be featured in the paper? Tweet a picture with a vendor!

If you see a vendor of *The Bridge* around Memphis, take a location-tagged picture of him or her and tweet it to us @thebridgepaper!

We'll print your submission in the next issue of *The Bridge*.



HOW IT WORKS: VENDOR TRAINING



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



After a brief interview,
they learn skills needed to
SELL THE BRIDGE



Each vendor
then receives a
**BADGE &
20 FREE**
papers

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

*Additional papers are purchased for \$0.25 apiece.
Vendors who spend certain amounts on papers receive incentives such as
messenger bags and all-day bus passes.*

thebridge

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Editorial Policy

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

All articles in *The Bridge* are approved by the Editor-in-Chief and directors. However, 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 feedback from all members of the Memphis community. Letters to the editor should be sent to editor@thememphisbridge.com and may be copy-edited for clarity.

Want to know more?

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

For advertising-related requests, please contact:
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To make a donation, please mail to:
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2000 North Parkway, PO Box 1630
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Vendor Spotlight:

T.A. Robertson

BY ZACHARY JONES

Staff Writer

T.A. Robertson, 46, has made many adjustments for the better in the past few years. One of them is becoming a certified vendor of *The Bridge*. But he's not done. Robertson shares a strong passion for Christianity with his wife, Lisa, and the two attend weekly services at Bethlehem Missionary Baptist Church. He also plans to channel his flow by becoming an ordained minister in the near future.

But the future didn't always seem so bright. For many years, Robertson struggled with addiction. In 2004, he began rehabilitation in Memphis, and after nearly four years, he was ready to begin life on a new path. He met Pastor Roderick T. Williams of Starting All Over Outreach Ministry, who, according to Robertson, ended up playing a huge role in Robertson's turnaround. Robertson married Lisa in winter 2011. She considers herself his biggest supporter, especially regarding his deci-

sion to use Christianity to help others. "What I love about T.A.," says Lisa, "is that he is encouraging, God-fearing, humble, and just loves to give hope everywhere he goes. What drew me to him was that he is rich in spirit."

Robertson's ministerial mission is to help people overcome similar trials to those he has endured himself. Robertson wants to, in his words, implement righteousness. During his own struggles, he says, "The things that

I had to hold onto [were] the prayers poured into my life ... for me to pick up my cross and follow truth. This is where my ministry begins."

Robertson is now an experienced and successful vendor of *The Bridge*. When he's not spending time with his family, he remains an active volunteer in his community. He also now owns an apartment. All in all, Robertson serves as a great example to others that, although, they may be struggling, desire to make a change.

"What drew me to him was that he is rich in spirit."

-Lisa Robertson



BILL PIACESI/Focus for the Good

Letter from the Editor

BY CHLOE BRYAN

Editor-in-Chief

This is my last issue as editor in chief of *The Bridge*. I began last June with only one article under my belt and almost zero newspaper experience. To say I was apprehensive would be an understatement. In fact, I was terrified. What if I wasn't good at this job? In fact, what if I stunk at it? What if I let this organization down, this important group of people doing good work in the city I love?

But that is one of the difficult lessons of nonprofit work, isn't it? When a vendor comes to Thursday distribution, when he chooses to invest time into selling the paper, there's a chance it won't work out, that it won't be as lucrative as he'd thought. When a contributing writer submits a poem about her struggles

with homelessness, there's a chance it won't inspire action, that it won't change anyone's perspective. In fact, when it comes to endeavors like *The Bridge*, it's easier to dismiss radical ideas entirely, to assume that the odds aren't in your favor. When Evan, James, and Caroline started this paper from a college dorm over a year ago, they weren't 100 percent sure it would be a success. But they cared enough to try anyway.

It's risky to want to change things. It's not safe to look the status quo in the eye and tell it you're not satisfied with what it's dishing out. But when you do, that's when the magic happens.

Thanks for everything, *The Bridge*. Keep risking it.

Corrections: April 2014

Several of the poems from contributing writers were misattributed in the April issue of *The Bridge*. The correct authors for each submitted piece are as follows:

Untitled, Tina Robinson
Bridges, Askari Shabazz
Cool Water, Clyde Thomas
Detroit City, Askari Shabazz
My Life, Askari Shabazz
 "Let's Keep in Basic," Minister T.A. Robertson
What Is Jail?, Pierre Kelly
It's a blessed day today, Robbin Kindell
Untitled, Charlie Finnie
Snow Day, Pierre Kelly
My Life of Writing, Cynthia Crawford
Agendra, Theodora P. Brownard
My Blessing, Mila Shaw

The Bridge regrets these errors.

Poetry Selection by Theddy Wilkes

A Blessed Day

Sometimes our lives change for the worst;
 sometimes they change for the best,
 but let's face it, every day is a test.
 We can't predict the future,
 nor can we change the past,
 so let's cherish each moment as if it were our last.
 People will forget what you said,
 people will forget what you did,
 but people will never forget how you made them feel.
 More smiles and fewer frowns
 should be on our faces,
 but only with mercy and grace will we find our true places.
 So let's keep God first
 and don't forget to pray
 that we all can rise and have a blessed day.

It's Your Life

The most difficult phase in life is not when no one understands you.
 Sometimes you find the middle of nowhere
 And sometimes in the middle of nowhere you find yourself.
 It's when you find and understand yourself and
 You walk out the door with hate and leave love on the shelf,
 When you should practice love and leave hate on the shelf.
 The first step toward getting somewhere is to decide
 you're not gonna stay where you are,
 So value life and each moment of the journey
 Because when you come to your destination
 Another journey begins, my friend.
 Let go of the past. Only then can you move forward.
 Let go of regret. Only then can you move toward happiness.
 Let go of problems and move toward solutions.
 When your life is in shambles and you wanna quit,
 Turn it over to God and the pieces will start to fit.
 When you come to the end of your rope,
 Tie a knot and hang on to hope.
 When all seems hopeless and I'm under the gun,
 I can imagine freedom fields where wild horses run.
 Life at its best and worst is a series of challenges.
 It's how we face those challenges that define who we are.
 We are responsible for who we are and our actions,
 So be positive and always pray.
 Only then will you get satisfaction.
 Some people make the world happen,
 And some people watch the world happen,
 And some wonder what's happening.
 Choose which group you belong to.
 It's your life.



