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Tonya Watts says: "Please Help"

BY TOM WILLS
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Tonya Watts isn't afraid to walk right up and talk to homeless men by the river. "I am a 95 lb. girl and I go down there all the time and hang out with them. I have never met nicer people in my life. They are use to being ignored so when someone shows interest in them they light up like a Christmas tree."

But it wasn't always this way. Tonya lived in a downtown apartment near the river four years ago, and she admits being intimidated by the strange homeless men she saw. When she walked her dog, she didn't make eye contact. But eventually she took a chance anyway and began to talk to them.

One day, Watts met a homeless man who went by the name Booger Love. "He walked me all over the streets teaching me stuff about the homeless way of life. I was appalled the way people looked at me while walking with him. I felt like a society outcast and I loved every minute of it! I had never been more proud."

She had struck a friendship that would change and nearly overwhelm her life. She became so concerned about the homeless men and women she'd met, she couldn't sleep at times. She even ran out into the street looking for her friend Booger in

a late-night storm. But through this experience, she knew she had to draw the line for her

own health, "It was then I knew I had to get out of there. It was way too much for me at the time."

But, she came back. In July of 2007, she returned to Nashville to record a video for her new song, Cumberland Angels. "It's inspired by all of my friends and my promise to Booger to help," she explained. "The song is a tribute to the homeless of Nashville and a call to treat them right."



Photos Courtesy of Tonya Watts

Getting off the bus downtown, she was shocked to see signs up all over saying "Please Help, Don't Give". "I was in complete shock! I have never felt such anger and disgust. I honestly thought they were joking. Nashville is the Christian hub for Bible publishing and Christian music. This couldn't be." But it was. So she incorporated interviews with homeless men and women into her video and even featured a shot of the "Please Help, Don't Give" sign.

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Panhandling Law Goes Into Effect

BY STEVE SAMRA
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Nashvillians looking to panhandle some spending cash must now be careful where, when and how they ask for any thing of value. This is due to a unanimous city council vote that enacted an ordinance designed to curb aggressive panhandling during

the day and all panhandling after dark.

The new law bans any aggressive panhandling, as well as setting new rules for passive panhandling. This includes a complete ban on all panhandling between sunset and sunrise, which, in the winter months in Nashville, could be as early as 4:30pm.

Homeless advocates were dismayed by the passage of the bill, particularly with the "after dark" ban still attached. Councilman Mike Jameson had suggested that the ban after dark might be removed, saying, "Originally, I was opposed to the legislation because of concerns that it was overreaching."

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The Panhandler's Image

BY RAY PONCE DE LEON
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Abraham Lincoln jotted down the immortal Gettysburg Address in fifteen minutes. Metro Council took considerably longer to finalize their panhandling ordinance.

But no matter the final wording, the crux of the matter will be in how such an ordinance will be enforced. And the definitive factor may lie entirely with a police officer's discretion.

If clothes make the man, does a toboggan make the panhandler?

Two Nashvillians who regularly panhandle whom I interviewed, herein relate their experiences. Wishing to remain anonymous, I will refer to them as "P-1" and "P-2."

RAY: P-1, what do you use the money you make panhandling for?

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An Update on Mr. Lee

Veteran on the Edge of the Streets

BY STEVE SAMRA
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Mr. Lee continues to struggle with problems affecting his home but he's had some successes as well.

He contacted Medicare and discovered that he'd been double-billed for both his regular Medicare payment and his Blue Cross supplemental insurance. He was able to cancel the supplemental insurance and revert to the original Medicare coverage. No word yet on whether he will be refunded the almost ten years of back payments made to Medicare but he's investigating that potential windfall now.

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Our Mission:

The Contributor's goal is to provide a diversity of perspectives on the condition of homelessness and to highlight the contributions of homeless and formerly homeless individuals while providing a source of income. All of the vendors selling this paper are either homeless or formerly homeless.

Our Editors:

Tasha French is a photographer and graphic designer from Huntsville, Alabama. She became interested in homelessness in 2002 upon moving to Nashville and working downtown. She has since shadowed various outreach workers on the street, photographing and interviewing homeless individuals. This project can be found at www.sanshouses.com. She dedicates this issue of The Contributor to actor Brad Renfro who struggled throughout his short life. "I always thought we'd meet again. Thanks for making me 2 degrees from Kevin Bacon."

Steven Samra is a homeless outreach worker who's spent much of his life mired in poverty, homelessness and drug addiction. He kicked his drug addictions in 2000 went to college and has been able to steadily improve his lifestyle as a result. He runs two local blogs; stonesoupstation.blogspot.com and findsteve.blogspot.com and spends most of his time wandering the streets of Nashville with his dogs, Kialai and Kuma, trying to make the lives of the less fortunate a little better each day.

Our Policy:

Editorials and features in The Contributor are the perspectives of the authors. Submissions of news, opinion, fiction, art and poetry are welcomed in hopes of providing a diversity of perspectives on the issues of homelessness and poverty. The Contributor reserves the right to edit any submissions.

Submissions and requests to volunteer, donate or purchase ad space or subscriptions can be emailed to:
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Will Connelly cut his teeth on the streets as an outreach worker for MDHA providing information and services to the homeless. He now assists homeless individuals in applying for disability benefits and housing through Park Center and the Mayor's Homelessness Commission. To his embarrassment, his mentors are Linda Ronstadt and Aaron Neville because they once sang, "I don't know much, but I know I love you."

Tom Wills is a local artist, Nashville native and a member of The Downtown Presbyterian Church where he and other artists have studio space. He has been volunteering for 13 years at the church's weekly lunch for the urban poor. He was also a founding member of Belcourt Yes!, a non-profit formed to reopen the Belcourt Theatre in Hillsboro Village. He runs a blog reprinting two devotional texts chosen by theologian/poet Charles Williams:
tomwills.typepad.com/thenewchristianyear

Tom Sweet: Vendor of the Month

The Contributor is proud to bring you Thomas Sweet as this month's featured vendor. Tom has been pursuing work with The Contributor since our very first vendor meeting. He has contributed his poetry, songs and essays and has found some success selling papers downtown and in the surrounding area.

Tom tells his story here:

About eight months ago I was laid off at my job due to a fall in sales. I wasn't too worried because I had a little over \$1,200.00 in the bank, and thought that that would keep me going until I found another job and the paychecks started rolling in again. Well, it didn't work out that way. Before I knew it, I was unable to pay the rent and found myself homeless. That's how easy it was to become homeless and find myself on the street.

I would like to give you an idea of how it is almost (notice that I said almost) impossible to get out of this situation once you have found yourself there. One of my dilemmas was that I no longer had a mailing address nor a



phone in which a prospective employer could contact me. Another was that even if hired, where was I to get food or a shower while I waited two weeks for a paycheck? Places such as Ken & Carols and Campus for Human Development that feed the homeless and offer facilities for bathing, do so during regular work hours. And let's say that I make it through that two weeks and get my first check. Well, it is still not enough to rent a place. These are just a few of the dilemmas faced by people who find themselves homeless.

But all is not lost. Thank God. There is help if you can resource the right people and practice patience.

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Vendor Conduct: A Critical Component in Paper's Success

BY STEVE SAMRA
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The Contributor's success depends heavily upon the efforts and the conduct of our vendors. This code of conduct addresses the manner in which one can sell the newspaper it is strictly enforced. Violations of any of the rules can be cause for termination.

In order to become a vendor, one must attend two mandatory vendor training sessions and sign a code of conduct. Any problems with vendors can easily be reported to the Contributor staff.

Once trained, all vendors are required to wear a Contributor badge whenever selling the paper. It is to be clearly visible to the public and they are to present it to anyone who asks to see it. The badge shows the vendor's name and two contact numbers for The Contributor.

If you have a concern or complaint about a vendor, please do not hesitate to contact us. We are proud of our vendors and want to make certain they can continue to sell pa-

pers in Nashville without any problems or restrictions. It is important that we react quickly to reports from the community so that we may investigate and, when warranted, provide corrective action.

Some vendor conduct that is expressly prohibited:

1. Using aggressive sales tactics. Potential customers must always feel welcome to say "no" and continue on their way.

2. Selling papers inside of or directly in front of any business without the express, written permission of the business owner on file at our office.

3. Offering additional goods or services while selling the paper.

4. Working while intoxicated or under the influence of drugs or alcohol.

Our goal is to assist the homeless in earning an honest wage without panhandling.

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.EDITORIAL.

Is Your Granddaughter A Panhandler?

OPINION OF THE CONTRIBUTOR
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Beware when you take your grandchild out in public. She might ask for a treat. And, she could be cited for panhandling.

Ordinance # BL2007-66, is our new anti-panhandling ordinance. It passed its third reading on January 15th, 2008. Has our city council comprehended exactly what this ordinance establishes?

It outlaws panhandling in two ways. First, it defines and makes illegal "aggressive panhandling". This basically clarifies existing law and makes it easier to enforce.

Second, it defines "panhandling" as "any solicitation made in person upon any street, alley, sidewalk, public place or park requesting an immediate donation of money or other thing of value for oneself or another person or entity."

It then outlaws "panhandling" after sundown and in "certain" areas. Herein lies the problem. Because the wording in the ordinance is so overly broad and vague, it is entirely possible to make a seemingly innocent request in the wrong place or time, and you've suddenly violated Metro law.

Clearly, "Aggressive panhandling" and "panhandling" are completely different things and aggressive panhandling is already illegal under other currently existing laws.

Panhandling itself is a normal form of conversation. Think about it. John Donne touched our universal need when he wrote, "No

man is an island, entire of itself." We need, we want, we ask.

We ask for money and goods at all places and times. "I'm short on cash, can you get lunch?" "Got a cigarette?" "Daddy, can I have a quarter?" This is normal conversation.

But, normal is now illegal because everyone needs, not just the poor.

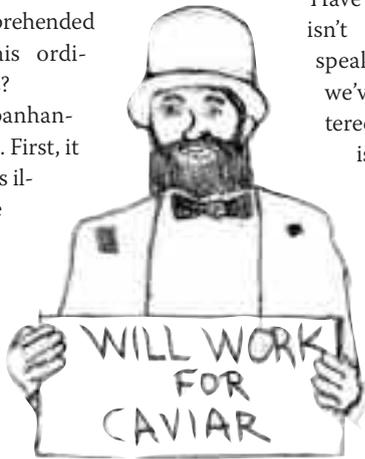
"Have you got a dime?" isn't just panhandler speak, it's a sentence we've probably all uttered at some point. It is a normal function of a social society.

The ordinance's sponsor, Councilman Walter Hunt, was pressed by The Nashville Homeless Power Project to elaborate on this potential interpretation problem. Hunt exclaimed, "This is not targeting you (homeless people)!" He explained that con artists with homes are the problem, not homeless people.

