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**MESSAGE
FROM YOUR
VENDOR**

A Christmas Story

Narrative inspired by Miss Wanda, writer at Door of Hope



Courtesy of ABBIE NORRIS

CREATIVE MINDS: Miss Wanda and others gather at the Door of Hope to write about and discuss the Christmas season.

BY LEE SILBERBERG
Staff Writer

This place seems familiar. This isn't the first time I've been here. This can't be the first time I've been here. How did I get here though? It's the same block I've walked this entire year, in the same town far away from where I want to be. I know exactly where I am, but that doesn't make it any less terrible. I'm on Cleveland Avenue. I'm still in Atlanta, and I'm still far away from all those things that I want to be right next to tonight.

I remember these nights. Tonight is supposed to be about family. Tonight is supposed to be about forgiveness, but I can't even forgive myself right now. Why did I let myself get here? How did I let myself take it this far? I want to see my children. I want my children to see me. Just for tonight, but they are so far away; so very, very far away right now. They're hours away. I can count on my fingers, but I couldn't see them like this even if I wanted to.

That's what my kids are missing, all the things that I had when I celebrated the 25th of December. It wasn't about the presents. It wasn't about the possibility of having a white Christmas either. It was about family and everyone being together. It was about that feeling of peace I got when family embraced me, and the warmth that touched me so softly, that lingered the night. The warmth that hits the soul,

like hot chocolate after a cold winter's night. At least it isn't cold here, or too cold. I guess I should be thankful for that. After all, it could be colder, I could be hungrier, and everything could be worse.

I wish that it wasn't that way though. I wish I could go back to that place. The place where I felt accepted; I had a path to walk on before I took a wrong turn at that crossroad in my life. I wish, most of all, that the only white flake I see on Christmas is a snowflake; every perfectly different snowflake. Maybe I could throw them after gathering a whole lot of them into a snowball, maybe I could make snow angels with my family. Maybe, if I hadn't gotten myself here, I could watch my kids do all those things just like I did those things. I wish I could see them do those things. I just wish it so badly.

I wish I could see my kids do all those things that I did. I wish I could see what they look like right now. I wish I could see them wake up and open up the presents that I tried so damn hard to get perfect for them. Maybe once I get my life together, once I get out of this hole and find my way back, I'll be able to show them that I've always thought about them with a big hug. I just want them to know that they're what I want to have right now. I don't want this Cleveland Avenue sign; I don't want to be at this crosswalk

right now. I want to be home. I want to be where I'm loved. I don't want this stupid metallic pole to be the only thing next to me right now. It's Christmas! It's the birthday of my Lord and Savior, and all I can do is sit here and wish that I wasn't exactly where I am right now. I wish I wasn't at this crossroads in Atlanta. I wish I didn't put myself in this place in life.

It doesn't matter that the day isn't that cold. I could be anywhere in the world right now and I would still feel this cold inside. I have to change. I don't want another Christmas ever again like this. I don't want to not have all the people I want around me. I want to have the people I love near me. I can't keep using; I can't keep walking down this path. Baby Jesus was born in a manger, but he didn't stay there. I don't have to stay in the manger either. I have to make a change. I have to. I just have to. I can't stay at the corner of Cleveland and far away anymore. I want to stand at the corner of my kids and my family. I can't have this for Christmas ever again — this life, this day — I can't relive this. I don't want to ever relive this Christmas. There are so many Christmases I cherish; this can't be my Christmas future. This shouldn't be my Christmas present. I will change, right now, for the better, and make my Christmas future as beautiful and warm as my Christmas past.

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/her and tweet it to us @thebridgepaper

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



Courtesy of MICHAEL QUANDER

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. Send letters to the editor at editor@thememphisbridge.com.

Want to know more?

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:
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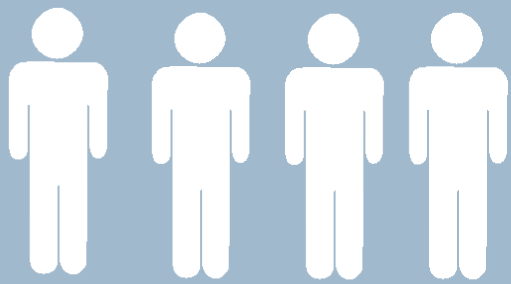
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HOW IT WORKS: VENDOR TRAINING



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.*

Vendor Spotlight

BY MASON BROWN
Staff Writer

Every month, we like to sit down with our vendors and hear their story. For this issue, I chatted with Michael A. Tyler, Jr.

Are you originally from Memphis?
“Yes, I was born in North Memphis and raised there.”

How long have you been a vendor for *The Bridge*?
Since May, 2013.

What made you interested in *The Bridge*?

One day when I was trying to campaign and be a poll worker, my wife told me, ‘You shouldn’t campaign for a person just to make the money if you’re not supportive of the person.’ So she mentioned to me PT Bob (Poneytail Bob)...he’s a vendor. And he directed me to Mr. Roderick. I spoke to Mr. Roderick, Roderick did my interview, he trained me about *The Bridge*, I got my vendor license the next week and it’s been up and up ever since.

What made you interested in being a vendor for *The Bridge*?

I had been working for the *Commercial Appeal* since I was 18 — selling papers on the corner. I think along the line I heard about “the homeless paper.” I heard about it but I never thought about picking it up because I had a...what do you call it...a pride about myself - too much pride about myself.

So you’ve had experience selling papers. What’s the secret to being a good vendor?

The paper is a decent, good, honest paper, helping close the gap between homeless and sheltered...that’s what I tell my customers who buy my paper. This one, it just so happens that we have a bunch of jokes in the back of the paper in the kids’ zone of the paper. And of course, in any sales that you’re doing out on the streets,

you have to give them a winning smile. You can’t let them see if you’re having a bad day. You can’t show it. And actually most of the time I have a good day. And a brief compliment doesn’t hurt anybody.

What was your family like growing up?

As a child, 17 years old, my mom and dad had separated and my mom had stayed with my grandmother for a while. My mom, at that time, was mental...bipolar and schizo-

I never thought even thought about it like that...High school was kind of awesome.

If you could have dinner with anyone (living or dead) who would it be and why?

Can I pick three? Barack Obama, Chris Benoit (I would’ve wanted to be a student of his). I need five. Shawn Michaels, the whole ‘Generation X-team’, and Bill “Superstar” Dundee — and William Crankshooks (Memphis wrestler).

What was your favorite book growing up?

I like Dr. Seuss! I love Dr. Seuss. Now my favorite cartoon would have to be Disney Playhouse. Have you ever watched that? It’s so awesome!

What is something you want the public to know about the homeless or those on the verge of being homeless?

Here it goes: Just like the *cooperyoung.org* says, Say no to panhandling. Say yes to charity that’s helping

close the gap between homeless and sheltered. The reason why I say that is because *The Bridge* gives you a step up. I think people should buy the paper just to support the person that’s working with a vendor’s license instead of holding up a cardboard sign saying ‘Give me your money.’ I could have done it. A couple times I thought about it. But I’d rather sell the paper with my talent...and make hundreds of millions!

Why should people read *The Bridge*?

I consider myself a *Bridge* vendor (I make hundreds of millions) who is selling something where someone has been through what I’ve been through. We’re all entrepreneurs. *The Bridge* paper is just a wonderful paper to sell.



Courtesy of CORENA HASSELLE

phrenic. She was a mental patient. My mom left my grandmother right after I finished school. So long story short, my Aunt Margaret, her sister, came and got me and my little brother and took us the Executive Inn motel and we were staying out of motel for a while. And me and my mom went through this for a couple years.... back and forth from different motels.

But I graduated and that’s when I really grew up. I was 18 years old and I had to take my mom and my little brother on my shoulders. She was getting assistance from the government...but she was back and forth and in and out of different psychiatric hospitals.