JIM MCLELLAN/Staff Photographer

STEADY GAZE: Theddy stands outside St. Mary's before Thursday distribution.

Life as We Know It

Whatever you give to life
 Life gives you back.
 Do not hate anybody.
 The hatred that comes from you
 Will someday come back to you.
 Love others
 And love will come back to you.
 For everything you gain,
 There's something you will lose,
 And then you'll gain something else.
 It's about your outlook in life,
 You can either regret or rejoice:
 It's not a difficult choice.

Welcome Home, Nashville

Open Table supports local homeless on their journey to shelter



Courtesy of Open Table Nashville

BY SEHRISH KHAN

Staff Writer

Despite the recovering economy, homelessness is expected to rise across the nation in 2014. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, approximately 610,000 Americans were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2013. Nearly 65 percent of these people were living in emergency shelters or transitional housing while 35 percent lived on the streets, in cars, or in tents.

The rate of homelessness is expected to increase this year due to high housing costs, causing people living at or near poverty to be unable to afford housing. In order to combat this trend, many metropolitan cities are founding initiatives to help provide the chronically homeless with permanent housing. One such initiative is Open Table Nashville, a non-profit, interfaith community that disrupts cycles of poverty, journeys with the marginalized, and provides education about issues of homelessness.

Open Table Nashville was established in response to Tent City, Nashville's large homeless encampment located on the banks of the Cumberland River. Tent City was comprised of five acres of tents and existed in Nashville for over 20 years. In its prime, Tent City housed about 140 people, ranging from the recently unemployed to substance abusers to ex-convicts. In a city with 6,000 homeless people, nearly 30 percent above the national average, Tent City's housing and strong sense of community were a blessing to the homeless population of Nashville.

However, the flood in May 2010 engulfed Tent City in ten feet of water and completely destroyed the site, leaving its residents in a panic. The flood was caused by a record-breaking storm during which 50 roads were closed, 36,000 power outages occurred, three people were killed by floodwaters, and thousands were displaced. Nashville was in a state of emergency and the homeless community was the most vulnerable, forced to evacuate to local churches and emergency shelters. During this time, a group of outreach workers, ministers, and volunteers involved with Tent City, who would

come to be the founders of Open Table Nashville, made a promise not to abandon the displaced residents. When the city failed to provide adequate solutions for the displaced residents, the team set to looking for temporary housing. After considerable struggles and backlash from nearby communities, they were finally able to create the Hobson House, a community house owned by the Hobson United Methodist Church that offers transitional housing to homeless individuals on the path to self-sustainability. Open Table Nashville officially became a religious, interfaith 501 (c)(3) nonprofit community in June 2011 and has been successfully housing the homeless since then.

Today, Open Table is a key partner in How's Nashville's collaborative program. How's Nashville is a community-wide and inclusive effort, launched by the Metropolitan Homelessness Commission in 2013, to end chronic homelessness in Nashville within this decade. How's Nashville is also a part of the 100,000 Homes Campaign, a national movement to house 100,000 vulnerable and chronically homeless individuals and families by 2014. Thanks to their collaboration, Open Table and its partners have been able to permanently house over 360 chronically homeless individuals and families between June 2013 and January 2014.

Open Table is also involved in a variety of other initiatives to support the homeless. During the winter months, they partner with faith groups and service providers to coordinate Emergency Warming Shelters at local



Courtesy of Open Table Nashville

congregations when the temperature drops below 25 degrees Fahrenheit. These shelters house individuals who cannot go to traditional shelters for various reasons including couples trying to stay together and people with mental health issues. Open Table also partners with local congregations to provide bi-monthly Resource Shelters. These shelters provide those who are homeless with essential ser-

vices and resources like birth certificates, housing applications, and first aid. Resource Shelters also provide food, showers, clothes, and a safe space. Additionally, Open Table offers "Welcome Home" kits to help people transition into their new homes, educational curriculum and training to facilitate an understanding about the homeless community, and regular homeless outreach activities.

Because of its largely unprecedented approach to combating people experiencing homelessness, Open Table has recently received a lot of media coverage, including a feature on CBS News' 60 Minutes with Anderson Cooper. In this feature, Cooper interviewed several of Open Table's leaders and met with many of the homeless themselves. He joined Ingrid McIntyre, Executive Director of Open Table, to talk with chronically homeless individuals at the highest risk for dying on the streets. Open Table's collaboration with the 100,000 Homeless Campaign serves to house the chronically homeless with serious medical problems. The funds to support this initiative come from existing federal programs and private donations. Leaders

Because of its largely unprecedented approach to combating homelessness, Open Table has recently received a lot of media coverage, including a feature on CBS News' 60 Minutes with Anderson Cooper.

of the campaign claim that housing the chronically homeless actually saves taxpayers money. Many of the high-risk people that Cooper interviewed had been to the emergency room two to three times within the last month, resulting in hospital bills higher than one's month's rent on a subsidized apartment. In order to determine who amongst the chronically homeless would receive apartments, Cooper joined outreach workers and volunteers of the campaign for interviews. Participants were asked a series of question regarding their health and given a free bus pass as compensation for their time. The results of these surveys determined who was at the highest risk for dying on the streets and given an apartment first. Cooper was humbled by the experience to talk with the homeless firsthand and said, "It really changes your perception of the idea of homelessness and the people who end up being homeless."

"Although they have faced problems with the lack of affordable housing in Nashville and the lack of landlords willing to accept Section 8 vouchers, the federal government's subsidized housing program for low-income people," says Anne Havard, Open Table's Volunteer Coordinator. "They have not let it prevent them from being a great example for other initiatives nationwide." Open Table has impacted Nashville very positively and will continue to do so in the future. Through their collaboration with How's Nashville, they have been able to house large numbers of chronically homeless and medically-vulnerable individuals and families.



Courtesy of Street Roots

Special Friends

BY PT BOB

Contributing Writer

Greetings, friends!

I'm up at 4 a.m. again with a pen in my hand. Maybe it's a senior thing. Go figure!

I had a most wonderful surprise this past weekend. A young lady whom I have grown to respect and admire very much unexpectedly popped back into my life.