Councilman Hunt claims this bill is aimed at con artists. But since when can laws be "aimed?" Hunt says this isn't about those without homes per-se. This is exactly our point. It effectively targets us all, but Mr. Hunt somehow expects this ordinance to be selectively enforced.

This is the definition of discrimination.

We, at The Contributor, see this as two separate issues. Con artists and aggressive panhandlers should be addressed separately and this ordinance should either be changed for clarity or scrapped.



Ray Ponce de Leon



I have a problem

BY MILDLYDISTURBED
Nashville Blogger

I recently had 14 days in which I have had several run ins with people both in need and those that reeked of scammers. I also am not paying for alcohol or drugs for anyone, I watched what happened to a homeless and mentally ill man in NY who needed help and got money. I'll never contribute to helping someone crawl into a bottle.

I spent the last two weeks of December more on the streets than normal, mainly due to riding a bike dressed as Santa throughout Nashville, stopping to visit friends, warm up, and generally being an attention whore. During this time I ran into a much higher than normal count of people asking me for money, and subsequently have also had a much higher rate of confrontation when I ended up turning someone down.

I was asked to help a well dressed man out who said he was going to die on the streets that night if he did not get help, I told him where the shelters were and he said they would not take him, by the end of the conversation the phrase "I just need a beer to help me accept my fate" had come up and that was that for me. I also guess I have a problem with people dressed better than I am asking for help.

Christmas Eve I was stopped in a parking lot by a man who felt the need to provide me with every form of identification possible to prove his age, name, that his birthday was coming up, and that the shelters would not let him in until it dipped below freezing (which I pointed out it was going to do in about an hour). He had lost his job and had found employment as of Monday, but I was informed that would probably not last because the Nashville Police liked arresting him because he was black. When I showed him my empty wallet he graciously offered to escort me to an ATM, I declined.

Every few days I talked with a woman on the streets who needs help and does not ask for it. I don't think she knows who I am from visit to visit. She gave a friend of mine \$5 as a Christmas gift and I still don't know what I can do to help her.

I listened as two men gave a man downtown in excess of \$40 and one told of his time on the streets with the caveat that the man would make a call to a number they gave him and get off the streets. "There is work here, it is not easy but it will put shelter over you and give you food". Two hours later I saw the same man talking to some other people, two days later he hit me up for money.

I used to hand out Subway cards, good for free subs. After being declined by a couple of people in pretty scary ways, I stopped that. Well, that and Subway quit doing them.

So, I have a problem - I don't trust anyone now with what they say.

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Making Panhandling Safer

BY WALTER HUNT
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Panhandling is not a right in all cases. It is not a right when individuals who are not homeless pose as such to get money from unsuspecting citizens. It is not a right when panhandlers persist and annoy citizens who refuse to honor their request. While I understand many people that ask for money on Nashville streets are simply down on their luck and looking for their next meal, I am convinced that a large number of aggressive panhandlers are not homeless; they are professional beggars. This kind of panhandling is a huge problem in Nashville and in cities across the nation. This problem has become unmanageable. The cities of Indianapolis, Orlando, Louisville, Las Vegas and many other cities have proposed some type of panhandling measures. Some have passed the constitutional test while some have not. I did the research and modeled our proposed bill (Ordinance No BL2007-66) after one that passed the test, Indianapolis, which was upheld by the Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals.

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Motivations

BY CHELSEA BISHOP
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Panhandling can be a problem for companies around the Downtown Nashville Area. Signs posted "NO Loitering" or "No Soliciting" are found posted on major businesses. The main focus for the panhandlers seem to be alcohol and cigarettes, but it that really the case?

Some of the ones that are possible panhandlers may not be using it for that. The proof lies in the questions. How many times do you find people actually stopping to take the time to get to know some of these people? Now and then, you find homeless people sitting on the sidewalk, and people walk by and look down on us, because they assume we are drunk or not really worth the time. Fact is, the ones that are using this charity theory are making it look bad for the ones that really could use the money for something better. My question to the panhandlers is: When you get maybe \$50, \$100 or more dollars each time you are doing this, why not use it to get a room? or go towards a down-payment on an apartment?

The people that constantly walk by everyday don't have to even give any money. They do it willingly, spending approximately over 5,000 dollars a year just to support the homeless. Why do so many of you use it for something that's going to harm your body and make it worse than it already is? The ones that actually do go and get a room and try to get themselves off of the streets with the money that is donated to them, I personally congratulate you! Job well done! If you take a double-take on panhandling, ask yourself, what are they really using it for? Who is this person that I'm talking to on the sidewalk here? Are they someone I would like to meet? What is it really like being in their shoes?

What could I use this money for? Is there something productive that could come out of this money? Budget is the key. Consider the fact. Also, the fact that violence can sometimes play a role in the reason why the cops stay on the scene. The common mistake that some make is that panhandling should be banned.

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Homeless Man Facing Charges for Attempted Murder of Another Homeless Man

Additional charges pending

BY STEVE SAMRA
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36 year old James Woods, a homeless man himself, has been arrested on charges of attempted murder for the shooting of homeless man Francisco Moreno Ramos. Ramos survived a gunshot wound to the head and subsequent amputation of his leg by a train that ran over him as he lay waiting for help after the shooting.

Mr. Woods is also a "person of interest" to the police in three

other shooting deaths of homeless men, Brandon Coons, Jose Coronado and George Ingle, all killed during the month of December, 2007. Bullets from the same gun killed each man and match a bullet found from the shooting of Mr. Ramos, according to a court affidavit.

Mr. Woods has been remanded to custody for a parole violation and since his arrest no other shootings have occurred. He is currently awaiting trial on the shooting of Mr. Ramos and police state there may be additional charges filed.



Homeless Count Coming Soon

BY STEVE SAMRA
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Every year, officials in Nashville attempt to get an idea of just how many people are actually homeless by canvassing the city and manually hand-counting every person found sleeping outside or in city shelters for the night.

While the count is not entirely representative of the full population of homeless men and women, it does provide city officials and those who work with the homeless some baseline numbers to work with. This is critically important as these agencies and

organizations make plans, seek funding and set budgets for the coming year in order to continue assisting the homeless.

Many things hamper achieving a fully accurate count, including lack of information on where to find people sleeping, limitations on access to some areas frequented by homeless, and time in which to actually do the count.

Since homeless counts must be done after shelters close for the evening and before they reopen in the morning so as to avoid duplication, the counts must be performed at night, which impedes an accurate tally.

A common misperception of supposed stepped up police activity targeting homeless camps at count times also inhibits the ability to accurately count everyone.

As word of the impending count spreads, many individuals who have ex-

perienced negative incidents in counts done years ago flee until the effort is over. These people are then missed in the final tally, which can negatively impact overall funding and assistance requests from the various agencies and organizations who work with the homeless.

For the previous two counts in Nashville, no police action was initiated before, after or during the count. There is no reason to assume any will be taken this year and it is the hope of those assisting the homeless that as accurate a count as possible will be obtained this year.

The homeless count will occur on January 29th, 2008, from 9pm until 12am. Homeless individuals interested in assisting in the count as compensated volunteers are encouraged to contact Suzie Tomie at 252-8574 or Will Connelly at 887-8470.



"Tonya Watts" Continued from Page 1

Her activism isn't limited to her music. She has printed anti "Please Help, Don't Give" T-Shirts and Posters, she has started the B Love Foundation, did a coat drive, and is currently doing a sock drive for the homeless. "The homeless rely on their feet as their main mode of transportation," Watts explains on the B Love Foundation myspace page: myspace.com/blovefoundation.

It's not easy being Tonya. She's well aware that the issue of homelessness is not a simple one. She admits, "I don't claim to have answers. But I know in my heart there are answers, and it's time we find them and take action." Her song lyrics (in proper country style) throw in the good with the bad:

*Punks and drunks and Vietnam vets
Teenage Mothers smoking cigarettes
Heroin users, wife abusers
Who haven't got it all together yet
Hungry hopefuls if given a chance
Could make a world of difference*

*Cumberland angels
Down by the river
Some of them dangerous
and some them lost
We look at them like strangers
Could've been our neighbors
Could've been you and me
if a different coin was tossed
But we're all the same
when that final river's crossed*

The Nashville Downtown Partnership represents business owners in downtown Nashville, and they are implementing the "Please Help, Don't Give" campaign. They offer a website that suggests agencies to give to instead of giving money to panhandlers:



Tonya posting flyers with her friend, advocate Jimi Roxx

nashville-downtown.com/pleasehelp/
Their reasoning for redirecting the good will of Nashville and its tourists is plainly stated, "Panhandling is not the answer. Giving to panhandlers is a lose-lose situation. You lose because they often use your money to support their addictions to alcohol and drugs and they lose by continuing these destructive behaviors."

It seems natural enough that a business-oriented organization would view non-profit organizations as the proper vehicles to outsource concern for the homeless. Yet, Tonya Watts does not support that approach, "I understand what The Downtown Partnership is trying to do, but there has to be a better way to go about this. To put these posters in windows all over downtown in these peoples face like this is so far removed from the message Jesus spoke of. It just feels mean spirited!"

Instead she pleads for attention

to their plight, "I am begging the people of Nashville to open their eyes and stand up for Jesus' children of the streets. For those that are not aware of how poorly these people are being treated go down there and ask them for yourself."

Tonya Watts is asking others to do what she did: to talk to homeless people and to wrestle with their struggle alongside them. She doesn't glamorize it. And, she doesn't even mention panhandling. Rather she asks individuals to look deeper into the need and act on it.

And, she likes organizations that fight homelessness too. She started one, The B Love Foundation.

Tonya Watts' song, Cumberland Angels, and more about her crusade against the "Please Help, Don't Give" campaign can be found on her myspace page: www.myspace.com/tonyawattsmusic



Tennessee Titans Make the Playoffs

BY JERRY WEST
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The Titans are in the playoffs for the first time since the 2003 season. It was not pretty, but all that counts is they won. But, the offense is still struggling badly. So let's start with the quarterback. Vince Young has only thrown for nine touchdowns all year with sixteen interceptions. In the last game he was hurt in the third quarter with the game not decided.



But the struggling offense was not all Young's fault. LenDale White has over 1000 rushing yards and can take a lot of hits, but he does not have breakaway speed to go-the-distance on a hand off. The offensive line is solid, but the receiver crop is not that good. They do not have enough genuine experience

and they don't have the wide-open offense you need in the NFL. Jeff Fisher and Norm Chow called the close-to-the-vest, dull play calls and lacked wide-open plays. Rob Bironas is a great field goal kicker, but the Titans will need to score touchdowns against San Diego.

But give Kerry Collins credit for the win against the Colts. You need a good second quarterback to manage the game. He made no mistakes and took the calls that were given up. But make no mistake the Colts did not need the win, and most of their starters weren't even in the game.