What was it like not have a consistent home in high school? Did it make things more challenging?

Letter from the Editor

BY NICOLE HUGULEY
Editor-in-Chief

I walked into Target in mid-November and tried to stifle a groan. Hanging from the ceiling, spinning slowly from the gentle force of an air conditioned breeze, were several large Christmas-themed decorations. Two-dimensional pine trees, glittery tissue paper fans, and bouncing gold ornaments — emblems of the commercial holiday season — loomed over my head like a flashy neon sign screaming “CHRISTMAS IS COMING.”

As we know, Target is only one of hundreds of businesses that begin attracting customers by way of recognizable Christmas decor way before families reconnect over turkey, stuffing, and pecan pie. Around the same time that Target Christmas-fied its entrances space, Starbucks put an end to the reign of pumpkin spice lattes in favor of their Christmas signatures. But much to my cynical dismay, such marketing tactics accomplish exactly what they intend. I, along with most Americans, associate the Christmas holiday season with warmth, happiness, and joy.

The pervasive effect of the Christmas cultural phenomenon on our daily lives is undeniable — but have you ever considered how this insistent, idealistic message of holiday cheer affects those who have no chance of sitting by a warm fire to welcome Santa on December 24th?

As you flip through the pages of this December issue, you may notice a few recurring themes. First, my editorial staff and I decided to focus on providing several different perspectives on winter and the holiday season. You’ve probably already noticed or read the front cover, a creative narrative written by Lee Silberberg after he interviewed Miss Wanda. This article sets the tone for others related to Christmas; check out page 4 for Emily Neale’s analysis of homeless shelters during wintertime. On page 11, Lisa Lee offers her thoughts on Christmas, reminding us all that the essence of the season is rooted in Christianity, not consumerism. The second theme that weaves its way through this issue involves the power of the written word; poetry, as a form of human expression, offers a cathartic release for many people. Check out a full spread of poetry on page 8-9 and Katie Cannon’s article on Speak Poetry Memphis, page 15.

There are several other gems hidden within this issue, but I’ll keep those a surprise — a reward for taking the time to read from cover to cover. Thank you for purchasing a copy of *The Bridge*; I hope this one in particular leaves you with a broader understanding of the trials faced by our neighbors on the streets during these cold winter months.

Baby It's Cold Outside

Helping the homeless in wintertime



Courtesy of SAMY LAMY AND ANDREW WILLIAMS

BY EMILY NEALE
Staff Writer

Wintertime, with its Christmas caroling, hot chocolate, snowball fights, and sledding, offers the chance for cold weather frivolity. But for the homeless population in Memphis, the cold brings hardship. When faced with temperatures dipping below 40 degrees, people must either find shelter for the night or endure the frigid air on the streets. With this influx of people seeking shelter, the competition for a bed increases, causing some to be refused asylum.

Many of the homeless shelters throughout the nation have specific cold-weather-related protocols to ensure that people have a place to spend the night. But one night is not enough. The National Coalition for the Homeless states that “44% of the nation’s homeless are unsheltered.” That’s nearly half of the nation’s homeless left out in the cold. Clearly, the resources for housing all the homeless are inadequate. Many shelters allow someone to stay for the night, but turn them back onto the streets during the day. There are also several requirements to be able to take shelter, like a photo ID, going to a church service, and paying a small fee. If the person cannot make those requirements, then he or she has nowhere to go but the street.

And this isn’t a one-night problem. In our city, there are approximately 2,000 people without homes. Even though our winter is relatively mild, it still lasts for several months. Those months are when people need lodging the most, yet the increased demand cannot

always be met.

Luckily, Memphis Union Mission does everything in its power to help those seeking a safe place. This shelter has a specific plan for cold weather that allows “any man to stay overnight for free” when the “temperature drops below 32 degrees.” This policy is excellent for decreasing the homeless population’s vulnerability to the dangers associated with the cold. According to Steve Carpenter, the Director of Development for Memphis Union Mission, the shelter “didn’t have to turn anyone away this past winter.” He continued, “Opening [The Opportunity Center] has been a blessing. Without it this past winter would have been tough.” In addition to their 120 permanent beds, Union Mission provides a total of 364 extra beds through their two locations, so that nobody is left on the street.

Memphis Union Mission stands as a refuge for those in need of a home. I talked with a few of the men staying at the shelter during lunch. The dwelling is open and inviting, with many circular tables for eating and conversing. As I walked through I was welcomed into their conversations and briefly joined their circles of friendship. One man, Coleman Dickson, counts himself lucky that he’s been homeless for just two months, and “doesn’t know how it feels to be out there [on the street],” he says. “I’ve seen guys out there that look kind of defeated. I haven’t reached there yet.”

Memphis Union Mission’s cold weather policy reduces the chance of individuals contracting hypothermia, frostbite, or even dying due to the weather. With temperatures dropping to the teens and single

digits “people could freeze to death,” says Mr. Carpenter. A couple of years ago, a homeless woman “fell asleep in a car and literally froze to death,” he says. These accidents need to stop in Memphis. Memphis Union Mission is doing its part to help those without homes, but now it’s time for the community to step up. The “biggest gap in the shelter system,” asserts Mr. Carpenter, “is the lack of beds for women.” Memphis Union Mission has a long-term program for homeless women, but does not temporarily house women. The shelter must coordinate with others to find lodging for these women and their children. In addition, shelters are always in need of clothes, especially during the wintertime. Donating gloves, coats, hats, socks, and underwear can help reduce winter-related injuries.

The treatment and quality of life of homeless people affects the well-being of our whole community. “There’s a saying that a society can be judged based on how it treats its most vulnerable citizens,” Carpenter says. “And if we’re going to be a compassionate society, we have to look out for the neediest among us.”



Want more of *The Bridge*? Check out our instagram at [thebridgepaper!](https://www.instagram.com/thebridgepaper/)

By the people, For the people:

Civilian oversight needed to balance law enforcement



CITY HALL: The Civilian Law Enforcement Review Board, a.k.a. CLERB, has their office located in the Memphis-Shelby County City Hall.

Courtesy of QUIN TEACHEY

BY MARIA YOUSUF

Staff Writer

Michael Brown. Jesse Bogand. Alejandro Leos. All individuals who died at the hands of police, the latter two here in Memphis.

As Abraham Lincoln famously said, “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” Government — and by extension, law enforcement — is a tool to serve the people. Police are employed to ensure public safety and order, but this mission has become distorted, as shown in recent reports of police activity, including the violation of civilian rights and mistreatment of suspects.

As stated on the city of Memphis’s official website, “the Civilian Law Enforcement Review Board (or “CLERB”) is an independent, non-police Mayoral Agency with the authority to investigate allegations of misconduct filed by Citizens of the public against the City of Memphis Police Officers.” If CLERB lives up to its mission and scrutinizes the behavior of local law enforcement, it is, in theory, logical and effective. Ideally, the CLERB would oversee a police force that empathizes with civilians and enforces legislation in a humane manner.

Many debates have risen over whether the CLERB has enough power to actually effect a change for the public good. It allegedly has the “power to receive, investigate, hear cases, make findings and recommend action on complaints concerning the City of Memphis Police Officers” (<http://www.memphistn.gov>). However, there are many claims stating the CLERB may seem to have authority on paper but does not have enough power to properly live up to its original purpose.

According to midsouthpeace.org, the CLERB cannot hear a case until after investigations are carried out by the Memphis Police Department’s (MPD) Internal Affairs

(IA). Additionally, the CLERB lacks subpoena powers, meaning that whether or not MPD officers attend CLERB hearings is left to the officers’ discretion and is entirely voluntary. The CLERB’s lack of authority over police officers renders it unable to keep police activities in check, which is intended to be its primary mission, and leaves Memphis under the jurisdiction of a police department unmonitored and unregulated by civilians.