Ms. Nellie Moualem, a Rhodes College student that I met a few years ago, turned up walking towards me on the sidewalk across the street from my apartment. I was walking towards the bus stop on Poplar and, "surprise!" there she was.

Nellie had chosen to study overseas for a year and I had lost track of her. I had been told she was studying in Africa, but it turns out that was wrong. She had spent the last year in Spain instead.

She returned this past August and has been living across the street from me this whole time. Talk about hidden treasures in your own backyard!

I forgot all about the bus I was supposed to catch and spent a very pleasant hour or so talking and sharing events of the past year in both of our lives.

She then graciously accepted to join me for church service at All Saints Presbyterian the next Sunday. Being the intelligent and gracious young lady that she is, she was warmly welcomed and invited to return at any time.

I want to take this chance to say what a blessing it is to have so many young people as friends in my life. They give me respect and challenge me to keep my mind and body as active as possible.

Nellie is a great example of the type of young adults that Rhodes College produces. Her beautiful eyes are piercing with her intelligence, you can always see the wheels turning in her brain.

Nellie is from Texas and is an example of the country song, "God Blessed Texas" with angels sent from Heaven to have a place to dance.

She smiles and is patient as I recall memories and stories from my past. I'm sure that she will be very successful in life and any endeavors that she chooses to be a part of. Nellie, I hope that I don't lose track of you again. You are truly a spark of life for me.

May God Always Bless You,
PT Bob Clyburn

The Ache

BY CYNTHIA D. CRAWFORD

Contributing Writer

I wake up to a new day,
praising God. I dress to
start my day.

Invisible, I walk to the
bus stop.

Almost hovering above the
sidewalk I glance down
the street to see the bus
approaching.

The bus stops about 7 feet
from where I'm standing.

The doors open, some people
get off and I get on.

As I drop my money into
the fair box I greet the
driver with a "Hey, how you
doing?"

In response the driver says
nothing and doesn't even
look my way.

I walk to the closest available
seat and sit.

Looking around the bus to
see some familiar faces and
some that aren't.

30 minutes later. I get off
at my destination.

Entering the support counter,
I feel a warmth come over
me and taking a deep breath.
"Hey, C.C." "Hello Cynthia."
"Hi, Cindy," are the greetings
that welcome me.

My responses are warm and
Accompanied with hugs all around.

I make my nest and settle
down for a couple minutes
of reflection and prayer.

I pick up the pen and
placing it to the paper I write...



Courtesy of SEAN DAVIS



Courtesy of ALLEN ELLIOTTE

Summer at the Shell

Open-air venue brings Memphian music lovers together

BY GRANT EBBESMEYER

Staff Writer

Music: it is as much a part of Memphis as barbecue. Perhaps, then, it should not be surprising that some of the city's most well-known landmarks today revolve around the creation and performance of music. Among these landmarks is the Levitt Shell at Overton Park, located in the heart of Midtown. Renovated in 2007, the Shell now hosts over 50 free shows every season. More than just an outdoor performing arts venue, the Levitt Shell unifies diverse sections of the Memphis community every summer during its free concert series. Although it stands as the site of several historic performances, local feelings toward the Shell have ranged from vexation to adoration since its founding.

In 1901, the City of Memphis purchased the 342-acre piece of land that would become Overton Park, where the Levitt Shell is now located. A year later, the park was officially named for John Overton, one of the founders of Memphis. The park quickly grew into one of the city's largest landmarks. In 1906, the first public golf course in the region was built there. The Memphis Zoo opened in the same year. In 1911, a public playground, the first of its kind in Memphis, was created in the park, and the Brooks Art Gallery was built in 1916.

In 1936, the Overton Park Shell, today known as the Levitt Shell, was constructed. A joint project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) and the City of Memphis, the initial construction cost was \$11,935. Architect Max Furbinger designed the Shell, basing his plan on other music shells built in St. Louis, Chicago, and New York. The Overton Park Shell was one of 27 built across the country by the WPA, although it is one of the few that remains standing today.

On September 13, 1936, a WPA band performed in front of a 6,000-member audience at the Shell's dedication. Initially, the Memphis Open Air Theater (MOAT) used the Shell as the site of orchestra, light opera, and musical theater performances. Beginning in 1947, the Memphis Federation of Musicians used the Shell as the site of their "Music under the Stars" series, which provided free shows for the public over the next years.

Perhaps some of the most important concerts in the history of the Shell occurred in the summer of 1954. On July 30, Elvis Presley, then relatively unknown, performed his first commercial show in front of a large audience at the Shell. He opened for Slim Whitman and

was billed as "Ellis Presley" on the concert advertisements. On August 10, Presley appeared again. During this show, people began to recognize him for his "Elvis wiggle." He appeared at the Shell for a third and final time on August 5, 1955, this time as the star of the evening's show.

A combination of free and paid concerts brought many famous musicians to the Shell, among them Johnny Cash and Booker T. Jones. Beginning in 1974, the Memphis Park Commission decided that the Shell should be the location of only free concerts, as it remains today.

Although the Shell has been the site of historic concerts and is currently well-loved by many residents of the city, it has been at risk of being demolished several times. In the 1960s, the Shell was given to the Memphis Arts Center, who considered razing the structure to build a new \$2-million theater. Noel Gilbert, long-time conductor of the Memphis Concert Orchestra, organized a 6,000-signature petition and was able to save the Shell. Shortly after, in 1972, more plans were created to demolish the Shell, this time to build a parking garage in its place. Again, citizen involvement saved it from destruction.

In the 1980s, the Shell's decline in popularity continued accelerating. This time, John Hanrahan led the fight to keep the Shell standing. In 1985, the Shell sat empty for the first time. Its destruction seemed unavoidable. However, when Hanrahan died in 1986, his family and friends created the initiative "Save Our Shell" in his memory. The organization presented hundreds of free concerts over two decades, managed to maintain some interest in the Shell, and avoided its demolition for the time being.

In 2004, however, the Shell again sat empty. Its luck began to turn around in 2005, though. In that year, the City of Memphis partnered with the Mortimer & Mimi Levitt Foundation to renovate the Shell. The Levitt Foundation is, according to their website, a "national nonprofit that exists to strengthen the social fabric of America." They accomplish this by "working with cities to transform neglected outdoor spaces into welcoming destinations where the power of free, live music brings people together and invigorates community life." The Overton Park Shell, renamed the Levitt Shell, is one of six that the national Levitt Foundation has helped to

open and operate across the country.