The defense is solid. With a little help from the offense, we can get by San Diego. But the defense has to stop LaDainian Tomlinson, the best running back in the league, and make Philip Rivers beat us. The Titans must open up the offense to have a chance to win.



Timid Christians in an Age of Homelessness

BY LINDSEY GLENN
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The theme of social stratification runs through the veins of human history. People separate or "layer" into classes according to a host of circumstances, and it seems that class consciousness is not only a reality of the past, but also one of the present; people know where they fit in. Even Jesus said that the poor will always be with us, but the question remains: will Christians understand this as the dismissal of social responsibility or the engagement of it?

If society can be seen as a ladder, then those who end up on the bottom rungs are deemed the untouchables; the lowest of the low. They have no rights, no dignity, and little opportunity for change. One such group of untouchables has been the lepers. In Biblical times, lepers were confined to the outskirts of civilization where they roamed the streets with bells shouting, "unclean, unclean!" The book of Luke records a story where ten lepers are healed from their disease and only one returns to thank the healer. The grateful one happened to be a Samaritan, the healer happened to be Jesus. To many of the first-century Jews, lepers carried with them the stigma of sinfulness, a stigma also attached to the Samaritans. To



be a leper who was also a Samaritan was considered a double blow. In this story it is interesting that Jesus was walking on the border between Galilee and Samaria when he came upon the lepers. Jesus was a notorious walker and jumper of borders—borders that were both physical and social in nature.

In the time of Jesus, Jews were taught to fear lepers, and understandably so. Contact with one such outcast could strip a Jew of the things he valued: his health, his family, and his status in society. This tradition of fearing the untouchables is one that has been shamefully carried on throughout the history of Christianity. As a young boy, St. Francis of Assisi was conditioned to fear lepers.

We are told that he not only learned to fear the disease itself, but also the dreadful stench and deformity it wrought. As a result, he reacted to lepers with a repulsion and anxiety that only added to the indignities that these individuals already faced. One day, however, when St. Francis was wandering about on horseback, he came upon a man walking toward him on the road. This man was a leper and it is said that he brought about more fear in St. Francis than he had experienced even in battle.

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Homeless in Nashville

BY CHARLES STROBEL
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"How Does It Feel to Be Homeless in Nashville?" When I think of that question, I wonder where is the substance of that question found in the scriptures. During this season I find it in the Bethlehem story of no room in the inn and wonder how it applies to Nashville today.

How did those travelers named Mary and Joseph feel about being without shelter in Bethlehem? Did they face a Bethlehem population that

said, "If I offer you a room, it will only attract more homeless people"? Or would they see signs all over, sponsored by the downtown merchants, saying, "Please help, don't give"? Would they be arrested for panhandling if there were an anti-panhandling ordinance as we have before Metro Council?

We never think of Mary and Joseph as homeless and other stories suggest that they weren't. But they were forced from one place and stranded in a strange town needing shelter. All they could find was a stable in the back.

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Nowhere to Lay His Head

BY KEN LOCKE
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"A scribe then approached and said, 'Teacher, I will follow you wherever you go.' And Jesus said to him, 'Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.'" Matthew 8:19-20.

The Son of Man, Jesus himself, has nowhere to lay his head. Jesus, the Lord of Creation and Judge of the earth, is a wanderer without a place in this world to even lay down. That's an interesting insight, but what does it mean to us?

We could use this verse to argue that since Jesus was homeless, and we should all strive to be like Jesus, the homeless are more like Jesus than anyone else. I've heard

several people say just that. The flaw with this argument is that it suggests that being like Jesus is only about our living conditions. I would like to think that being like Jesus is more about how we love God and others than whether or not we have a regular place to sleep. If being homeless makes us more like Jesus in an important and meaningful way then perhaps we should exchange our shoes for sandals and our pants for robes.

We could also use this verse to argue that since Jesus was homeless we should treat the homeless with the same dignity and respect we would show to Jesus. That certainly sounds reasonable. But while I agree that we should treat the homeless with the same respect we would show Jesus, I would argue that Jesus was also respectful and kind to those who had houses.



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Exercising the Spirit: Hospitality

BY SCOTT OWINGS
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To a disciple who was attempting forms of spirituality that bordered on the bizarre the Teacher was heard to say, "Holiness is a mysterious thing: The greater it is, the less it is noticed."

An 18th century icon of the Holy Trinity was painted by the Russian artist Andrei Rublev. It was inspired by the mysterious but wonderful story of hospitality found in the Torah (Genesis 18). As you may recall, three strangers appear at the home of Abraham and Sarah and are treated royally, as if they were God himself. And that, in fact, is what the Genesis narrative and Rublev's painting wants us to see.

Hospitality, as practiced by Abraham and Sarah, blesses God and in turn brings a surprise blessing to us!

Hospitality is indeed a lost art, practice, and virtue. Our lives are busy—full of noise, crowded with appointments, ballgames, deadlines, and numerous church activities. Hospitality takes time and an unhurried presence, something few, if any of us, have these days. Tragically, when hospitality is eliminated or neglected, the Trinity's presence is missed!

The good news is that hospitality can, and must, be reclaimed. Call it what you will, but we must slow down, creating "down time," "family time," and "unhurried leisure" so that hospitality becomes possible. This will

not be easy and will likely require a reprioritizing of our busy calendars. While hospitality takes great intentionality and can be costly, the rewards are without measure—far greater than we can ever imagine! Consider what the Hebrew writer said when he wrote:

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (Hebrews 13:2 NRS)

This passage confirms what the Genesis 18 story highlights: when we welcome guests or strangers into our midst and treat them with kindness, we are blessing God. Seldom will we recognize with our physical eyes a guest as the face of God; however, in a very real sense this is reality, the meaning behind the sacred symbol of hospitality.

The story of Abraham and Sarah declares another mystery about hospitality. That is, as we show hospitality to others and seek to bless them, we are in turn blessed by God. Make no mistake: I am not saying we practice hospitality so that we might benefit. However, God is present in each person—even in the least and the last... perhaps more so! Unexpectedly, God also uses the guest to become in a sense the host—that is, the one who often brings the greater blessing. This happens in Genesis 18 as the Three not only are served, but serve, bringing laughter into the home by the long-awaited promise of a child.

Like all the disciplines, hospitality is a spiritual exercise and one that takes effort and practice. But, hospi-

tality is more than worth any effort we might exert, for not only will it strengthen our spiritual muscles, it will also bring a delightful blessing to God, others, and ourselves.

In closing, here a few concrete exercises you might want to try as a means by which you can grow in the grace of hospitality.

* Look for a guest at church and invite them to lunch, asking them to tell their story and share yours as well. As Eugene Peterson points out in his fascinating book *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places*, "Stories are verbal acts of hospitality."

* Have an Ice Cream party in your neighborhood, asking each person to bring their favorite flavor.

* Be a mentor for a youth.

* Volunteer to be a guide for recently arrived foreigners in your city.

* Host an exchange student or volunteer to take an exchange student on a tour of your favorite site.

* Invite someone that you don't know well into your home for a meal or dessert.

* Last-but certainly not least—seek to "be present" to each person you encounter. Simply being aware of others, looking them in the eye, and welcoming a stranger into your space may be the most important and neglected hospitable practice of all!



Reflection

BY DON BIESSWENGER
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"On the first day of Christmas my true love sent to me a partridge in a pear tree ..."

Thus begins twelve verses of the familiar song about twelve days of Christmas. God began a new thing with a baby born in a manger, but it is only the beginning, not the end. Christmas is not over yet. Why twelve days?

At the birth of Jesus into a poor family, many things happened: There were shepherds from nearby fields who saw a star and thought something had happened. There were cows, donkeys and camels around as well. Visitors came from afar. News of the birth traveled fast. One frightening thing happened: There was the king, who was threatened by this child and who ordered killing all the male children born at that time. This meant Jesus too. Mary and Joseph hightailed it to Egypt until things settled down. Jesus threatened those in power.

The story also says, "Mary pondered all these things in her heart." "Why," she must have thought, "It is just a baby in a blanket born in a barn?" She needed time to consider all these events. She wanted to think, to wonder and discern the meaning of what had happened and was happening.

Do we have things to ponder? Where do we find hope to keep going? Where have we messed up? Do we relate to other persons with respect?

Could we get along better? How do we deal with our anger? Lots to ponder . . .

- when our life gets out of control and hope vanishes

- when we return to old patterns of addiction.

- when we need to speak up where we are disrespected

- when we speak up and might keep silent.

We might ponder the meaning of Immanuel, which means "God with us" in this broken world. Does God challenge what we think? Does God honor deception, violence and hatred? Jesus comes along to point us a way. Pondering helps find that way. Our opinions will not just be affirmed, but often challenged.

Amidst it all we are invited to listen again to the holy presence in our hearts, minds and spirits. Indeed, God is present with us in this old and wondrous world teaching us what it means to be a human being. What do we discern? Others can also help us, seeing what we might not see, offering light where we see only darkness. In the midst of that pondering we sometimes sense a deeper stream. Deep calls to deep. The spirit of God guides us in our praying and living. We are not alone. Not Ever. God loves us and cares for us. Alleluia . . .

Mary pondered; so do we. Enter the new year rejoicing but ponder a bit as well. Happy new year . . .



"Timid Christians" Continued from Page 5

But, in a moment of beauty and vulnerability, he was compelled to jump off his horse and embrace him. It was there on the road that St. Francis realized his charge: to begin a new tradition of intentional service to the poor and the outcast.

Some seven-and-a-half centuries later, a great admirer of St. Francis began the Missionaries of Charity, an order of nuns whose mission was to serve the poorest of the poor. This admirer was Mother Teresa. In Calcutta, Mother Teresa spent her time cleaning the sores and washing the dirt off of society's untouchables. While most Hindus, Muslims, Jews, and Christians alike extended these broken people no more help than a coin tossed into their rags, the Missionaries of Charity spent their lives creatively living out God's love and restoring dignity to the lowly.

In the times of Jesus, St. Francis, and Mother Teresa, an ethic of fear penetrated culture: a fear of contact, a fear of descending the social ladder. It is not altogether different in our society today. Instead of fearing the lepers, we are conditioned to fear the poor and homeless. Layers of insulation cushion "us" from "them," and these layers leave a residue of comfort and security. It seems that fear is an effective motivator, and if we can be taught to fear "the other" (namely, the poor), then we will not make contact with them. Recently, a homeless man was accused of raping a woman downtown. This news made the headlines, and it is easy to see how great tragedies like this perpetuate an ethic of fear that discourages contact.