But how much authority should the CLERB have over law enforcement authorities? The police department is supposed to have the education and training necessary to qualify them for its position of power. As a government-supported law enforcing body, it is understandable that the police department has a greater proportion of authority and responsibility concerning making decisions about routes to take and actions to carry out. This does not mean the police department should have unchecked reign, however.

Since it is intended to be a more representative sample of those being governed, the CLERB could certainly stand to be more effective in terms of restricting the scope of police power and influencing how the police choose to implement their duties. While the police must maintain legal order and societal well-being, the CLERB’s input should be able to help protect human and individual rights. The CLERB does not necessarily need to be city’s ruling authority, but they need to have enough clout to balance public, impersonal needs with individual, personal interests. For instance, it should be mandatory for MPD officers to at least attend CLERB hearings and show some degree of

respect for and interest in civilian affairs. And beyond respect and interest, the MPD also needs to seriously consider and act on public feedback and constructive criticism. It is important for the governing and the governed to be of one mind and be able to work with one another to achieve a common goal, especially in areas of societal order and individual safety.

Having police held accountable by the people they are supposed to be protecting would help them to better represent local citizens and be able to more efficiently serve the public. Rather than ruling as a detached body, the police could be a personally-relatable force that works for local citizens to ensure fair enforcement of safety and security. Meaningful civilian oversight would not only serve to keep checks on the police department, but it would also revive civilian trust in local law enforcement. Ideally, police would not need a CLERB, but having an effective CLERB for now could help law enforcement reach a point at which it is most beneficial to both legislative authorities and civilians. A CLERB with sufficient jurisdiction can protect individual civilian rights and ensure public safety, or help the police department carry out its intended function, in a democratic, humane way.



There's Always "Room in the Inn"

Kicking off the new season with an exciting addition to the program



FOOD, SHELTER, WARMTH: Visitors participating in the Room at the Inn program lounge on a comfortable chair, sheltered against the cold weather.

Courtesy of NATALIE PALMER

BY GILLIAN WENHOLD
Staff Writer

As the days grow colder and the nights lengthen, it becomes more and more difficult for the homeless to survive on the streets of Memphis. Sure there are shelters but most only offer space to those who can't afford to pay the \$7 entrance fee when temperatures drop below freezing. However, the shelter *Room in the Inn - Memphis* is not only completely free, but has officially opened its doors for the season. Starting on November 1 and lasting until March 31, churches all around Memphis will double as homeless shelters once per week. On any given night, these churches are usually warm, but unfortunately, always empty. *Room in the Inn* seeks to take advantage of such available space by welcoming twelve homeless people into each participating church for the night. Guests register in advance, and on the day of their sleepover, they meet at a central location to be driven by bus to one of the congregations. Upon arrival, guests receive a home-cooked meal, access to shower facilities, a warm and safe place to stay for the night, and a light breakfast in the morning. Volunteers are always welcoming and excited to not only have the opportunity to help the visitors, but also to get to know their homeless guests on a personal level.

Room in the Inn was originally created in 1986 in Nashville and has recently opened its second location in Memphis. Having been established in 2010, this sector of Room in the Inn is relatively new to the

city, but the program has already seen tremendous development in a small span of time. According to the founder, Lisa Anderson, "It's growing very organically just by word of mouth." Since its initiation, the charity has been picking up speed, gaining city-wide attention. There are already ten participating churches and five more hoping to get involved soon. This season will also feature the opening of "The Carpenter's House," an exciting new addition to the program. This new building will provide incredible opportunities for Room in the Inn to expand its services to include hospitality during the daytime. It is being renovated and is expected to be ready for use this season, and three different non-profit organizations will be joining together to share the space. Room in the Inn, the Iona Burrito Ministry, which feeds burritos to people on Tuesday afternoons, and the Urban Bicycle Food Ministry, whose volunteers travel by bicycle handing out burritos on Wednesdays, will collaborate to provide a safe place for homeless people to go in order to prevent them from being harassed on the streets during the most dangerous part of the year.

The Carpenter's House is uniquely important to the next stage of development for Room in the Inn. So far, with the resources available, the foundation has only been able to offer overnight care. Thus, its primary focus was providing immediate help for the guests. However, Ms. Lisa explains, "The building just opens up things that we can't do in the congregations. The congregational network is emergency shelter, and the

building offers us an opportunity to do something that can be more permanently helpful." The Carpenter's House allows for the organization to provide day hospitality, making it easier to connect the guests with resources available to them. Lisa hopes that eventually Room in the Inn will be able to provide classes for visitors who are hoping to earn their GEDs. Another long-term dream for the shelter is for it to be able to offer homeless people a place to go when they are recovering from hospital visits, seeing as one of the biggest issues with emergency care is that once a homeless person has been released, he or she immediately returns to living on the streets. This is extremely difficult, especially in the winter, and more often than not, patients return to the hospital within a week.

We can't wait to see all of the exciting new additions to the program, but for now, being available for the guests remains the main focus of this organization. As Lisa observes, "There are always going to be people who don't have \$7 to get into the Mission." But luckily, there will also always be Room in the Inn.



Top 7 Things to Do in Memphis This December

As temperatures drop and the holidays approach, here are some of the best ways to enjoy the city and spread holiday cheer

BY **ABBIE NORRIS**
Staff Writer

1. Zoo Lights at the Memphis Zoo

November 21–December 30

This annual tradition is one of the city's largest and most-loved light displays. This year, head on out to the Memphis Zoo after-hours for a walk or trolley ride through the lights, ice skating, snow, and more! Zoo Lights is great for all ages and runs from November 21 to December 30.

More information available at <http://memphiszoo.org/zoolights>

2. Starry Nights at Shelby Farms

November 21–December 28

This Mid-South tradition is an annual display of more than 1.5 million lights. This year, it's back and bigger than ever! Ride through the lights in a horse-drawn carriage, or simply grab a mug of hot chocolate and enjoy the display on foot. Other attractions include visits with Santa, the Starry Petting Zoo, and a holiday market featuring local artisans. Starry Nights is open from November 21 to December 28, so head on out to experience some holiday cheer!

More information available at <http://www.shelbyfarmspark.org/starrynights>

3. Enchanted Forest Festival of Trees

November 15–December 31

This magical Pink Palace tradition has charmed children for more than fifty years. The Enchanted Forest is filled with animated penguins, elves making toys, and dozens of beautifully lit trees. In the forest, children can pose for pictures with Santa Claus and watch a miniature train weave through Gingerbread Village. Proceeds from The Enchanted Forest benefit Le Bonheur Children's Hospital, so go experience this magical display from November 15 to December 31 at the Pink Palace Museum.

More information available at <http://www.theenchantedforest.org/>

4. Peabody Tree Lighting Ceremony

November 28

Join the Peabody as they kick off the holiday season



Courtesy of SHELBY FARMS PARK



Courtesy of UGLY SWEATER RUN

with their annual tree-lighting ceremony! Onlookers will be serenaded with carols by local choirs and the Memphis Symphony Orchestra. The event is free and open to the public! It kicks off on November 28 and lasts from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. in the hotel's Grand Lobby.

More information available at <http://www.peabodymemphis.com/holidays/>

5. Holiday Pajama Party at Brooks Museum

December 14

This free event is great for pajama-clad partiers of all ages! Indoors, you can listen to holiday music from some of Memphis' most esteemed choirs and ensembles, tour the gallery, make holiday crafts, and watch some of the season's most celebrated films. Outside, go on a horse-drawn carriage ride through Overton Park and experience the Stax Music Academy light show. The party is on December 14 from 11 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Onesies welcomed.

More information available at <http://brooksmuseum.org/pajama-party>

6. Memphis Farmers Market Holiday Market

December 13

Memphis' downtown farmers market finishes off its winter season with holiday-inspired goods from local farmers and vendors. Head on down for produce, music, and seasonal fun! The Holiday Market is on December 13 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., so be sure to check out all it has to offer before it closes for the season.