The \$1 million renovations of the newly renamed Levitt Shell began in 2007. The renovations were funded mainly with \$500,000 from the City and the remaining amount was split between the national Levitt Foundation and the local Friends of Levitt Pavilion Memphis organization. After sitting empty for four years, the Levitt Shell again opened with free music on September 4, 2008. The venue can comfortably fit 2,500 people at any of its many events scheduled throughout the year.

This summer, the season kicks off on May 23 with a concert by Big Star. Formed in Memphis in the 1970s, the band reunited in the 1990s, and they are a familiar sound at the Levitt Shell. The initial season runs until July 20, and a diverse mix of acts will perform concerts on Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights. Among the performers is Rosanne Cash, daughter of Johnny Cash. She will be following in her father's footsteps by performing on the same stage where he sang in August 1955. Her historic performance is scheduled for June 14.

Following the initial summer concert season, Indie Memphis will present its seven-week long Concert Film Series, showing a different film every Friday night from July 25 until September 5. Following the film series, the fall concert series will begin on September 6 with a performance by the North Mississippi Allstars. The fall series runs on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday nights until October 19. For the full lineup and more information on visiting, see the Shell's website at <http://www.levittshell.org>.

There are few excuses not to attend a free concert or film showing this summer at the Levitt Shell. With a wide range of scheduled artists, it is sure to be entertaining fun for the whole family. The Shell is more than just a performance venue, though; as its website says, the Levitt Shell is "building a stronger community through music [by] finding common ground for a diverse audience." Due to this ability to bring people together and bridge gaps between disparate groups, it has also become a favorite selling spot for vendors of *The Bridge*. When you visit the Shell this summer, don't forget to find a vendor and buy a paper to peruse while you enjoy the music.

Humans of Memphis

The Grind is an online publication created to celebrate everything Memphis has to offer, bring controversial issues to light and recognize exceptional Memphians.

All photos are courtesy of *The Grind*.



Courtesy of MARY KATE PATTERSON/Section Editor

“Do you play music downtown often?”
“I play right here every single day.”



Courtesy of MARY KATE PATTERSON/Section Editor

“Sometimes when you hear good music, you just have to dance.”



Courtesy of MARY KATE PATTERSON/Section Editor

“Elvis had more money than taste, that’s for sure.”



Courtesy of REGINA LUCREZIANO/Section Editor

Will Tucker Band live on Beale Street



Courtesy of REGINA LUCREZIANO/Section Editor



Courtesy of REGINA LUCREZIANO/Section Editor

World Famous Beale Street.

No Insurance

BY TINA ROBINSON

Contributing Writer

People say they really care. But do they really? I can't pay for my life-sustaining medications. Who cares then?

I am a young widow with two wonderful sons. They are my world. I draw a very limited income. I am so grateful that it puts a roof over my head: So very grateful!

I have no insurance. A health center cut me out of their program when I became housed. I didn't know that this was going to happen.

I take several medications in order to live. I asked for a three-day supply and twice they told me no. I didn't feel like they understood my situation so I went to the other lady that worked there and explained. She was very kind and went to bat for me. But she was criticized for doing it, as if I were just trying to get a free handout. A free handout?

Diabetes medication. Blood pressure medication. Thyroid medication. Albuterol. I don't want to leave my kids without a mother. They have already lost their dad. There is something very wrong in this world when you can't afford your medication, when you have no access to it.

Sometimes, it really doesn't feel to be like anyone cares. If you don't have insurance, you're considered yesterday's trash, thrown into a dumpster. Guess what? Being thrown into a dumpster hurts. Like hell.



Courtesy of SIMPLY CVR

Inspiration of Hope

BY MARCUS MITCHELL

Contributing Writer

My greatest inspiration of hope is experiencing the often weird hardships of people from all walks of life.

You can discover

how to face a chapter of obstacles and all the challenges in life.

Rediscover many inspiring success stories.

Interact with the strong foundation, the work of the outward heartbeat of the community.

My Definition of a Friend

BY THEDDY WILKES

Contributing Writer

A friend is someone who would say

"Hello, how are you?" and really mean it.

"Come in. Have a seat," and mean it.

"Haven't seen you in a while, I've been concerned..." and mean it.

See you heading for the door and insist you stay for dinner

And really mean it.

My definition is also someone who will smile when you smile,

Laugh when you laugh.

When you have joy, they share your joy.

When you cry, they cry.

When you mourn, they mourn.

Someone to whom you would never throw blame,

And has seen you at your best and worst,

And still loves you the same.

So even if you don't have what you used to have,

And your present situation almost brings you to tears,

If you have such a friend as this,

you are rich beyond your years.

I have such friends,

So do you without a doubt.

So when we say our prayers,

We should never leave them out.

True friendship will burn as bright as the sun.

For me, true friendship is an eternal bond.

Just as sure as the day ends and the sun fades,

True friendships are forged,

Never bought or paid for.

I'm not one to act and surely not one to pretend.

I just wanted to share my definition of a friend.

May God bless us all.



Courtesy of PAUL OTAVIO

Reflections of a Jaded Past: A Memoir

BY FAT TOMMY

Contributing Writer

I guess I was born with a very curious personality. I wasn't a weirdo or anything, but I did have somewhat of a dual personality.

One side of me was an intelligent child, one who could talk like a grown-up and draw good pictures with pencils and crayons. I got good grades in school and was even able to skip a year.

When I was five, six years old, I would lie awake and try to figure out where the universe ended, what God looked like. What was heaven like? Where was it? Not typical 6-year-old questions. I was taken to a child psychologist to be evaluated. He was amazed at how quickly I could understand a subject, how quickly I could figure out the solutions to his questions.

I was born to be something. What that something was would elude me for most of my life. We are all born to be something. Many people face the same dilemma as I did: what am I meant to be? What can I contribute to society and humanity? What is the purpose for my life? Deep thoughts, but no answers. It's all a question of time.

I remember my room at the end of a long hallway. Sometimes in the middle of the night I would hear a strange sound coming from down the hallway, like a chain being dragged. I was terrified. I threw the covers over my head. The apparition would sit down at the edge of my bed. I felt its weight as the mattress sank down. I wouldn't take my head out from under the covers until it finally rose and went away.