Along with subscribing to an ethic of fear, timid Christians have fit comfortably into an economic model that operates on the principles of this world rather than the principles presented in the Holy Scriptures. While the Old and New Testaments teach a way of life based upon the "Jubilee principles" of mercy and grace, Christians often find themselves adopting the way of life proposed by the world. We are currently living in a capitalistic economy. The spoke around which our society revolves is cap-

ital, money, profit. In this kind of paradigm, it is understandable that people would want to protect their wealth. It is also understandable that people would fear anything that might be a threat to what they value most. It is this kind of paradigm that tells us not to make contact with those on the lower rungs of the social ladder. Our present economy thrives only when people are constantly climbing upward.

It is time that those of us who claim to be disciples of a homeless and uncomfortable Christ question our allegiances, our way of life. It is time to realize that our faith

has social implications. It is time to ask what it would look like to embody mercy and grace in Nashville in 2008. Yes, it is true that fear is an effective motivator, but I have heard rumors of a better one. I have heard of a motivator that does not insulate itself with the illusion of security. I have heard of a motivator less concerned with capital and more concerned with community. I have heard of a motivator that walks the border between social classes and jumps it regularly. This motivator is the

one practiced by Jesus. It is the motivator of love. Only when we are creatively motivated by love will another way of life be possible: one where mercy and grace become like highly valued crops, where we lean on our faith rather than our paychecks.

What if we could jump off the ladder and offer grace and mercy to the people who have been placed in a box by society? Is this not exactly what Jesus does in the story of the ten lepers? The Jews had placed lepers and Samaritans in a pre-defined box: they were the unredeemable. But in this passage, Jesus, the great border-crosser, toppled the paradigm of fear and prejudice and spoke of the Samaritan leper as the grateful and faithful one, the only one of ten who was healed inside and out. In this he showed that people rarely fit in the boxes they are placed in. Let us learn from this example as we re-imagine what our lives could look like. Let us join with those who are doing good works. Let us learn to suffer with those who suffer instead of merely dropping spare coins into the rags of beggars.



"Homeless in Nashville" Continued from Page 5

We also may not think of them the way theologian John Shea writes. He says there are those who push and those who get pushed. There are those who decree a census and those who must travel to register. The parents and child are outcasts; they are travelers; there is no room in the inn. This is not the stuff of sentiment and romance but the cruel facts of poverty.

The cruel facts of poverty bring us to the feeling of being homeless in Bethlehem, Baghdad or Nashville. Unless we know the facts of such poverty, those who are without homes look differently than they are. Resignation looks like laziness, aimlessness looks like loitering, hopelessness looks like lethargy, coughs cover chronic lung diseases, other people's worn-out shoes only exacerbate foot problems, and backpacks carry what our medicine cabinets contain.

Imagine being in a strange city where you know no one. You are penniless, with only the clothes you have on and a small bag. You sleep wherever you can, always with one eye open. You have no access to medical care, education, job training and housing.



Homeless agencies offer some help, but they plead "no" or cite inadequate resources. Add to that an attitude that you pick up as you walk around town. People hollering out car doors, "Get a job yobum." And if you happen to have a radio plugged in your ear, you may hear some mean-spirited talk radio blaming you for everything, but especially for destroying the boot-strap myth that everyone of us made it on our own, with no help or hand-outs from anyone. Let your imagination take over and it gets even worse as you think of all the dangers out there, once nighttime comes. The parks close, the library closes, the MacDonald's closes, and the streets become more deserted, leaving you with few places to go and sleep safely.

How does it feel to be homeless in Nashville? Maybe if we knew how everybody who is not homeless felt about the homeless, it would help. But we have no data, except old data. Dr. Barry Lee, a former sociology professor at Vanderbilt, conducted a poll of Nashvillians regarding their feelings about the homeless. He reported that 82 percent of the people interviewed "overwhelmingly favor providing more public services for the city's homeless." (Tennessean, Nov. 24, 1987, p.1) "I think the real litmus test is that...a majority of the respondents said they'd be willing to

increase taxes if that's what it took," he said in a Nashville Banner story (November 19, 1987), p. A 12. In a private conversation, he told me that most of the persons he interviewed had attributed their caring attitude to some personal contact with at least one homeless person. Personal contact led to more understanding and compassion.

Now 20 years later, maybe a holiday gift for the city's homeless could be an updated survey, sponsored by the Homeless Commission, the Metro Human Relations Commission, and Community-Nashville, with funding by the Chamber of Commerce. (And while we're at it—let's sample our attitudes about minorities and immigrants) It would answer a lot of the vexing questions before us.

It also could answer how it feels to be homeless in Nashville. For if there has been a hardening of attitudes toward the homeless since 1987—more negativity and less compassion—we can imagine how they must feel.

Yet I want to think otherwise. And I believe I am not alone when I say this. Thousands of people in this community do care. They represent a compassionate Nashville who walk and talk about how we can be better. They remind me of the gentle message of this season that we never want to forget—a message that cries out joyfully for Nashville to embrace the divine vision of a humanity that can "sleep in heavenly peace."



Famous Amos? How About Famoser Donna?

BY RAY PONCE DE LEON
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Why is Famous Amos so famous? Did he ever bake chocolate chip cookies specifically for free distribution to the homeless? True, some room-in-the-inn churches might include his baked goods in their sack lunches. But, realistically, Monsieur Amos is a relative unknown among Nashville's homeless population. That is, compared to our own chocolate chip diva, Donna the Cookie Lady.

Donna, who works in a downtown Nashville office, has been a volunteer at West End's Cathedral of the Incarnation since the winter of 1996. Every Tuesday night she distributes her delicacies to grateful room-in-the-inn guests. When asked what she likes most about her crumbed philanthropy, Donna replied, "To see the delighted looks on their faces as I pass them out."

Are her cookies concocted from an old family recipe? "The recipe's on the bag of chocolate chips," she confessed.

When did Cookie Lady decide that cookies were her life? "I'm also a cat aficionado," Donna added. "Before I turned ten, my mother and I would take cookies, toys and clothes to poor people. I donated some of my own toys, which made Mother proud."

In 1982, Donna volunteered for the Salvation Army soup kitchen in Washington, D.C. "At that time, St. Lufus, the mental institution, let everybody out. Soon, their meds ran out and they moved into Washington Circle Park. One of the ex-patients believed he was the exiled president of a foreign country. I just called him 'Mr. President!'"

In Murfreesboro in 1987, Donna worked with St. Rose's Catholic church. Her green bean casserole was a flop. "People hurled

into their handkerchiefs! So I began bringing cookies."

During the eleven years at her present site, the Cathedral, Donna estimates that she's served over ten thousand chocolate chippers. A Catholic, Donna believes St. Chip should be canonized.

Another event Cookie Lady's been involved with, for her eighth year, is a Benefit Bluegrass Concert in Downtown Nashville. "My fellow co-hosts are Eddie and Martha Adcock and Jean and Jim Johnson. This will be the benefit's eighth year at the Stadium Inn."



When asked what advice she'd give young girls aspiring to be future Cookie Ladies, Donna suggested, "Start baking very young. I was four when I started baking cookies."

Apparently, it's like figure skating. You need to start very young to become a World Class Cookie Lady!

Homeless Radio Marathon Coming to Nashville

BY MARK LEMLEY
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On February 20th, Nashville will host the 11th annual National Homelessness Marathon. The Marathon is a 14 hour radio broadcast to raise public awareness of homeless related issues. The event began in New York in 1998 by Jeremy Alderson who continues to head up the broadcast. In a press release, Alderson says he brings the Marathon to a different city each year "because homelessness is both a local and national problem, and we want to highlight the ways in which local and national issues interact in different regions".

Last year's Marathon was held in Fresno, CA and was broadcast by 120 radio stations nationally. Alderson says this year he chose Nashville "partly because it is a city at the crossroads in terms of its treatment of homeless people, and in this respect,

it is like many other cities across the United States."

This year, the Marathon is set to originate from Nashville's Campus for Human Development. The broadcast will begin at 6pm February 20th and run for 14 hours continuously. WRFN, Radio Free Nashville, will be Nashville's affiliate for the Broadcast. The Marathon will include airtime for homeless men and women as well as Homeless advocates such as The Nashville Homeless Power Project. A microphone will be available on site to people living on the streets who want to share their thoughts and stories. "It is our mission to help homeless people to be heard and to promote a national dialog about why there is poverty in America," says Alderson. More information and broadcasts from previous years can be found at www.homelessnessmarathon.org.

Meeting Narrows Homelessness Commission Focus

BY STEVE SAMRA
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The first Homelessness Commission meeting for 2008 set the tone for what Chairperson and former Vice Mayor Howard Gentry feels is the issue of greatest concern for our homeless population, housing.

To that end, Mr. Gentry and the commission members are hoping to limit their involvement and participation in other areas of homelessness in order to remain focused and on task.

Mr. Gentry pointed out that while the myriad problems surrounding the lives of Nashville's homeless population are important and need to be addressed, without housing other problems will never be rectified.

The commission missed its stated goal of 200 housing units a year in 2007 entirely, creating not one new affordable housing unit.

The commission did hear the request for resolutions put forth by the Nashville Homeless Power Project on their recent report on the Nashville Rescue Mission. The commission members made some minor changes in the document and approved the request for the NHPP's resolutions.

Councilman at Large Jerry Maynard then agreed to form a committee to begin investigating whether temporary shelters in Tennessee were governed by any regulations and/or standards with the goal of possibly establishing them in the event they did not exist.

Mission Representative Don Worrell supported the formation and implementation of set standards but expressed concern for the impact any new standards might have on Father Charlie Strobel's Room In The Inn program.

NHPP commission member Ms. Clemmie Greenlee provided an explanation of why the NHPP created the report on the Mission, hoping to clarify the NHPP's motivation for the action and dispel any rumors on the matter. According to Ms. Greenlee, the primary goal of the report was to create an environment conducive to positive change and improvement of the Mission's living conditions for its temporary residents.

"New Panhandling Law" Continued from Page 1

But it has now been amended to address only aggressive panhandling. As defined, it would be tough to defend the type of conduct at issue. So I am inclined to support it." Yet, this was not to be the case. The bill passed unanimously with the after dark ban attached.

Councilman Eric Cole, while voting for the ordinance, requested, during the council meeting, that "concerned stakeholders" in the downtown area get together on June 1st, 2008 to determine how best to address issues facing homeless citizens and downtown businesses and residents. It is unclear yet who will be included in this meeting.

Outreach worker Will Connelly believes that the passing of the ordinance won't change much for many homeless people, whom he states don't panhandle at all, but could still leave them vulnerable towards legal action. "We already have laws on the books that address aggressive panhandling, and they are used by police when things get out of control. We didn't need this law and the after dark ban may unfairly target people who otherwise would never have been considered 'panhandlers.'"

The law went into effect immediately.