More information available at <http://memphisfarmersmarket.org/events/>

7. Ugly Sweater Run

December 21

Dig up your favorite ugly sweaters and participate in this festive 5K at Shelby Farms! After the run, enjoy unlimited hot chocolate, snow blowers, and ugly sweater contests. Those over 21 can enjoy an extra, complimentary lager or cider. The Ugly Sweater Run benefits Save the Children and is on December 21 at 3 p.m., so what are you waiting for? Register online and wear the ugliest sweater you can find!

Thank You,



Rhodes College
—1848—

for continually supporting *The Bridge!*

Too Many Years

BY TOMMY PAYNE
Contributing Writer

Too many years have passed me by,
Years that I lingered all alone;
I have no more tears to cry,
Oh Lord I'll never go back home;
Home is just another place,
Where no one ever looks inside;
To see the past in my face,
And all the sorrow I can not hide.
Guess you can call me a morning
glory.
I blossom when the fall winds blow.
I'm the twilight of a survivor
That really has no place to go.
Too many years have passed me by
Years that I never fell in love.
My only friend, the sun lit sky,
And lonely nights of stars above.
Guess you can call me a morning
glory
Running down the lonely road.
Feeling nothing but a summer breeze;
Carrying my heart is a heavy load
Too many years have passed me by
To carry the burden of my soul
In the twilight of a survivor
My tragic story sadly told
Guess you can call me a morning
glory
I dance to the music of wind and rain
I'm the twilight of a survivor,
hiding my quiet and secret pain.

This Time of Year

BY CYNTHIA CRAWFORD
Contributing Writer

I like the leaves changing colors.
Oranges, reds, and yellows;
falling silently to the ground.
The green beauty that once was,
now raked into piles and bagged up.
Yesterday's treasure, today's trash.
Flowers, various greens and squashes
in harvest.
Little children frolicking in costumes of ghosts,
witches and cartoon characters;
All in exchange for sweet goodies.

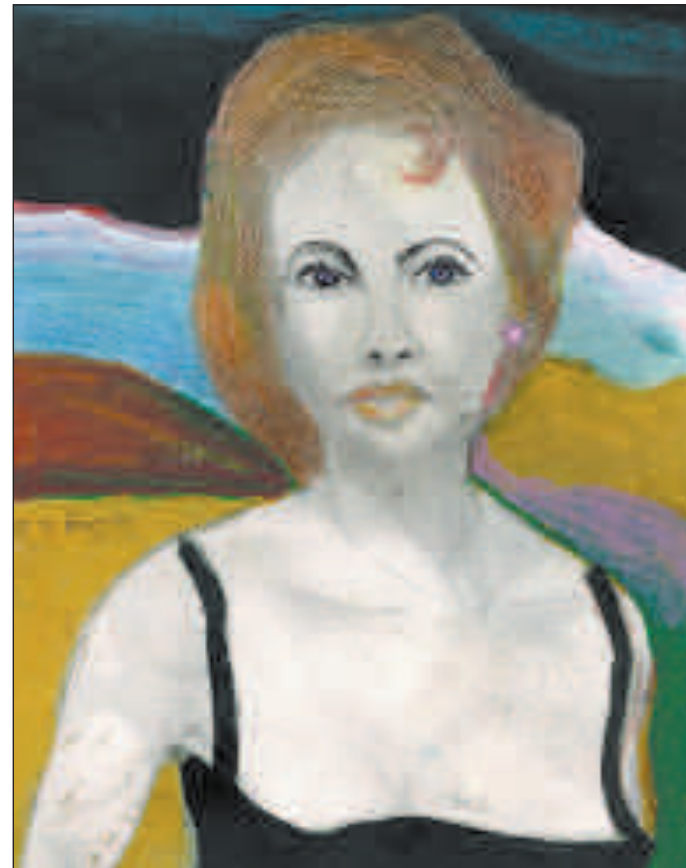
So many things to give thanks for, cornucopias,
pumpkins and turkeys.
Pumpkin and pecan pies. Food, refreshments,
trimmings, and the game of catch up between
old friends.

Daylight savings time,
I get an extra hour to sleep.
Thanksgiving and Christmas parades and plays.
Jesus Christ our savior, his birth we celebrate.
Christmas gifts and Ol Saint Nick.

Lights, trees, decorations, holiday hymns
and Christmas music.
Sugar, cinnamon, spice and all things nice.
Pinecones, snowflakes and snowmen.
Snowmobiles, sleds, snowball fights
and ice skates.

Hot chili, soups and stews.
Hot chocolate with marshmallows,
and hot coffee too
These are the reasons that I love
this time of year

They wandered across the frozen plains,
Survival etched in the human mind,
They fashioned crude instruments of death
To slay the beast as well as our kind
Drums of war, drums of war,
Ethereal, alluring, but grotesque sound.
Chanting, run my son, run my son!
Be first to earn the bloody crown.
The drums yet enchanted our ears,
When civilization amassed and grew,
For all our human brethren slew.
Heartless warriors stand tall and proud;
To protect the Kingdom's wealth and land,
To conquer the weak,
To advance the strong.
Death inflicted by man,
Drums of war, drums of war
Eerie, provocative, relentless sound.
Chanting, run my son, run my son!
Be first to earn the bloody crown



Courtesy of TOMMY PAYNE

Dreams of Mae

BY TOMMY PAYNE
Contributing Writer

Once in a while, I'll dream of Mae.
She had a careless broken heart;
She turned her back, she walked away.
She tore my helpless dreams apart.
I loved you, I loved you, I loved you,
What more can I say.
I need you, I need you, I need you,
More and more each lonely day.
The taunting memories;
Sometimes I think of you and cry.
Grey clouds are all I see,
Since the day you said goodbye.
Pretty little country girl,
She'd never been in love before.
Jealous heart and foolish pride;
She walked away, she closed the door.
I loved you, I loved you, I loved you
What more can I say.
I need you, I need you, I need you,
More and more each lonely day;
In the heart of Alexandria,
A sleepy Louisiana town.
A young boy fell in love,
But his world would come tumbling down.

I loved you, I loved you, I loved you,
What more can I say.
I need you, I need you, I need you,
More and more each lonely day.
Times of late, I dream of Mae.
She had a careless broken heart;
She turned her back, she walked away.
She tore my helpless dream apart;
Haunting memories,
Sometimes I think of her and cry.
Grey skies are all I see,
Since the day you said goodbye.
Pretty little country girl;
She was captured by innocent love.
My charm did change her world,
That grew as high as the stars above.
Haunting memories,
Sometimes I think of her and cry.
Grey skies are all I see,
Since the day she said goodbye.
Times of late, I dream of Mae
A careless, broken heart.
She closed the door, she walked away;
She tore my helpless dream apart.
I love you, I love you, I love you,
What more can I say.
I need you, I need you, I need you,
More and more each lonely day.
Times of late I dream of Mae,
Times of late I dream of Mae.

What About the Children

BY CHARLES RIDDICK
Contributing Writer

What about the children whose
lives we hold dear

What about the unfortunate ones,
who will shed a tear

Children today seem to
grow up fast

Children are so vulnerable let their
childhood last

Children that are encouraged have
a chance to grow

There is so much about life they
will need to know

We should empower the children
with all our strength

For the children we should go to
great lengths

Children have needs that
must be met

What does this world have to offer
them, what will they get
May the children possess the
courage to stand for what's right

Children that live good lives is an
awesome sight

Like unused books sitting
on shelves,

Some children store their
talents inside themselves

There will be children who will feel
their lives are under a curse

Homeless and alone if life couldn't
get any worse

Some children will be
game changers

Others will be disconnected with
this world and remain strangers

I feel today's world is
getting colder

In a child's defense,
I want to be a soldier

Sometime I don't get what this
world seems to project

I do know there are children we all
need to protect

The negatives in life we don't want
children to fall prey

Life is not all black and white there
is still some grey

Children will be children
that's a fact

Lets hope and pray that they keep
their lives intact

When they cry out just help them
and pray

Love them hold them and really
hear what they have to say

What about the children? Will
their lives be better today?