These experiences would haunt me for most of my life. Were my parents playing a cruel trick on me? Was this a ghost? An alien? I didn't know. But I know fully that the experience was real. Not a figment of my imagination.

I told my story to my writing teacher. Amazingly, she told me that she'd had a similar experience when she was a child. This made me feel better. Someone else could vouch for my sanity, even both of our sanities.

But the other side of me was dark and psychotic. I became a habitual thief for no reason at all. Every time I went to the grocery store for my parents, I would steal a cupcake or a candy bar. I did not have to steal. My parents were well-to-do and gave me a good allowance. But the habit continued for a long time, and my amorality sent me to jail on numerous occasions. I was diagnosed as having antisocial traits — in layman's terms: a criminal mind that made excuses for my behavior. On one level, I was a creative genius. On the other, I was a typical ghetto thug who would eventually overdose or die in prison. But I rejected this assessment. I refused to consider myself an abnormal deviant. Neurotic and remorseless.

Did an angel sit at the foot of my bed? Or did a devil terrorize my dreams? I still do not know. The chain-dragging apparition remains a mystery locked in my mind.

One thing's for sure, though: I loved to steal. It gave me a sense of power, a sense of control. It was my blow against the empire.

But it was only a small, petty blow. It made no grand statement, did not elevate me beyond social nothing-



Courtesy of KRYSZTIAN OLSZANSKI

ness. It only fulfilled my compulsive personality. I was still a nobody, a bubble in the ocean of humanity. A prison number. A junkie. A homeless vagrant.

When I got to high school, I was a cut-up. My home room was the principal's office. I got old winos to buy wine for me. I gambled, smoked pot, stole things, and pimped girls. Girls liked me — I was handsome, well-dressed, smart. But I was hiding demons.

Eventually, I became a very aggressive criminal — burglary, dope pushing, pimping. But that was only when I was high on "syrup," cough medicine laced with codeine that, in those days, could be bought across the counter. Children's poems by Hans Christian Anderson and Christina Rossetti clung to the back of my mind. Relics of my not-so-innocent childhood.

I was in prison by age 19. Robbery with a deadly weapon. The sentence was five to ten years in maximum security. "The Walls," formerly a prison for Union soldiers during the Civil War, was the main prison in Nashville. It was a decrepit, foreboding castle, and my experience there was wholly surreal. The men around me looked like demons, shiftless wanderers in the realms of hell. This was just that — hell. I felt like an animal, locked in a cage, constantly fearing death. But I played my role perfectly. I took a course in journalism from the University of Tennessee. I received my associate's degree by writing a paper on Dante's *The Divine Comedy*. This not only looked good to the parole board, but it also granted me a degree of protection from the usual prison predators. If you sought rehabilitation, the prison administration would provide a safe haven for you in a secluded part of the building. Away from the sharks and the wolves.

I was paroled in 1969 at age 22. I already had a wife, two daughters, and a job working in a factory that made kitchen furniture. But it wasn't long before I started selling pot, then downers, and then heroin. Where was my chemistry set? My microscope? Where was Edgar

Allen Poe? My adoring parents?

I pulled off some spectacular heists. One was in a department store. I took guns, leather and suede coats, the entire jewelry case. More feeble blows against the empire.

But I liked it. At least I gained some real attention. Maybe this was all I had wanted from the start — to be heard, to be noticed. I became hungry for attention, and willing to go to any extreme to get it. Even drugs. Even crime.

I was back in prison by 1974. Ninety-three counts of burglary and safe-cracking. Drug dealing, larceny. I made front page, got me some attention. I joined the Nation of Islam, the "Black Muslims" led by Elijah Muhammad. I was not beguiled by Elijah Muhammad. As far as I was concerned, he was just another false prophet. A pimp. But by standing on his platform, I was able to have control — to sell drugs in prison, to pay guards to let female prisoners come to prison banquets and movies so we could slip off into kitchen warehouses and have sex.

I amassed a tiny fortune in the name of Allah. I was a devious con man, but I considered myself not manipulative or hypocritical, but pragmatic. And the God that I worshipped seemed to smile upon my antics. I was badly behaved, but at least I had good intentions.

At first, I accepted the Nation's teachings. But after actually reading the Qu'ran, I discovered that Islam was not a racist doctrine that preached supernaturalism. It was racism in reverse. Blacks were naturally superior to whites, or so Elijah Muhammad's books said. A great spaceship rested on the other side of the moon to take all black people to heaven while the other races would be destroyed by Allah. I may have been seeking an identity, but not a false one.

Have I found it? Can anyone?

Top 5: Free Summer Activities in Memphis

BY ERIC DAITER
Staff Writer

From world famous barbecue to a rich musical history, Memphis has locked in its position as one of the most vibrant cities in the country. Thousands of visitors come annually for the Memphis Experience: the restaurants, Sun Studio, The Stax Museum, those adorable ducks walking through the Peabody lobby. But the Memphis experience is far more than this. Did you know there's a place in town that sells both ukuleles and magic potions? If you're in the city for the summer, beat the heat and check out these (free!) attractions.

Playhouse on the Square

66 South Cooper St.

If music and theater is what you're looking for, look no further than Playhouse on the Square, which boasts a packed schedule of plays, musicals, and live performances from all ends of the spectrum. Often the playhouse will offer a pay-what-you-can night for certain productions. With its upscale architecture and spacious theaters, Playhouse is perfect for a date night. This summer, look forward to productions of *Gypsy*, *Hairspray*, and *Mary Poppins*.

Beale Street Flippers

Beale Street

Next time you're exploring Beale Street, look out for possibly the most eye-catching performance Memphis has to offer. For the past 20 years, the flippers have dazzled and awed passersby with their risky style of gymnastics. Many of the members are brothers; all are close friends. The flippers also perform at halftime shows for the Grizzlies, Timberwolves, OKC Thunder, and many other teams. Catch them day and night performing live for Beale Street visitors.