Ordinance # BL2007-66:

It shall be unlawful for any person to engage in an act of panhandling when either the panhandler or the person being solicited is located in, on, or at any of the following locations:

1. Any bus stop;
 2. Any sidewalk cafe;
 3. Any area within twenty-five (25) feet (in any direction) of an automatic teller machine (ATM) or entrance to a bank;
 4. Any daycare or community education facility, as defined by Section 17.04.060 of the Metropolitan Code;
 5. Within ten (10) feet of a point of entry to or exit from any building open to the public, including commercial establishments.
- C. It shall be unlawful to engage in the act of panhandling on any day after sunset or before sunrise.
- D. It shall be unlawful for any person to engage in an act of aggressive panhandling."

A Portrait of Outreach

BY BENN STEBLETON
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Part 1

It was just another Friday night on the street. There was sparse activity in Riverfront Park. A few nicely dressed couples, probably tourists, were gazing into the Cumberland River with hopes of spying romance in the reflected lights. During the day all they would have seen was a muddy flow, but night had a way of hiding imperfections.

The hopeful pairs kept their distance from the only other inhabitants of the darkened park. Small groups of homeless people scattered themselves throughout the same terraces. Some drank from brown paper bags. Some passed around hand rolled cigarettes. All swapped fantastical stories.

There was no interaction between the tourists and the homeless. No requests for coins, no threats of violence, not even a passing hello. Both groups seemed to want to pretend the other did not actually exist. One could speculate for pages on why each camp would wish such a thing.

I, also, ignored the tourists. They were not helpful for my job. Frankly, I found them little more than annoying. But, on occasion, the drunken ones could be entertaining.

I was under the employ of Oasis Center, working their street outreach program. One night each week, two nights in the summer, I left the comforts of a mainstream lifestyle to spend several hours amongst the unhoused.

The mission of the Oasis Center Street Outreach program was (and still is) to locate, engage, and assist runaway and homeless youth ages 13-21. In Nashville, a city that tends to chase street kids away, locating was the most challenging part of the mission.

To address this difficult but vital

task, I scheduled some time in the homeless world. I frequently used contacts, people who could show me the young faces fresh to Nashville's streets. There was no one better capable of assisting me than those adults who themselves called the streets home.

I made every effort to fit in, to relate, to identify, to understand, to gain acceptance, to become a part of the culture. But no matter what I did, I knew that I was as much of a tourist as those couples watching reflections in the river. They had come to see a city in which they did not live, and I had come to see a culture in which I did not live. At the end of every shift, I went home. I slept in a bed protected by a roof and four walls. No matter how sh**ty my apartment might be, it was enough to separate me from those who made their bunk outside.

But through a few years of consistent appearances, I had gained at least a superficial understanding of the downtown Nashville street scene.

This particular April evening was cool without being cold. The retreating winter had provided some perspective on temperature. This night would be uncomfortable, but it would not be dangerous.

My accompanying volunteer, Krista Stevens, and I began our shift with a quick sweep through the boat dock. Up the hill—at street level—traffic, music, and an unharmonious mixture of voices dominated the air. But here it was quiet enough that one could hear the water softly negotiating with the dock.

A few bodies were already curled up on the benches, absorbed into torn jackets or stained blankets. Later that year, Tara Cole would be pushed to her death from this spot. But such brutality was not even an imagined possibility when I walked past the cocooned forms.



“I knew that I was as much of a tourist as those couples watching reflections in the river. They had come to see a city in which they did not live, and I had come to see a culture in which I did not live.”

Continued on Page 12

Ben's Tip of the Month

BY BEN GRIFFITH
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I'm bad at remembering names. My brain has a voice activated off switch, just say "my name is...". That's it, brain off. I've tried rhyming, saying names outloud six times, writing them down, visualizing a picture on the person's forehead...none of it works.

I'm frustrated by all of this because I know that names are very important. Take what Amanda Jones told me at Room in the Inn one day:

"First Benjamin...using a person's name is the greatest thing I have learned from years of working with people in general. It instantaneously removes people from the anonymous. If we only paid attention to the power of this knowledge. I have watched fights diffused, smiles emerge, and tears fall. The folks who find themselves on the streets often times lose everything. A lot of times this name is their only possession. And if it's offered to us to use, how ungrateful are we that we do not return it in it's most pristine state."

And the ladies at Room in the Inn are amazing, I think they know the name of every person that walks through their doors. They also have this unspoken authority I could never dream of having. They'll walk up to people who are fighting and it will instantly dissolve. I could write about this for a while, but I digress, I have another confession.

Maturity is something I've never struggled with. That is to say I've never struggled with wanting it. I'm pretty comfortable with staying a kid forever. 28 years into the project I think I'm still going strong. Problem is given my own immaturity, I have no problem calling anyone my age or younger "kid". I work with young people, young people struggling to define themselves and explore their strengths. Me calling someone "kid" who's trying to assert their own independence does little to en-

courage them.

What's the big deal? It is this: words are important. My job has been teaching me that. Yes words are just words, but we use them to express how much we value other people. It's not hard to show someone we value them with carefully chosen words, however, it's even easier to take shortcuts. For instance, I've often heard the term "feeds" applied to meals for the homeless. This one was simple to figure out, even for old "foot-in-mouth" me. People don't eat at feeds, cattle do. Time for a new term! My friend Kevin Barbieux, a well-known blogger, is a very smart man, I turned to him for help. He pointed out that my first problem was calling homeless people "the homeless" rather than "people, who are homeless." This is simple, powerful and true. To save time we drop a word "people". Suddenly we aren't talking about people anymore, rather a problem "homelessness." Problems can be solved, and sorted and blamed on other problems. People are much more complex.

People always have good in them that can be recognized, despite their problems. So, what to call a meal? "Call it what is is," Kevin told me, "if it's a dinner, call it a dinner, if it's a lunch, call it a lunch. A lunch where they serve homeless people." Pretty simple stuff, good stuff. It involves me using three or four extra words, but in the process I can show someone that I view them as a person, not a problem, or even worse a cow. Ever called your girlfriend a cow? Ok, don't, but if you have, you know words are powerful indeed.

And so, I'll take this full circle, my suggestion for the month doesn't involve giving anything, it involves getting something. Learn a homeless person's name. Be honored if they give it to you, it's a gift. Be prepared, a person with a name quickly moves from "homeless" to "person" to "friend." And we don't solve, or cure, or fix friends, we love them.



My Oasis

BY JENNY GRAY
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Webster's dictionary of the English language defines the word "oasis" in two ways. The first is "a fertile or green area in an arid region." The second is "something that provides refuge, relief, or pleasant contrast." Although I do not consider vocabulary to be one of my passions, there is something about this word that really intrigues me. It could be that, depending on how technical you want to get, I work at an oasis.

I am an outreach worker for Oasis Center, a non-profit organization in Nashville whose mission is to help

youth grow, thrive, and create positive change in themselves and their community. The Oasis Center Street Outreach program was designed to provide basic emergency services to Nashville's homeless youth that are between thirteen and twenty-one years old. We start by providing each youth that we meet with a backpack full of supplies. From there, we focus on relationship-building and helping youth work towards their own individual goals.

When I began working at Oasis Center a little over six months ago, I quickly realized that the Center is very appropriately named. My coworkers are fantastic, the environment is supportive, and the job feels like a perfect fit. But I also quickly realized that spending my days in a comfortable office at Oasis Center is not exactly in my job description.



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The Christ I Came to Know

BY BRIAN HUSKEY
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I met the person I ultimately came to identify as the risen Christ in an alley behind Christ Episcopal Cathedral in Nashville, Tennessee. I was serving as a street outreach worker for the Nashville metropolitan government at the time, assigned to provide a highly constrained regimen of social services to homeless people. Late one February afternoon as I was leaving a meeting in an adjacent office building, I encountered Walt B. (not his real name) as he stumbled down the alley, eating day-old doughnuts and muttering incoherently to himself. After a perfunctory on-the-spot social assessment, I called a nearby shelter and obtained Walt a safe,



warm place to sleep for that night. The next day I learned from the shelter staff that Walt had a seizure during the night and was transported via ambulance to the hospital. The shelter workers suspected that he was intoxicated when I brought him to the shelter (although his blood alcohol content was zero on arrival at the hospital a couple of hours later). I was

mildly chastised for wasting their time (and mine) on an individual they considered to be a problem, a hopeless drunk with no motivation to change his circumstances. The local police precinct officers, pastors of downtown Nashville's churches, and social services providers who knew Walt held the same opinion about him. They all thought Walt was a ne'er-do-well, soon destined to be a statistic in the county's indigent burial program at Bordeaux Cemetery.

I came to know Walt well in the months following my original encounter with him. At first he was reticent and suspicious but eventually he began to regularly seek me out when I made my daily rounds of alleyways and parks in downtown Nashville. I would get reports from police officers about Walt's frequent falls and mishaps that occurred as a result of his seizures. Occasionally I would hear that he was in the hospital after a bad spill. But the specific charge of my responsibilities as Nashville's first full-time downtown outreach worker in many years severely limited the assistance I could provide him.

Everything changed on a sweltering August afternoon when I found a confused and disheveled Walt at a busy intersection after he had been inappropriately discharged from a hospital emergency room without a convalescent placement. Walt was parched and sunburned. He had defecated in the thin hospital scrubs he was still wearing. Breaking every protocol of outreach policy and procedure,

“Breaking every protocol of outreach policy and procedure, I transported Walt to the shelter that provided medical respite care for homeless people and insisted that they admit him without a physician referral . . . Walt was not going to die on the streets on my watch.”

what I felt deep within my spirit. The answer that welled up in the tears that revealed my shame and fear, the response that I simply could not let pass my lips on that day, was, “Because you are Christ to me, my friend.”

For me, Jesus was exactly where he promised he would always be: among the least of my brothers and sisters. Kevin Burke says, “Humanity itself is the grammar of God, and God's finest poetry is written on the parchment of our lives with the ink and the openness of the poor.” If this statement is true, then the lyric of the Divine was indelibly etched onto my heart in the time I spent with Walt.

I transported Walt to the shelter that provided medical respite care for homeless people and insisted that they admit him without a physician referral. Disgusted with the lack of sympathy Walt received from local churches and the absence of formal social services response to Walt's dire need for permanent housing, I personally took on the task of securing an appropriate placement for him, no matter the cost – even if it meant I lost my job for over-assertiveness or exceeding professional boundaries. Walt was not going to die on the streets on my watch. From a scriptural perspective, in modern-day Nashville, Tennessee, I was not exactly a consistently good Samaritan, but I also knew I could be neither the priest nor the Levite any longer, pitilessly passing by someone who was suffering so terribly.

Walt and I began an Emmaus walk together. We shared meals and life stories as we spent days together negotiating the bureaucracies of public health care, subsidized housing and government entitlement programs. Walt's major medical problem turned out not to be alcoholism, but an extremely rare seizure disorder that frequently gave him the appearance of a comatose drunk.