Drums of War

BY TOMMY PAYNE
Contributing Writer

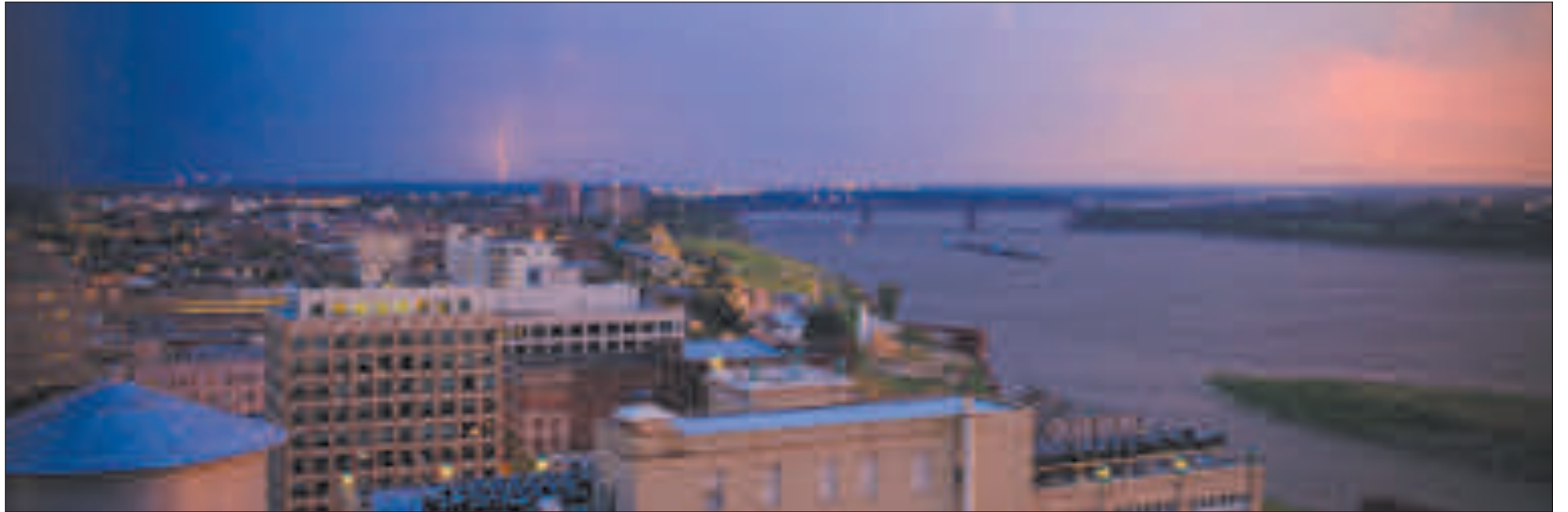
Strange, Unearthly, compelling sound,
The remnant of some bygone age;
Quelling both my love and fear,
Assuming primal rage.
Drums of war, drums of war,
A mystical, enchanting, foreboding sound;
Chanting, run my son, run my son!
Be first to earn the bloody crown.
The drums didn't first enchant my ears,
On the Pleistocene's very shore,
When nature withdrew her boundless love,
Expelling the idle sons she bore;



Courtesy of GEP PASCHAL

Flashes of Light in the Night Sky

Ignorance Is Not Bliss



WORLD ON FIRE : In this installment of Bryant's story, chaos breaks loose in Memphis as an alien spacecraft lands in the Mississippi River.

Courtesy of SEAN DAVIS

BY ISAAC BRYANT
Contributing Writer

Ignorance is not bliss! Whomever said that, you lied! As I laid in my bed watching Mearl Purvis, I couldn't believe there was something to talk about in Memphis other than the giant green tarp stretched across the Mississippi. They talked about the Grizzlies, the Tigers, they even talked with the 1# ranked power forward in the nation. Basketball season couldn't get here fast enough for me.

As Mearl joked with Joey Sulipek, it happened! They switched to a Fox correspondent, standing at the Mississippi River interviewing some yahoo who had raised a lot of sunken ships. He was going on about what it would take for the Coast Guard to float the 'whatever' that was in the river. "Judging from the length and width, the object is roughly 10'x30'..." Blah, blah, blah. I thought he would never shut up. "What if the thing in the river wasn't floatable, idiot?" I was thinking to myself.

The Fox correspondent must have grown tired of his bombastic mannerisms because she cut him off mid sentence to go to commercial. As she was doing her outro, the camera focused on the tarp. It was quiet; the tarp was billowing in the wind. Then three things happened: whatever had crashed into the Mississippi, ripped through the tarp. There was an explosion so bright, even though it was on TV, it still hurt my eyes. My TV went blank.

"Not this time," I shouted I as ran to my office, "I got y'all this time." On my monitor was what looked like the most complex sudoku ever solved. It wasn't, it was a program I had written. All I had to do was hit enter. I'd know everything Uncle Sam knew and what he didn't want me to know.

As I contemplated whether I should hit enter or not, I heard a voice say, "Might as well, Walker." I looked up. In my office door stood a M.I.B.S. "Sooner or later you may be invited to the game. Can't believe it took you this long. Either you are really smart or a wuss," He said with a New London accent.

It seemed as if he filled my whole office. I tried to look around him, but he said, "No worries old boy, it's just me. Thought I could do my country some good if I got out in the field and got my hands dirty."

When he said that I reached for my...

Downtown:

In Tom Lee Park, about a thousand diehard idiots who hadn't tired of what was in the river were knocked flat by the blast. Those that could run, did. Trampling the less unfortunate as they ran west on Riverside away from the military barrier. Front St. was not blocked. The 400 or so people in Confederate Park took off toward Squirrel Park. The less fortunate were also trampled, or plowed down by the cars on Front as drivers lost control.

Millington Naval Base:

At the Navy base, fighter pilots, who had taken to sleeping in the cockpits of their F-14s, began to fire up their birds of prey.

Downtown:

On Riverside, the commander of the armored tank division stationed in Memphis settled down his men and got ready for a fight.

Mississippi River:

On board the two Coast Guard flat boats, a total of 81 crew members were lost.

Aboard the spacecraft: out of rations, life support almost nil; the captain and his crew celebrated as they felt the craft pull away from the muddy Mississippi. "By the Great Father!" Visda shouted, "Just two more revolutions captain, two more and even an earth infant —" That's as far as he got as their craft was assaulted by the blast.

...When he said that I reached for my bottle of whiskey.

"That spirits store around the corner isn't hurting for business, thanks to you and your next-door-neighbors."

Only I'd left the bottle in my bedroom. So I mustered up the courage to speak, "What do you want? I kept my end of the agreement. I don't owe you or any

other alphabet soup agency anything. I held up both my hands, wiggling my fingers. "See, I still got all 10 of them."

Then he leaned over my desk, I could see my reflection in his sunglasses-I looked scared! "Lad, you started this mess, you and the rest of DS-8, 8, get it?" Then he slammed his hands onto my desktop. I don't know why I didn't jump.

"We were dismantled 28 years ago. And y'all took my machine, my software designs, and all my notes. I've kept my part of the bargain, period! Besides we only changed —"

"It wasn't a damn satellite! It was..."

He was a quiet for a moment. I know from personal experience, M.I.B.S. don't make mistakes. I knew then that something was really wrong. I threw that voice inside my head out.

"Y'all pointed the bloody thing to E.T., it took two years for them to get the message and 26 for them to answer."