Courtesy of SEAN DAVIS

University of Memphis Art Museum

3750 Norriswood Ave.

The University of Memphis' Art Museum is home to countless modern and historic pieces of artwork and artifacts. The Museum houses some of Memphis' world-renowned pieces, including year-long observable antiques and objects in the "Ancient Egyptian Collection" and "Africa: Visual Arts of a Continent". The African exhibit offers visitors the opportunity to eliminate past misconceptions of what African art actually is while experiencing it first hand. Likewise, the Egyptian exhibit embodies one of the largest collections of artifacts from Egypt in the South. Otherwise, the Museum includes a range of local artwork expressing ideologies of virtual media takeovers and the evolution of the human race. The possibilities for learning are endless.

A. Schwab

163 Beale Street

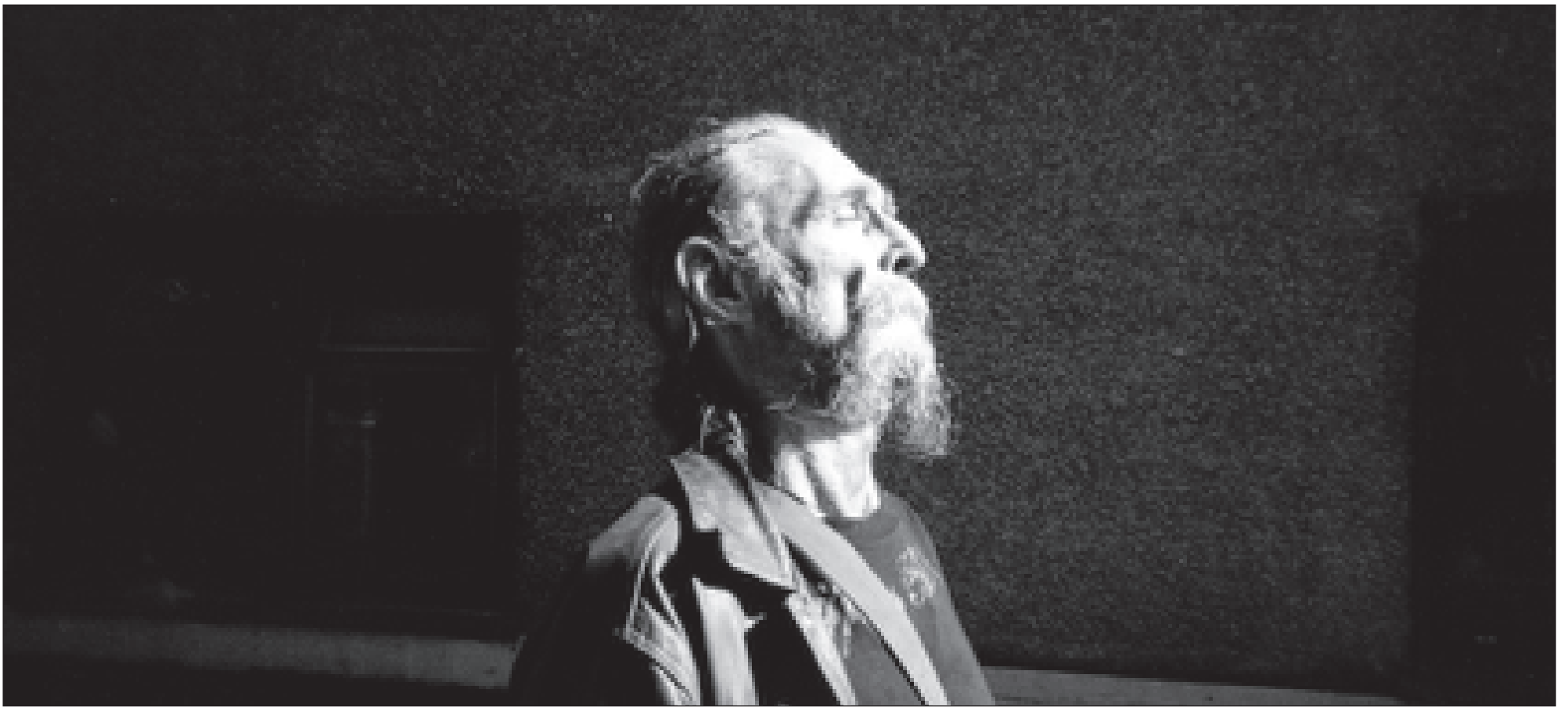
Established in 1876 by a family of Jewish immigrants, this dry goods store is the only business that remains from the earliest days of Beale Street. On its two floors of shopping

space is a collection endless trinkets, foods, and Memphian memorabilia — arguably unmatched in the region. The store works to emulate the legacy of the old Beale Street by providing old-fashioned goods for its customers, ranging from dollar candies to vintage musical instruments to artifacts of classic Memphian music culture to voodoo paraphernalia. Fun fact: A. Schwab used to be the retailer of the largest overalls in the world - so large, in fact, that they had to be hung from the ceiling.

Memphis Bike Trails

assorted entrances around Memphis

Did you know there are over 60 miles of bikeable roads in Memphis? With five "neighborhood" routes and one longer "Memphis" route intended for both recreation and efficient commuting, Memphis is becoming an increasingly bike-friendly city. Check out the new airborne Bike Gate outside Overton Park — created by a conservancy group and local artist Tylur French, the archway that serves as a gate into the park from East Parkway and is composed of over 200 brightly-colored bicycle frames. And it's not just a pretty piece of art: the piece is part of the city's work on a new trail that will allow bikers to travel from Shelby Farms Park to Overton to the Harahan Bridge. Bike away!



Courtesy of MEGAPHONE

Look up at the sky; it's for you

BY CHARLIE FINNIE

Contributing Writer

Some days, I look afar,
trying to see that falling star.
People here, people there—
sometimes I start to pull out my hair.
The things I hear from all.
I never think I'll fall.
I stand tall through it all.

The frame of this world
we live in is so cold.
From silver to gold, I see people fold.
I say to myself, I'm getting old.
The reflection I see, it's always me,
so I sit down and think
that I'm out in the cold.

I see in my dreams
me making it slow through all that I know.
The stress and turmoil I've been in.
So I'll sit and tell you: things
aren't always what they seem.
If you see something in your dreams, it's come true
because it's a reflection of me and you.

People like me? Stand in my shoes.
You will be depressed.
The heaven up above, this test
is just because God has something in store for us.
You see me now. You'll see me later.
Why do people sometimes hate us?
I'm homeless now, but what you know won't hurt you.