His seizures were easily controlled with medication. I took him to get a haircut and new clothes. We drank bad coffee, played cards, laughed, cried, and cursed about the fiercely hot Nashville summers. We talked about our mothers, both of whom were coincidentally named Martha. We shared the hope of a better world. My friends got interested in my effort to help Walt and provided the security deposit and first month's rent for his new place, as well as all the furnishings he needed.

Six weeks later, Walt ended fourteen years of homeless exile on the streets on Nashville on the day he moved into his own apartment. As we were setting up his kitchen, he commented to me, “I don't know why you have been doing all these things to help me.” My heart was immediately convicted – but I dared not say what I felt deep within my spirit. The answer that welled up in the tears that revealed my shame and fear, the response that I simply could not let pass my lips on that day, was, “Because you are Christ to me, my friend.”

For me, Jesus was exactly where he promised he would always be: among the least of my brothers and sisters. Kevin Burke says, “Humanity itself is the grammar of God, and God's finest poetry is written on the parchment of our lives with the ink and the openness of the poor.” If this statement is true, then the lyric of the Divine was indelibly etched onto my heart in the time I spent with Walt.

Continued on Page 19

Re-visioning Outreach

BY KEN KRAYBILL
Training Specialist
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“Okay, and what's the but...?”

The workers say, with a grin, that the only but is that you get to move yours into a place that is warm and dry. If you wish, you can sleep in your own bed, store your food in a refrigerator, hang your clothes on a hook, and take a shower whenever you want.

“And...?”

To live in this housing, there is no requirement to go through any kind of treatment or rehabilitation program. No hoops to jump through. How you choose to live your life is up to you. Of course, just like others in housing, you've got to

“The gifts which derive from justice are greater than those that spring from charity.”

- Kahlil Gibran

A recurring dream...

Several outreach workers visit a homeless encampment down by the river. They apologize for not dropping by in awhile. There have been some changes “back at the office” – something about a re-visioning process – resulting in changes in their jobs.

The outreach workers pull out some photos and pass them around to folks, most of

whom have been residents of the riverbank for years. The workers explain that the apartment units pictured in the photos are safe, decent, affordable, and available places that basically can be theirs for the taking. No major demands required. You basically just have to pay your rent, if you have an income, and treat your neighbors reasonably.

The small group of individuals in the encampment waits for the workers to say more, knowing there must be a catch.

The workers continue...we just want to let you know about this housing opportunity, and invite you to check it out. There's no catch. Nobody's trying to force you to do anything. It only seems fair that you should have a realistic option to move into your own place if you want. It's totally your decision.

You can choose among various places because people often prefer to live in certain neighborhoods. Oh, and you need to know that this is not temporary housing; it's permanent. You can live there as long as you choose.

Cost per-day, per-person in New York City (2004)

• Supportive Housing	\$41.85
• Shelter	\$54.42
• Prison	\$74.00
• Jail	\$164.57
• Mental Hospital	\$467
• Hospital	\$1185

Source: The Lewin Group, 2004
documents.csh.org/documents/ke/csh_lewin2004.PDF

keep up with your rent, be safe, respect the rights of others, and try to be a good neighbor.

If this interests you, let us know. We can go take a look at these

places together. If you choose a place you want to live, we can help you complete the necessary paperwork, and soon thereafter give you a key. Once you move in, a team of folks will be available on an on-going basis to support you in keeping your housing and assist with any other concerns or needs you might have.

End of dream...

This dream is becoming a reality on a small scale in some cities throughout the U.S. Often targeting the most long-term, vulnerable and/or expensive-to-the-system homeless people, programs are approaching folks with the tangible offer of permanent supportive housing. Not surprisingly, it's working.

When offered attainable housing options with reasonable support, people rarely turn down a warm, safe place of their own to call home. Consequently individuals typically realize renewed stability and health, as do the communities in which they live. Permanent supportive housing is a dream come true for all.



Love Bums

by: Jim Jenkins

Lovelessness
Is a curse of self-perpetuation
Like money you need it to get it
And like money the tycoons of love
Look down on us with vanity and disdain
And like money there are love bums
Desperate for love but unable to get it
By any means save for begging
Like the bicycling gay serial killer schizophrenic

When such bums come around I feel like a dick
But I don't know whether to get out a wallet or stick
Because some people are simply full of crazy
Like the nervous ticking bicycling gay serial killer schizophrenic

Jesus said love the least of these brothers
Like beggars, hookers, taxers, and lepers
But Jesus didn't have to worry about someone getting into his
cell phone's address book
Like the rapid talking nervous ticking bicycling gay serial
killer schizophrenic

The Torah says love your neighbor
Whether he's black or white or gay or
Straight
But Moses lived out in the f**king desert!
He never had an unpredictable crackpot in his car window
Like the crazy eyed rapid talking nervous ticking bicycling gay
serial killer schizophrenic

The Buddha calls for compassion for all
Even if they make your skin want to crawl
But I seriously don't buy that this guy teaches at Father Ryan
No, not the storytelling crazy eyed rapid talking nervous
ticking bicycling gay
serial killer schizophrenic

The hindu scriptures say that all things pass
But Vishnu and Shiva can kiss my ass!
Because it's just not that easy
When presented with the skinny sweaty storytelling crazy eyed
rapid talking nervous
ticking bicycling gay serial killer schizophrenic

God grant me the serenity
To give money and love to those who won't shank me under the
chin
The balls to walk away from those who will
And the wisdom to know the difference

Promise

by: Mary Duncan Morris

Homeless Writer

Come, make me a promise
One that you can't break
Come, make me a promise
I've had all I can take

I dream that you take me
Far, far away
I wish you were here
Every waking night and day

I want a new life with you
So please just try
Make me a promise
So we can fly

This chickencoop
We called home
Instead be shining stars
With the universe to roam

Far from this joke that
They call life
It's not worth the stress
We can't endure this strife.

If you want to please me
Promise me that you will
Grow to love me again someday
So much that you'll come to Nashville.

All Alone

by: Mary Duncan Morris

Homeless Writer

For I feel so alone.
Do you know how it feels?
How it feels to be alone?
That no one wants to be with you?
Broken hearted, you're all alone.

For I feel so alone.
Do you know how it feels?
How it feels to walk alone?
That there is nowhere to go?
No place to go, you're all alone.

For I feel so alone.
Do you know how it feels?
How it feels to think alone?
That they try to erase your thoughts?
Your mind is left blank, you're all alone.

For I feel so alone.
Do you know how it feels?
How it feels to live alone?
That you have no one to turn to?
No one to turn to, you're all alone.

Homeless Tears

by: Chelsea Bishop

Homeless Writer

I look around,
I see the bitter tears,
I feel the wind nipping,
at my ears,
the cries of hopelessness soar in the wind,
as I wipe away the rain again.
The lack of energy,
the lack of inspiration
to push away the enemy.
I see the face of oppression,
standing behind the
face of gloom,
why do we often sit idly by,
and let our life fade so soon?

Crawl Till You Fall

BY RAY PONCE DE LEON

Homeless Writer

poncedillyon@hotmail.com



You may not be able to do the Watermelon Crawl, but there's one crawl everyone can participate in: the First Saturday Gallery Crawl, put on by Twist Gallery. Twist is located in the balcony of the historic Arcade building. Since April, 2007, the first Saturday of each month has been devoted to an artistic open house.

Some of the local artists who've exhibited their creations in the past reads like a Who's Who of local talent: Scott Simontacci, Julie Lee, Rachel Clark, 3-D artist Brady Haston, Quinn Dukes, Catherine Thompson, Jen Cartwright, Drew Peterson, Tara Murino-Brault, and Rocky and Mandy Horton.

The Arcade is located between 4th and 5th Avenues, Downtown. Beth Gilmore, curator, and her co-founder and director, Caroline Carlisle, invite everyone to attend this newest tradition of the tradition-laden Arcade. Cover that crack in your wall with an original local work of art.



The Only

by: Michael Harris Sr.

Homeless Writer

It's cold here in this town
I'm tired of walking around
Trying to find a place to stay warm
There's nothing as lonely
As a street on a Sunday
With nothing but the street's lights flashing

Now as I make my rounds
Through the alleys downtown
I'm searching through the trash cans
for a sandwich

Chorus:
You don't know the hungry
You don't know the lonely
You don't know how it is to let go
You don't know the only

Before my mother passed away
There were so many things she had to say
Before she closed her eyes
She took me by my hands
She said "Son always pray and try
to be a good man"

Chorus:
Cause you don't know the hungry
You don't know the lonely
You don't know how it is to let go
You don't know the only

Note to a sleeping city inching upward

by: Lindsey Glenn

Oh sleeping city inching upward,
where lamp posts pray their light upon asphalt,
in this dark night, remember.
Remember the grandest of things
come with a cost.
Look back:

See old years unfold
to the lofty construction of the Basilica in Rome
that crowns the tomb of a humble saint.
To offset expenses,
indulgences were sold to the poor;
bread money used to buy salvation.
For dinner mothers boiled rocks in water
to ensure the eternities of their half-starved babes.

Today, tourists drool over the Basilica's colonnade, its ornate interior.
They pose for pictures beside the piazza's trickling fountains.

It is never glamorous to think of the cost.

See this year, now.
See a city raising up its daintily painted fingers
while dusty mothers boil rocks for their children.
See a city, well entertained, shuffling luxury into its nest,
prostituting itself to the highest bidder.
See a city "helping by not giving"
to appear nicer, neater for the comfort of its people.

It is never glamorous to think of the cost.

It is glamorous to carry dogs in lacy purses
and to park expensive cars in safe garages.
While our pets and cars sleep warm at night,
our brothers shiver beneath bridges.

Just Kidding

by: Tom Sweet

Homeless Writer

I'll be sixteen for the rest of my life,
With a smile on my face and mischief on my mind...yeah.
Now, I'm really not bad, I try to be good,
But trouble seems to find me all of the time.

Chorus:
I'm just wild, I've got a heart of gold,
Yet I wont do what I've been told,
'Cause I'm just one big rebel on the inside.

Now I'm gonna have my fun 'til the day that I die,
Yet I wont be hurting no one, that's no lie.
The Good Lord, He gave me this life, and I wont be adding no strife,
I'll be happy here and now, and in the by and by.

So let's you and me go out and have us some fun,
We surely ain't gonna quit until we're done.
We'll keep a smile on our face, and we'll be laughing all over the place,
And letting everybody know where to get them some.

Now you can find me playing around at the Toys 'R' Us,
The manager chasing me around and making a fuss.
He said "You're too old to play these games",
I said "You're too old ain't it a shame,
Doncha know you done gone and missed the bus.