"What they still stuck with analog?" The voice in my head could sneak one in, especially when I'm scared.

He smiled, then he laughed, a good hearty laugh. But I wasn't buying it; he could have been imagining me on thiazine and in Depends. "They don't need analog, they crashed into the Mississippi. Took 26 years for them to get here. All because of nine bad ass kids! Unbelievable! Oh yeah, we know you know about Osceola. Not too funny now, am I? I give you credit, you knew to keep your mouth shut about that." We were silent a moment. I was just scared to say anything. "Go ahead and hit enter, Walker. You may not be invited to play, this way if you are, you won't come into the game behind."

I stared at the monitor.

"And stay off mapquest.com! I know how much you love Ms. Green's legumes and corn muffins, especially the Signor's grappa. I'd hate for them to become what member #9 has become. Yes, she's still alive... stopped screaming ages ago, though she still wears a bib and needs diapers. You be a good lad." He pointed to my Dell and left my office.

Continued on page 13.

Season's Greetings!

A Holiday Message of Love



Courtesy of SEAN DAVIS

HAPPY HOLIDAYS, MEMPHIANS: Lisa Robertson reminds us, regardless of what you may be doing this season, to be thankful, to be thoughtful and to give kindness to others.

BY LISA LEE ROBERTSON
Contributing Writer

Praise the Lord, and he is worthy to be praised! During this holiday season, we would like to share our love with you through Christ, our Lord and Savior, and remind you that the key to this joyous season is our ability to love.

Love is not just something that we talk about because it sounds good. No, it should be felt from within first. This is where my husband, T.A, and I get our joy. We first love God through Christ. Then, we were able to receive something special, joy. We practice this year round, and it begins with our relationship with Christ. We have both been homeless before; we both have experienced the results of our previous decisions in life, and we both have learned that life consists of consequences and results.

In our time here, we have learned to be more grateful. We have learned and we practice forgiveness. Yet, we are still learning to repent more, and turn away from doing and thinking as some of the world does. We live with the mindset of giving thanks to God for what He has already done, and we operate cheerfully in Thanksgiving to receive a better blessing from God. This holiday season,

I suggest that we all should see where we are in Christ and with Christ before we decide to participate in our rituals and traditions. The mindset of Christ has got to line up with your participation in uplifting God's kingdom and winning more souls for goodness. Only what we do for Jesus Christ will last, stored up in Heaven.

This season, I'd like to share with you the keys to having a blessed holiday. No matter where you are, what your circumstances may be, here are some steps that will help you mature your spirit into God's spirit.

1. Each and every morning give praise. Say, "Thank You, God".
2. Clean your thoughts for the day. Today I can and I will not complain. Meditate on this. Complaining opens the door for the enemy.
3. Forgive any and everything that is not right with you at this time; it can be a job, spouse, friend, school, home or any number of things.
4. Thank God for prayer. Pray!
5. Make reminders between you and God; your do's and don'ts, and stick with them.
6. Speak with wisdom and speak thinking of life over yourself. Say, "What is proper?"
7. Start encouraging yourself. How you see yourself in Christ will pull you through!
8. Remembrance! Always reflect and bring to your mind what he has done to love you, and where He has brought you from.
9. Give something to someone that will help them; it can be prayer, time, love, money, rides and so much more. When you give something out of love, don't look at it as something you have to give. Look at it in the big picture, because, when it come to love, you will get back all that you gave and more. Also, don't let yourself say I don't have anything; you can talk with someone, that's giving. You can smile, that's giving too. Don't let the economy rob you of your thoughts; they belong to you and God.
10. Remember that you are blessed. It is your duty to uplift the soul, so that it can be nourished and receive God's love that comes through us, his body!

So praise His Holy Name Jesus! We love You. And if you would like to come fellowship with us, or just want to touch base with any issues with Christ, we are at Starting All Over Outreach Ministry: 1234 Mississippi Blvd, Memphis, TN 38126 (901) 275-8579. And just remember, have a blessed holiday; you are loved.

From Beginning, to End, to Life

C.C. shares her story of being pregnant and homeless

BY CYNTHIA D. CRAWFORD

Contributing Writer

It had been a long, difficult 9in9months. After all, I'm not as young as I used to be.

January 2011 was the month I found out that I was pregnant with my fifth child. From the beginning, I knew my mission from God himself. I was travelling back and forth from Birmingham, AL to Memphis when I was diagnosed with hypertension during pregnancy. I was prescribed medicine to regulate my blood pressure. My child on the way and my newfound hypertension influenced my decision to move back home to Memphis in April 2011.

Upon arriving in Memphis, I assumed that I would live in a shelter. But all shelters and waiting lists led me back to the streets of Memphis. Thus, I was homeless again while pregnant.

Soup kitchens, bible studies, public toilets and wash-ups became regular parts of my life again. Not to mention grassy beds. Thankfully, when a friend of mine found out about my plight, she gave me a place to stay.

This blessing only lasted for three months. We had a falling out and I could no longer stay with her. She referred me up with a caseworker who introduced me to Door of Hope. I spent a lot of time at Door of Hope's Support Center. They had Bible study, reading classes, writing classes, and Bingo games. I also enjoyed socializing with the other clients, volunteers and staff. They all became like my adopted family. It was really a freeing time in my life. They put me into a shelter at Trinity off of Third Street. I started communicating with different agencies and was able to get rides to and from the doctor's office for prenatal visits.

By late July 2011, I made that fateful call to Bethany Christain Services, a local adoption agency. I met a bubbly little blonde named Adonna, and we sat at McDonalds on Third sipping tea, talking, and crying. To be honest, she did as much talking as I did the crying. Plans were made and papers were signed. It was one of the toughest steps of the process but the most fulfilling.

To make things worse, there was another pregnant woman at Trinity who had a critical spirit. People scrutinized and ridiculed me for my choice. I tried to be understanding and remain quiet, knowing they were just ignorant to the decision I had to make.

A week later, in Bethany's office, I looked through and read a stack of books about the stories of dozens of couples that were hoping to adopt. Suddenly my breath caught in my throat as I read through one particular couple's book. It was meant to be. The baby in my tummy instantly woke up and started kicking. These were her parents. We had made the decision.

Throughout the next month, the couple and I acquainted ourselves. They took me to lunch a few times and even attended doctor and ultrasound appointments with me. They were beyond ecstatic and so was I. I could feel the love of God flowing in and out of this couple.

By mid-August, Bethany moved me into an extended-stay hotel. It was dramatically different than living on the streets or in a shelter. I learned how to shop by the week instead of for the moment, and had free access to a full kitchen, shower and toilet. A pregnant woman's dream! Now I could shower anytime I wanted to. I even walked around my room naked a few times!

Funny, ain't it, all the little things we take for granted. Like going to bed and choosing to shower when we want to, or even going nude to refresh ourselves. Within a week of moving to the hotel, I no longer needed my blood pressure medicine. A couple of times a week I would apply for jobs, attempting to plan for the future after the baby. However, managers and employers looked down upon me because I was nine months pregnant. Non-profit volunteers and other people that had also experienced being homeless loved and accepted me for me. They taught me to love myself again and that everyone has value. I owed them nothing for feeding me, loving me, accepting me, and giving me a new lease on life. I, during most of this time, was involved in Sunday School and attended church regularly. I was growing my much-needed support system.

I woke up one Sunday morning feeling totally uncomfortable. I was not hurting or anything, but felt like something was off. So I glanced at the clock at 5:29 p.m. and went outside. I began to pace back and forth in front of the hotel. I was clueless as to what was going on with my body at the moment. After about 15 minutes of walking, I realized I was in full-blown labor! I called 9-1-1, then the Bethany workers to leave a message to notify the adoption parents. The ambulance took me to

the Baptist Women's Hospital out east, I was evaluated, and the staff started shooting all kinds of questions at me and flying around me in a hustle. The next thing I remember, they were running me down the hall so fast, my head could have spun. We entered the delivery room and the nurse and orderlies moved me to a bed. The nurse actually told me to hold it in! Do not push! She ended up delivering my baby girl, no pain medicine needed.