So my reflection is how I see it.
I hold my head up through it all—
the reflection of me will call.
This is from me to you.
Look up at the sky. It's for you,
my reflection.

Mother's Day

Sequel to "This is for you, Mama"

BY DELORES WASHINGTON

Contributing Writer

Folded hands, palms together
'neath her jaws, as she lay
Prone upon the couch;
....daily/....night-ly.

These memories of her
I hold tight-ly.
As I look up into the evening sky/ dark,
I see her window's pouch.

She was dancing.
She'd been all over the universe;
Seen oceans/beaches/gorgeous evening sun-
sets

Greeneries/galaxies/stars.

The glistening sunshine after a rain;
Colors/flowers/the universal rainbow.
Yes, my mother in heaven's glow/show.

To all mothers here and there;
In the know of the One
In the glow of the One
Please have a Happy Mother's Day....Today.

Thank You!



Rhodes College

—1848—

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of Rhodes College

Vendor Liason Roderick Baldwin Works with Wisdom

BY MADDIE MCGRADY

Staff Writer

It's no wonder that only a year after its creation, *The Bridge* boasts over 100 vendors when one considers that Roderick Baldwin is one of the first people new vendors meet in the organization. You can see Roderick in action every Thursday afternoon at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, leading new vendor training sessions with his trademark combination of no-nonsense instruction and humor. In Roderick's own words...

Q: What is your name?

RB: Roderick S. Baldwin.

Q: What do you do for *The Bridge*?

RB: I am the vendor trainer for *The Bridge*. Also, I'm on the Board of Directors. And hopefully I will be able to provide insight to staff about homelessness and homeless individuals. Let's just say I am supportive of staff.

Q: Where are you from originally?

RB: I'm originally from Tunica, Mississippi. I came to Memphis in the late '60s. My mother moved here to find a better way for us to live, to find a better job in the city. When she got to Memphis, she worked in a cleaners and then she was a maid.

Q: Could you describe your childhood in Memphis?

RB: My childhood growing up in Memphis was good, but very protective. We were told where to play and we had to be back at the house at a certain time.

Q: What did you do after high school?

RB: After high school, I decided to go into the United States Marine Corps. [It was] different, not what I expected. I didn't stay long. I was discharged. I came back to Memphis and I started working in a hotel restaurant.

Q: What have your experiences been with homelessness?

RB: My experiences with homelessness were mainly me being in survival mode. A lot of times I had to be very, very cautious of being on the streets because I didn't want anything bad to happen to me. So I hooked up with some other guys and we went around in twos. I made it through the nights and the days. I spent a lot of times at the Union Mission. I slept out in a couple of parks.

Q: For how long were you homeless?

RB: Off and on for about 10 years.

Q: This was while you were working in a hotel-restaurant?

RB: You would think a person working in a hotel restaurant business would not be homeless, but I was. I had places of residence, but I walked away from them because of my interactions with alcohol and drugs.

Q: How did you hear about *The Bridge*?

RB: I met [Founders] James [Ekenstedt] and Evan [Katz] at Door of Hope. They gave me the opportunity to be a liaison and train individuals to sell *The Bridge*. And the reason [I agreed] was because I had been previously homeless myself. It was a golden opportunity to give back.

Q: What's your favorite part about working for *The Bridge*?

RB: Everything! I love everything about *The Bridge*. It has put a dent in homelessness and the stereotypes of homeless people. Its big mission to end homelessness and to break down the stereotypes of homeless people. We're not all panhandlers, we're not all solicitors.

Q: How have you seen the impact of *The Bridge* in the Memphis community?

RB: Well, it has a great impact. Seeing new vendors come in [to training] shows me that people are talking about *The Bridge*, that people are visibly making money from it. It seems like it is working.

Q: How has *The Bridge* impacted you personally?

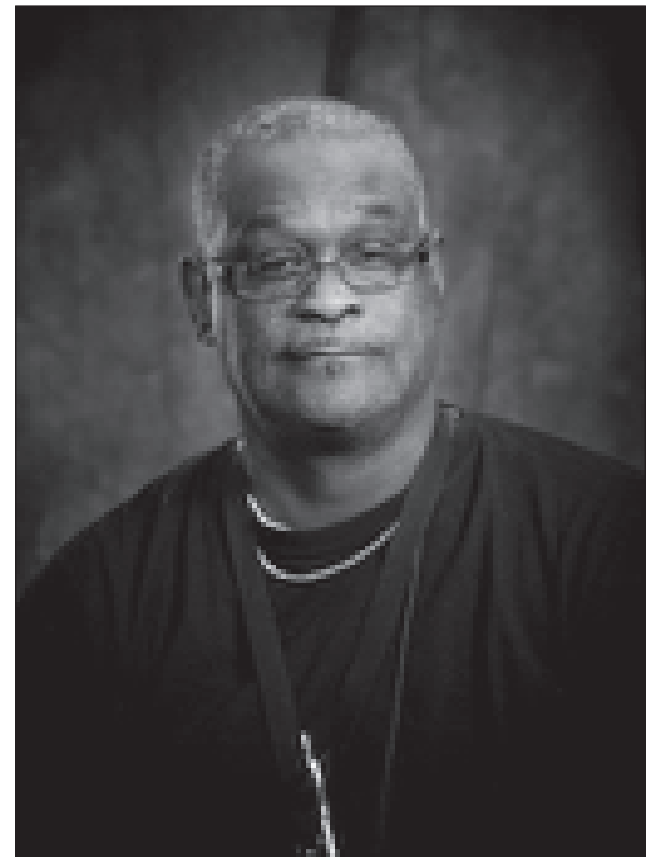
RB: *The Bridge* has helped me to be happy with change. It has helped me as an individual to be humble and to have the spirit to make a difference in peoples' lives. And I've seen *The Bridge* really help people who had not previously been able to help themselves.

Q: What advice do you have for currently homeless individuals? Any words to live by?

RB: Use the system wisely. If you want help, there is help for you. Don't be afraid. The system does work.

Q: Who are your role models?

RB: My mother, June Averyt, Jesus Christ, Martin Luther King, Jr., and my uncles. They all taught me about good morals, good values, and to be open-minded. Communication is the key to a positive dialogue. They also taught me about the value of hard work, to treat people the way I want to be treated, and to help me live in a more positive



world.