BY RICHARD DAVIS
Homeless Artist



“Portrait of Outreach”
Continued from Page 8

We climbed the steps that took us up the riverbank. The temperature was low enough that the park’s street level concrete slab known as “the hot rock” might be in use. Vents ran under this cement sidewalk extension, warming it enough to make the uncompromisingly hard surface somehow comfortable. Earlier in the year I had come upon emergency crews responding to a homeless man asleep in a puddle of his own blood. He reported that some “kids from the bar” had broken a beer bottle over his head while he slept.

But this night the hot rock was peacefully empty. It was probably too early for anyone to risk cuddling up to its heated hard surface. The swing shift cops were still on duty. It was rumored that they were quicker with trespassing tickets than the overnight officers. But that might have been only gossip. I’d never tested the claim myself.

A homeless woman was shuffling purposefully toward us. Most of her

hair was gone, her clothing was always disheveled, and her gait was unsteady.

She wasn’t drunk, although most witnesses would make that assumption. She was yelling angrily. She yelled angrily a lot. Her eyes were locked on me as she approached us. I slowed my pace until I realized that she was looking through me, not at me; she was yelling beyond me, not towards me.

In the past I’d attempted to speak with her, but her unmedicated mental disorders made any communication almost impossible. I soon recognized her as just another character on the scene, harmless in spite of her intimidating presentation.

We passed each other without acknowledgement. Near the fort was the raging racist.

His mind also did not function quite properly. Despite several encounters, he never seemed to recognize me.

His usual dirty attire was often accessorized by a ragged confederate flag wrapped around his shoulders. He called this flag his “poncho.” In the summer he was frequently shirtless, displaying a tattoo that claimed himself to be “100% pure.”

His brazen racial commentary

occasionally led to a good ass-kicking by passing black club goers. Still, he did not seem to adjust his behavior. Slow learner, this one.

He began to talk to me about my shoes as we approached. I was wearing my orange Chuck Taylors, and he mistook this as an indication that I had just broken out of jail. I briefly attempted to explain the concept of ebay to him, but he continued to insist that I was a “bad man” on the run.

He’d forget about it by the next time I saw him. There was no point in wasting time with further explanations. We shrugged off his attempts at interaction and continued along the river.

The fort’s public restrooms were already locked for the night. There would be no bathroom available to the homeless until their opening again in the morning.

On the other side of the fort was a small group of homeless individuals. Three of the five were drinking from plastic Sbarro cups filled with cheap beer. They were not drunk yet, but they could see intoxication from where they sat.

We spent several minutes speaking with them. They were a very hospitable group, even generous enough to offer us a taste of their beer. But they did not have any information about homeless youth, so we decided to move on. It was just the beginning of a long night, and we had a great deal of concrete to cover with a lot of people to see.

I Am Not “One Of Them”

BY LYN NOLAND
thecontributorstaff@gmail.com

I was standing in the kitchen with my six month old son on my hip when I heard a commotion outside. I peeked out the blinds to see police cars in the driveway and heard a scuffle around the back of my house. We were surrounded.

Monday, April 14, 2003 is a day I will never forget. The police knocked on my door saying they were looking for someone else, I wondered why they would surround the house, unless they thought I was up to something. I was. They asked if they could come in, I said “sure”. I thought I had my stuff

outside. I figured if I didn’t let them in, they’d think I had something to hide. I was too slick for them, or so I thought.

I went to jail that day and my son went to foster care. My nine year old daughter went to live with her dad. My life had exploded, worse than any lab I’d ever seen. I was eventually charged with manufacturing over 100 grams of methamphetamine. I thought I had ruined everything and my kids and I would never be able to have a normal life. I thought that if the police would have just left me alone, I would have been okay, we would have been okay. It was all their fault. I wasn’t hurting anybody. Why couldn’t they just leave me alone? I wasn’t supposed to go to jail. I wasn’t one of “those people”.

I remember as a child, craving the attention of my parents. My dad was a truck driver and was gone most of the time and my mother was always in bed with some kind of ailment. She had a shoe box full of pills under her bed and I would watch her sleep wondering sometimes if she would ever wake up. I must have

been fairly young at the time because I was only tall enough to look right at her face as she slept. When she wasn’t asleep, she was gone. I remember one time I came home from Brownies, which was over at five, and no one was home. She had forgotten about me and I was locked out of the house. Her nice new Cadillac was there though, and back then the cigarette lighter would work even without the car being on. I was

so cold and it was getting dark so I curled up in the car and kept pushing in the lighter and warming my hands around it until I fell asleep. Sometimes I wondered if I disappeared, how many days would it take them to notice.

When I got to high school I became the overachiever. I wanted so much to be important to someone, anyone. I made straight A’s, was in every club, class clown and was always in the local paper for community service projects. By this time my dad had divorced my mom and started a new life in another town with another family. I saw him even less. I became more like my

mother’s room mate instead of her daughter. I came and went as I wanted to and started drinking at parties with my friends. I remember she told me once to “be home early”. I laughed at her and said, “When did you

wake up and decide to be my mom? Oh, I’ll be home early all right, early in the morning!” and slammed out the door. She never told me what to do again.

Right after graduation, I went to summer school at UT Knoxville. I was from a small town and was ready to see what the world had to offer. This is when my drinking really took off.

“I had come upon emergency crews responding to a homeless man asleep in a puddle of his own blood. He reported that some ‘kids from the bar’ had broken a beer bottle over his head while he slept.”

“I went to jail that day and my son went to foster care. My nine year old daughter went to live with her dad. My life had exploded, worse than any lab I’d ever seen.”

“When I was drunk, I was funny, pretty, and people liked being around me. I could be whoever I wanted to be. Handsome men would buy me all the drinks I wanted.”



www.HOUSINGWITHINREACH.org

The Housing Within Reach website will assist you in finding quality, safe, affordable permanent housing. Search for housing three ways:

- by housing type
- by housing type and location
- by operating agency.

Creating Homes Initiative (CHI)

Regional Housing Facilitators provide technical assistance to local community partners to write grants, secure financial support from multiple funding streams, and coordinate the creation and improvement of housing units ranging from 24/7 supervised supported living facilities to home ownership.

Want more information about CHI? Contact Regional Housing Facilitators:
Tameka Favors—Nashville/Davidson County at 242-3576 or
Vonda Gray—Middle Tennessee at 460-4479.



Creating 500 new or improved permanent housing options each year.

Continued on Page 16

The Contributor

Congratulates

Clemmie Greenlee

of the Nashville Homeless Power Project

Nashville Scene's Person of the Year!

"Panhandler's Image" Continued from Page 1

P-1: Everything. For food, cigarettes, paying my locker and storage rents, riding the bus. But I'm not going to lie to you. I need to drink a beer first to get the courage to do it.

RAY: It takes courage?

P-1: Yeah. I find the best way is to hold a sign at an off-ramp. But I'm nervous the whole time I'm doing it, 'cause a cop could write me up a citation or arrest me.

RAY: About how much can you make?

P-1: I could get twenty, forty, fifty bucks in a half-hour, then I quit.

RAY: Have you ever been written up?

P-1: In the past, but I've been lucky lately.

RAY: I was once walking to McDonald's on Broadway, when a guy coming from the off-ramp on thirteenth avenue excitedly told me he had just made \$150 dollars in ten minutes.

P-1: He was probably exaggerating.

RAY: I don't know. He was so happy, he gave me two dollars for coffee.

P-1: If he had gotten that much, he might have given you more.

RAY: P-2, do you like to work off-ramps too?

P-2: Yes, but I keep off to the side. I don't get too close to the cars so

the drivers won't feel threatened. I find, the further away I stand, the more money I'll get. If I stand too close, nobody will give me nothing.

RAY: Have you ever been given a citation doing this, or been arrested?

P-2: No. The police just tell me to move along.

RAY: Why do you think others doing the same thing get cited and you don't?

P-2: Well, besides for soliciting, they can get you for obstructing traffic. Like I told you, I stand away. Another thing, I'm clean-cut. Some people tell me, "You don't look homeless." I tell them, "What's homeless supposed to look like?" Once, a Hummer stopped, and I see the guy looking in his wallet, and all he has are big bills...hundreds, and I say to myself he's not going to give me anything. Then the guy says to me, "Your eyes look clear," and he hands me a fifty.

RAY: So, you think looking clean-cut makes a difference?

P-2: Looking sober, too. With drivers and with cops too. They see you're not a staggering drunk, desperate for you next drink. That you're trying to better yourself.

RAY: Oh, yeah. The guy who claimed he'd gotten \$150 was clean-cut too. And what did you do with the fifty dollars?

P-2: I got a motel room and a six-pack, to forget about the situation I'm in.

Street Interview: Randy

Randy: My family they tried their best to raise me the best way they could. You know?

But mostly it was my fault because I wouldn't listen to them. If I knew then what I know now, I would have changed a whole lot of things different. A whole lot of things would have been different. The way I live; the way I act. You know? The way I do everything. Usually you can't most people don't know how to do that.

You got some people that live on the street that don't even know how to panhandle. They're scared. I pulled one guy to the side, you know, he's 18 years old. I said, "Ricky, I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll let you tag with me for a day and let you see how I do it. Then the next day, I'll try you out and see how you do it."

He watched me all day and he heard the lines that I told them. The next day, I turned him loose and I said, "Look, go up in front of me, stay in front of me. Let me stay behind you and watch. If I see you start messing up, I'll intervene in it and I'll help you out."

He never messed up one time. He made more money that day than I did the day I was teaching him. That comes to show you, out here you gotta do what you gotta do in order to survive. It ain't like I can go home, cook me a meal, watch TV, lay in a good comfortable bed with clean sheets on it. I can't do that. I can't do that right now. But I will eventually, one of these days I will be able to do it. But right now at this moment in my life, I can't do it. For one, I guess really because I'm scared. Because one, I have been out on the streets so long that I get claustrophobic staying inside of a house now. I have been homeless ten years and

I get claustrophobic and I have to leave. I can't stay there. I can stay there for about a month or two, but after that I gotta go. I gotta come back out here, cause this is really the only life I know how to live right now until I can get on my feet.

Now, don't get me wrong, I will get me a place to live one day, but as of right now, I'm not gonna do it. I'm just gonna stay right here for now.

--
Interview by Will Connelly & Tasha French. Audio and photos available at:

www.sanshouses.com.



Photos by Tasha French

Dial "O" for Oasis

BY RAY PONCE DE LEON
Homeless Writer
poncedillyon@hotmail.com

Jenny Gray is an outreach case manager for Oasis of Nashville, an organization that cares for homeless youth. Jenny confessed to being a bit sad before the start of this interview, because one of her clients had recently been murdered.

RAY: Jenny, what brought you to work for Oasis?

JENNY: Because I'm being paid to do what I love to do most: help people.

RAY: In other words, if you could do it for free, you would?

JENNY: Definitely.