The doctor walked in two minutes later, and I thought to myself "Nice timing, Doc, now that all the work is done!" I just prayed and held my baby girl to my breast, and she took right to it. Although the Bethany staff and the adopted parents didn't like it, I insisted on breastfeeding while in the hospital. This was my last gift that I could give her.

Reality settled in, and tears came to my eyes. "Your mom and dad missed your grand entrance!" I whispered to Serenity. Two days later, Serenity went home with her new parents and became Miriam. I went "home" to the hotel. I felt as empty as that room. Yes, I had a comfy bed, a small but nice kitchen, and my own bathroom. But, it had no one to talk to, and, most of all, it didn't have Serenity. I cried myself to sleep every night for a week until, finally, I could feel God's arms wrap around me. I had the most incredible conversation with God, and he reminded me that he was there the whole time. Although I had conceived Serenity within my womb and carried her for 9 months, I knew that that couple had conceived her within their hearts years before.



Courtesy of CRAIG CLOUTIER

Short Fiction: *Xses, the Super Heroine*

BY DELORES WASHINGTON
Contributing Writer

Xses is a beautiful, healthy earth woman. She lives in outer space, in a huge Plexi-glas dome on X-Lo space station.

It's a large double-rounded glass house with bedrooms and bathrooms, a living and dining room with a patio with patio furniture and a pool surrounded by green shrubbery, trees, and flowers. It's non-penetrable by any source: heat, cold, radiation, elemental gases or space debris.

Xses had been selected from an array of qualified women and men for the job of criminal demolition. She had to be strong, healthy, self-willed, stable-minded, compassionate, and able to survive years of solitude in outer space.

X-Lo was launched into outer space for the purpose of viewing crime from above Earth, using the telestar telescope with thousands of megabytes that enabled it to see and scope all areas of the Earth; NY, LA, Chicago, Atlanta; from large cities to small towns.

Xses sat at her computerized wall desk all day and night, with her telescope and maps of the Earth nearby. She did this to witness crimes and

to report these unseen crimes to the local Earthlings. It was a tedious, lonely, tiresome job, but interesting, as she could witness everything that took place on Earth. It was akin to watching reality TV all day and night.

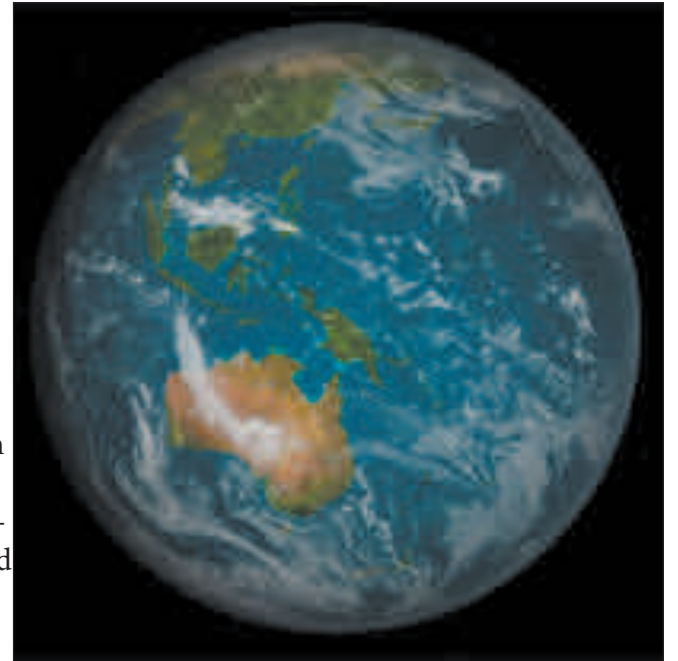
From her lofty perch, Xses could see all of the wonders of the universe; the beautiful sun rays bouncing colorful prisms off of her glass house, the silvery moon so close to her that she could almost touch it, the colored stars that floated by her house, and the billowy clouds and blue skies during daylight time that were indescribably breathtaking.

Although Xses was the chosen super heroine, she was still human; she became lonesome. Fortunately for Xses, the USA had recently launched an astronaut into space to collect specimens. The spaceship crashed onto X-Lo's landing pad, which damaged it beyond repair. Xses had no spaceship to return to Earth, she was to stay on X-lo permanently. Noah, the astronaut was now also stranded on X-LO.

Xses allowed Noah entrance into her glass dome. From there on, they were united in love and friendship. They produced little Xses-es

and little Noahs who built their own domes and spaceships once they grew up. And they traveled to other space stations, where they met others, mated and recreated the tale of Adam and Eve.

A new Earth in outer space, a new world.



Courtesy of BRUCE IRVING

Flashes of Light: Ignorance Is Bliss (cont.)

Continued from page 10

Next thing I know, Ms. G. is standing over me demanding to know who that man was and why she couldn't open my door. Before she got into overdrive, I turned her around and walked her out my condo. I locked the door and bolted it. I'd catch hell, but I needed to think.

I didn't hit enter. I turned on the broad band radio and got the same eerie whine that was coming from my tv. I walked onto my patio and heard an F-14 thunder over head. I didn't see any explosions reflecting off the Pyramid. (Yes, I can see the Pyramid from the Tower on a clear night.)

I needed to escape; so I grabbed my old friend Mr. Bourbon, and let him take me away!...My head was pounding. The Martinellis were pounding on my door. My phone had fell off the nightstand, when I swung my feet to the floor and felt the vibration on my left big toe. I 'bout jumped out of my skin! That's what a visit from a M.I.B.S. can do to me.

Signor M. had reverted to his rapid fire Sicilian and Ms. G was ranting in Yiddish. I rubbed my aching temples and said to Signor M., "In English, please."

"The explosions! The riots! The fires! Soldiers firing on citizens all over the city! The evacuation! They say to go to some web site. I don't know, we don't know what-"

I cut him off and shook my head at Ms.G. before she could open her mouth. "Go home, get your M-16 out, and lock and bolt the door." Ms G. opened her mouth, but I kept on, "Come back here in one hour, and no, the door won't be bolted this time, Ms.G.!"

Back in my office, I hit enter. "Wasn't no damn rock," I whispered, as I looked at the image on my monitor. It looked like a large V made of quick silver, cartwheeling through the sky. NASA footage showed it before it hit our atmosphere. It did appear to be 10'x30'. "How did that little thing travel through the Milky Way," I asked the empty room.

The last footage was from directly overhead. I could see both bridges running from here to Arkansas, the Beale Street River Landing, even The

Memphis Showboat. It looked like, for the briefest moment, the craft had gained control. "Wow, beautiful," I said, then it crashed into the river. There was no footage of the crash site in Osceola.

I went into my bedroom and tried the TV again. Unbelievable. People were covered in blood. There were bodies everywhere. Guards at the airports were in a firefight with people trying to get on to the tarmac and the the planes that were being used to evacuate the city. I couldn't believe I'd ever see the military firing on American citizens in my lifetime. In Memphis! There were long lines of cars headed east, south, and north. No one would go west even if they could; the military occupied both bridges.

In Overton, a third of the people were getting stoned. A third were praying, the Going to Glory Sect. And a third were trying to liberate the animals in the zoo! "Only in Memphis! Animals, then women and children!" I shouted.

I went to the evacuation website and was pissed; I didn't see our names, more importantly the Martinellis, on any of the evac lists for the 38137 zip code. I dialed the 888 number posted, ready to rip someone a new one. A pleasant young lady named Brittany Taylor tried in vain to help, after ten minutes she transferred me to a supervisor. This woman was clinical; she wouldn't give me her name, just told me to hold. As she typed away on her keyboard, I heard a beep from her CPU, a beep like something is wrong beep! After a pause in the typing she said, "Sir I can only refer you back to our website," click.