Q: What's your favorite book?

RB: That's a hard one. The only books I like are non-fiction: autobiographies or biographies. The books I love are the ones that are actually real. I don't like fantasy books. I love the Bible, of course, because it teaches me a lot. There's also a book called *The Big Book*, which is from Alcoholics Anonymous.

Q: What's your favorite song?

RB: It would be wrong to pinpoint just one! I'm picky about my music, but I enjoy music that moves the soul or music that tells a story. I like "Love and Happiness" by Al Green. That's one favorite song. It's one that just soothes me. "Party Train" by Gap Band, "Kansas Dust in the Wind," "Stairway to Heaven." How could you love just one song?

Q: Any hobbies?

RB: I love music. Like I said, it soothes the soul. I love to travel. I can't do this anymore, but I love biking and running. I love sports, all kinds. And I don't know if this is a hobby or what, but I love to just help people unconditionally.

Q: Anything you want readers to know about you?

RB: I really appreciate my life today. I don't take life for granted. And I want people to know that even though there are no guarantees in life, life is what you make of it. Life is a many-splendored thing.

Kinnane's *The Human Experience* More Reductive than Human

BY ANNA LOCKHART

Staff Writer

The premise of Charles Kinnane's *The Human Experience* (2008) is simple enough. One man, Jeffrey Azize, asks one question: What does it mean to be human? A tall order, to be sure. And an order that is never quite filled as the documentary follows Azize around the globe in his quest for profundity. He begins his soul searching in New York, living among the homeless community in an "attempt to find hope amidst the city's most hopeless." That statement, both vague and essentialist, is indicative of the film's overly idealistic tone. After New York, Azize travels to Peru to join a group of surfers from "Surf for the Cause," and he ends his trip with a visit to a leper colony in rural Ghana. Each leg of his journey framed by the single goal of depicting a unique — but simultaneously universal — experience. To be fair, Kinnane and Azize put forth what seems to be a genuine, good-hearted effort to reveal the intricacies of human nature, but the film's execution seems to err on the side of self-indulgence, at times even dipping into the problematic territory of slum tourism.

The Human Experience opens, as you might expect, with an expansive (though tidily compressed) portrait of human history through stock footage and swelling classical music. There are cheerful home videos of a stranger's wedding, a clip of Albert Einstein grinning, and a cluster of children peeking around a corner. The takeaway here? The human experience can be positive. Then Kinnane quickly cuts to footage of battlefields, police riots, and men being shot down. Takeaway number two: the human experience can also be negative. Right from the start, it becomes clear that the documentary's scope is too ambitious to generate a productive discussion on the nature of human beings. All we are given are shards of historical events, and later, shards of a particular community's specific perspective.

Of course, in order to avoid being overly reductive, it is important to note Azize's own past, which undoubtedly led him to produce *The Human Experience*. We are introduced to his brother Cliff after the film's title sequence, and we learn that the two of them live in the St. Francis House, a halfway house of sorts, in Brooklyn. The brothers grew up in an abusive environment with an alcoholic father, so their life has been far from privileged. Even so, their treatment of homelessness as part of the film's subject matter is misguided at best, and deeply troubling otherwise.

Many people have chosen to live on the streets as part of a public demonstration to raise awareness about the living conditions of the homeless community. That, in itself, is not necessarily problematic. Yet when Azize elects to brave the cold and adopt the lifestyle of a homeless New Yorker for



Courtesy of CHARLES KINNANE

a week because he "had a desire to see the world through someone else's eyes," something seems off-putting about his motives. Perhaps it is the nonchalance with which he tells the cameraman, "For me, everything's an adventure," that is unsettling. Or it could be the way he repeatedly "others" the homeless community, somehow making those men and women appear inferior to the housed and homed when he asks, "Why is it that they wake up every day? What's their reason for living?" As if to say that the possession of shelter is inextricably bound to the motivation for staying alive.

Most disconcerting, though, is the overall tone of Azize's quest for experience, or explanations of experiences separate from his own life. The three chapters of the film are labeled as Experience 1, Experience 2, and Experience 3, as if each new locale presents a new badge to be collected for his scout vest. Each good deed gets a reward, a new checkmark in the "Experienced Experiences" chart. There is no thematic overlap in the three disparate locations of Azize's travels, as if his week spent living in New York's homeless community in no way informed his visits with the impoverished children in Peru or the lepers in Ghana. *The Human Experience* sets up a very goal-oriented approach to living, traveling, and meeting new people, but such actions cannot be about the destination. Reality, and our perceptions and experiences of it, is ongoing. It cannot begin or end in a traditional, compartmentalized way. Each moment we witness bleeds into the next, overlaps, and warps with time. This documentary can't serve as a trophy to honor Azize's week on the cold streets of New York which he endured in order to "see the world through someone else's eyes." If the film is to be of any use, it will be to raise awareness of the issues contained therein, perhaps even in spite of its lofty tone.

Yet *The Human Experience* does manage to get it right in the interviews, particularly those conducted with homeless men and women in New York. Those individuals are given the opportunity to voice their opinions and concerns, and the men behind the camera listen dutifully. One woman notes the fact that most take their homes for granted, and it is really the familial network of support that prevents people from slipping into homelessness. It is a sociological phenomenon that is not discussed as often as it should be: strong ties to financially established family members and friends create an entire network of support, and those born into lower classes have less of a safety net, less of an inherited protection against poverty.

For all its troubling formulations and its near-comical ambiguity (in one interview, rendered in a dreamily hazy black and white, a neuroscience professor from Stanford states, "Life is worth living because it just is"), *The Human Experience* is well-intentioned. Yes, it is maddening to watch Azize and his brother joke about the quality of their makeshift cardboard homes while they have an actual house waiting for them beyond this film, but perhaps the humor was part of their coping process. There is not a single act of malice contained in the whole of the documentary, and each choice the brothers make is in the interest of understanding a group of people with radically different viewpoints than their own. The product may be troubled, but the process itself is admirable. And although Azize never lands on a singular definition of the human experience, his own words point to the impossibility of that task: "Everyone survives differently." But we all fight for that survival: the homeless New Yorkers, the impoverished surfers, the Ghanaian lepers, and the misguided filmmakers alike.