"I know this broad didn't hang up in my face," I shouted. Then, my phone vibrated. The screen read, 'Incoming mail,' but the sender was unknown. No one can send me blocked mail... "AAAH!" I shouted. M.I.B.S., what the hell did they want? As I started to open my mail, my door exploded. In poured men in black combat fatigues with MP-5 machine guns and shouted, "DOWN! DOWN! DOWN!"

M.I.B.S., Assholes set me up!!! Ignorance is bliss...my black ass!!!

Speak Poetry Memphis

Students do more than take tests; they speak out



Courtesy of MACRONIX - FLICKR

BY KATIE CANNON

Staff Writer

On October 23, Mr. Williams' Northwest Prep High School English classroom became an impromptu hip-hop concert, complete with freestyle rapping, backup vocals, and beat-boxing. The performers? The students themselves, along with their teacher for the day — local poet, singer, and actress Tiffany Mishe'. The next day, students discussed the implications of words like “welfare,” “ghetto” and “food stamps.” Welcome to Tiffany Mishe's Speak Poetry Memphis workshop, where real life is as worthy of study as anything you'll find in a literature textbook.

Mishe' has a way with words, and she's using her talent to change the lives of inner-city Memphis teens. Her program, Speak Poetry Memphis, gives underprivileged youth the chance to express themselves in a society that would often rather stifle their voices. To reach her young audience, Mishe' holds workshops at local high schools — but when Mishe' is your teacher, it won't be your average English class: instead of dissecting the themes of 19th-century stanzas, they write and read poetry that addresses contemporary issues, issues they face themselves. It's a cabaret of cultural identity, a candid discussion of poverty and stereotypes, aspirations and emotions.

Mishe' herself grew up in South Memphis's Castalia neighborhood. Throughout her childhood, she faced depression and intermittent homelessness. Art, however, gave Mishe' a therapeutic outlet to deal with her issues. “I was depressed and suicidal...I cried every single day of my life, but no one knew, because I was a writer,” she says. “I had notebooks full of dark, twisted poetry that saved my life and probably other people's lives too.”

Mishe' wants to offer that same artistic outlet to

today's generation of poor Memphis teens, who often don't feel as though they can talk about their problems. In 2010, Mishe' started Speak Poetry Memphis with the sponsorship of Walmart and Dress for Success. The program works to help the students both with their emotions and their education, encouraging students write poems on personal themes. One day, the topic is “I Am Not Who You Think I Am.” The next, they write about stereotypes, about words they offend them. By allowing them to write about things that actually affect their daily lives, Mishe' finds that students work harder, and produce profound work. “Please don't let my smile fool you/ I am not who you think I am,” one student's poem pleads. Another's reads “I want to go to Atlantis because it sounds peaceful/and I heard in Atlantis you don't even have to keep your piece full.”

The program is designed to bring students out of their shell, to give them the confidence to speak out rather than fall asleep in class. Mishe' often performs her own spoken word poetry for the classes, then asks them to discuss the themes that stand out to them. Then, the students will write and perform their own poetry. “Kids that never participate start participating,” says Mishe'. For many, the exercises are even a cathartic experience, dredging up long-suppressed emotion. “I'm like a counselor in disguise,” she says. “I come in, I get them comfortable, and then I get you to talk about something real serious.”

By incorporating rap into her curriculum, Mishe' hopes she can dispel the notion that the students are the problem when it comes to education. Instead, she lays the blame with the education system, whose archaic curriculum relies on material the students can't engage with. “If you were to re-

place the story that they're dissecting with some Tupac, or a Kanye West song, you can still get the same results — better, even,” she says. “Tell them to look for simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia—but you're giving them texts they're actually interested in. Then they're going to succeed. It's not them that are wrong; they're as smart as we'll allow them to be. It's us, we're not teaching them right.” Mishe's program allows students to simply be themselves — rather than have them conform to a certain definition of what a good student should be, or what good art, or literature should be, students can be successful in their own way.



Courtesy of STEVE JURVETSON

Happy Holidays!

Word Search

A	S	H	T	S	N	O	W	F	L	A	K	E	C	T	P	N	I
R	T	A	H	A	K	K	U	N	A	H	E	O	Y	R	I	F	N
O	H	R	N	M	K	W	O	A	F	N	C	L	E	A	O	I	E
Y	G	O	M	T	R	E	W	L	C	O	I	S	R	D	O	C	I
H	I	N	S	S	L	O	R	N	A	M	E	N	T	I	A	R	C
O	L	E	D	I	E	R	D	K	A	N	S	M	O	T	S	U	C
L	R	M	N	R	S	N	T	F	T	G	S	K	C	I	A	H	E
L	A	T	O	H	S	Y	T	S	E	H	O	S	I	O	L	E	M
Y	S	H	A	C	E	L	E	B	R	A	T	I	O	N	H	A	G

celebration
family
noel

Christmas
Hanukkah
ornament

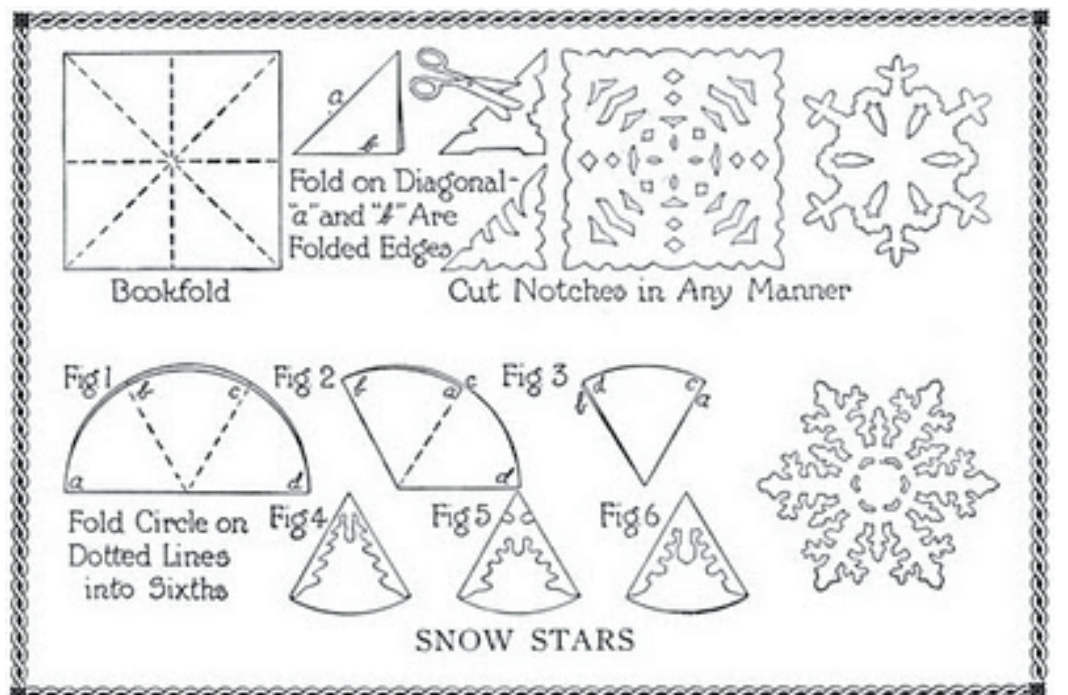
cocoa
holly
presents

customs
lights
snowflake

dreidel
menorah
tradition



Make-A-Flake!



Can you make it to the end?





HELLO, my name
is Michael,

I am a proud vendor
of the Bridge.
I am not a panhandler.
I sell the Bridge paper
to make honest money.
If we could all just
find work, Memphis
would be a much
better place.

#bridgethegap