RAY: Your co-case manager, Ben Griffith, told me last spring that the number of youth you serve was up. Is this still true.

JENNY: Yes, this recent quarter showed a 68% increase in the number of youth we've helped. Up a 100% in the six months I've worked here. But I don't necessarily think that means that youth homelessness is on the rise, it's just that we see more of them.

RAY: Why do you think that is?

JENNY: Ben and I have been going to a lot of the places that feed, giving away socks as a way of telling adults that even though we can't take them as clients, we still care about them. Many of the homeless adults we meet know of a young person needing help. We prefer to have them bring young people to us.

RAY: What are the ages of those you help.

JENNY: Youth between the ages of thirteen and twenty-one who are, or in danger of becoming homeless. That includes those who sleep in cars, motels, or are couch hoppers.

RAY: Do you feel that, personally, you're helping to make a difference?

JENNY: Oh, yes. We've been successful in building relationships with many of our clients, although sometimes it takes weeks or months to connect with someone. You have to be persistent.

RAY: But don't you sometimes get



Photo by Tasha French

the feeling you won't be able to get through in a particular case?

JENNY: I look for the hope in every situation, that I'll become a positive presence in their lives. I want people to know that we care for them.

RAY: With the recent controversy about panhandling on everyone's mind, have any of your clients told you that they've panhandled?

JENNY: Definitely. A lot of our youth have panhandled.

RAY: What do they usually use the money for?

JENNY: It's usually because they need something practical, like a bus pass or a hotel room.

RAY: How long has Oasis been in existence?

JENNY: About thirty years.

RAY: That long?

JENNY: Our street outreach, about five or six years.

RAY: Do you have any Spanish-speaking clients?

JENNY: Yes, although we run into more adult homeless who speak Spanish?

RAY: Is there anything you wish to tell the reader that we haven't covered?

JENNY: Oh, yes. Right now we have three buildings, a shelter, administrative offices with counselors, and a transitional big house. We're now working on combining all three. We'll be at the old Duck Head factory. I'm really excited about it. There'll be a drop-in center specifically for homeless youth, where they can get meals, a shower, use computers with the internet, attend classes in yoga, art, etc. They're also be a health clinic, and youth-run silk-screen T-shirt making. It'll all be more connected and more functional.

RAY: And your youth will have a product to sell...like us at the Contributor.

JENNY: Yeah. Ha! Ha!

You may reach Jenny or Ben at Oasis's general phone number: (615) 327-4455. There is counseling available 24/7/365.

Veteran Homelessness

BY DENNY HARRIS
Adjunct Professor
Belmont University
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The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have contributed to a sharp rise in the number of homeless military veterans, a recently completed Congressional Research Service report on homeless veterans says, and lawmakers are beginning to take notice.

The report shows female veterans were as much as four times more likely to become homeless than non-veteran women, with male veterans nearly twice as likely to become homeless than non-veterans.

Though many believe homelessness plagues Vietnam draftees disproportionately, the largest group of homeless vets comes from those who enlisted after Vietnam, the May 31 CRS report showed.

And although experiences in combat and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder are contributing factors to homelessness, studies have "found no unique association between combat-related PTSD and homelessness," the report said.

"Research has determined that homeless combat veterans were no more likely to be diagnosed with PTSD than combat veterans who were not homeless," CRS said.

Since Vietnam, most veterans do not normally become homeless within the first 10 years of separation, the CRS report said. But a December 2006 "Iraq Veteran Project" study prepared by the Swords to Plowshares veterans' advocacy group, troops who've served in Iraq and Afghanistan are becoming homeless sooner than their predecessors - seeking housing services within months after returning from Iraq.

"New veterans are falling through the cracks, and they are shocked and angry at the lack of care afforded them," said Iraq Veteran Project report author, Amy Fairweather. "They stand at the precipice of chronic homelessness unless there is a concerted effort to address their needs."

And Congress is taking notice. Illinois Democrat and presidential hopeful, Sen. Barack Obama, told the Associated Press at an April 6 campaign rally that "veterans are far more likely to be homeless than non-veterans and part of it is because we're not providing services to them as they

transition out of the service,"

"Part of it is because there is just not enough affordable housing," he added.

In April, Obama introduced legislation dubbed the "Homes for Heroes Act," which would establish grant and voucher programs to encourage development of affordable housing targeted for veterans.

In addition, Sen. Daniel Akaka (D-Hawaii) has introduced a bill that would institute a program in which the VA and DoD would work together to identify returning members of the armed services who are at risk of homelessness.

According to the Iraq Veteran Project report, the VA has created a list of factors that can help prevent homelessness, including employment assistance, transition assistance, rehabilitation, medical care, commensurate employment, compensation award and work therapy.

In response to congressional pressure, the Pentagon recently partnered with several federal agencies to create an online portal called designed to help veterans get the information, counseling, and access to the services they need to ensure a successful transition from military to civilian life.

The CRS report adds there are currently five federal programs specifically designed to assist homeless veterans, these programs have required about \$270 million in 2007, and future costs are on the rise.

Other research indicates that VA homeless programs have already served as many as 600 returning OIF/OEF veterans and over 1,000 more have been identified as being at risk of becoming homeless, CRS added. "This leaves many veterans' advocates concerned that the current VA budget and infrastructure will not be able to respond to the needs of an ever-increasing number of homeless and at risk veterans in the coming years.

"VA has consistently underestimated the homeless veteran problem," said Larry Scott, veterans' advocate and founder of "VA Watchdog.org."

And, even when presented with hard data on the number of homeless vets in America, VA continues to under fund outreach, rehabilitation programs and facilities designed to help this vulnerable population."

“Not ‘One of Them’”
Continued from Page 12

When I was drunk, I was funny, pretty, and people liked being around me. I could be whoever I wanted to be. Handsome men would buy me all the drinks I wanted. I was the “party girl”. Everybody who was anybody called me to see where the best parties were going to be. Alcohol had filled that whole in my stomach that was making me incomplete. I was finally important.

I lasted a few more years in Knoxville before deciding on a geographical cure to slow down my drinking. Three towns and four moves later, I found myself in Crossville where I tried cocaine for the first time. I really liked coke. I used it every week end and became the life of the party again. I married a wonderful man from Crossville, but

he didn't want to party like I did, so I divorced him and moved once again, this time to Cookeville with my beautiful daughter, Shelby. It was in Cookeville at a party at my own house that someone first offered me meth. They said, if you like coke, you'll love this, and I did! I knew I wouldn't become addicted to it, though. I wasn't one of “those people”.

I always had great jobs in sales and marketing and I was good at it, so I made a good living for me & Shelby. I drove a BMW, had a nice house on the water and good friends, the world was mine. I was a young professional, a PTO mom. I went to Chamber functions, Country Club Parties and chaired charity events. I had everyone fooled, but not for long.

Meth took over my life. Within a matter of months, I went from using on weekends to using every day. I didn't make the money I used to make, because I wasn't on my game any more. I started buying ephedrine pills, iodine and other ingredients to trade so I could stay high. I supplied several cooks with what they needed and they kept my pockets full. They also started teaching me the parts of the cook process. Then I was not only hooked on meth, but hooked on the cook. About that time I just quit going to work. I didn't

have time. I was too busy using and finding ways and means to use more. I had quit answering the phone to my old friends, family, everyone except the people I used with. I didn't go to clubs any more and had stopped drinking. I only wanted to be around people who meth and used like me, all day, everyday.

Then I found out I was pregnant, by a meth cook. I tried to ignore the fact as long as I could, but when my belly got big, it was hard to hide it. I slowed down using, but didn't completely stop. I really wanted to stop using for my baby, but I couldn't lift my head off the pillow without it. I had become physically dependent and couldn't function without getting high. Well, I really wasn't getting high much any more, just trying to be able to function and get through the day. Toward the end of my pregnancy I would go several

“I was a young professional, a PTO mom. I went to Chamber functions, Country Club Parties and chaired charity events. I had everyone fooled, but not for long.”

days and even weeks without using, but it was horrible. As soon as I had Steven, I was off to the races again. I was using more, cooking more and taking more chances than I ever had taken before. Even through all of this, I always thought I was a good mother, but have come to terms with the fact that I wasn't. My kids never saw me use and never wanted for anything, but I was never really present with them, not the real me. They meant the world to me and now they were gone.

I was in an old county jail cell built for 12, with 30 other women. People tell me “you don't look like the jail type”, well, who is? No one's Kindergarten dreams are to grow up and go to jail. After a couple of months, someone told me I could get out early if I went to rehab. I didn't really think I'd stop using, but I had lost everything while I was in jail. I figured I could get clean long enough to please my probation officer and get my kids back. I could fool everybody for that long. While I was in treatment I started to hear things from the literature and groups that really hit home. They had written books about me, well, people like me. I realized that I was an addict. Maybe I was one of “those people”. There were other people like me and they had gotten clean and stayed clean. Every body says that meth is hard to

kick, but if other people could do it, I could too. If I wanted to have any kind of life for me and my kids, I had to.

I left treatment and went to a half way house under instruction from my counselor. I knew if I went back home, I'd use again. Everyone I associated with there by this time used and cooked. I arrived in East Nashville with \$10 and a suitcase full of clothes. I remember wondering how I was going to eat until I found a job. The Director of that halfway house took me the next day to a little building on Main Street to get a food box from the Second Harvest Food Bank. I remember every moment of that day as if were yesterday. I walked in with my designer bag and leopard skin jacket, and looked around at the people there. There were people who were homeless and down trodden, beaten by life. My first thought was not to let “them” touch me. I am not like those people. I took a number and wiped my seat with a tissue before waiting to get called.

I remember seeing what they were putting in other people's boxes and getting excited to see what they were going to put in mine. I was hungry. I started thinking about how I had for so many years eaten out at the finest restaurants and thrown away left over food just because the cupboards were full and I could cook more tomorrow. I remembered buying extra groceries at Christmas to put in the bins at the store for the needy. Tears came rolling down my cheeks. I realized at that very moment that I was “the needy”. I was not only like “those people”, I am “those people”. I had nothing to eat, just like they had nothing to eat. I was homeless, living in transition, just like many of them were. It didn't matter what I was wearing or where I had come from, we were all in the same boat now. This was a defining moment in my life.

My number was called, and through my tears I managed to thank and even hug the volunteer who helped me to the car with my box. The Director asked me what was wrong and I told him of the whole experience. He hugged me but told me to get over my terminal uniqueness and do something about it. I decided that very day that I would somehow make it my goal to bridge the gap I felt when I had walked through that door. I didn't know how, but I began to pray for God to help me find a way. I stayed in half way for almost six months.

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The Now and the Vision

BY WILL CONNELLY
thecontributorstaff@gmail.com

The power of story is infinite. Stories reflect the world we live in and provide the vision and imagination necessary to reshape that world. Stories help us understand ourselves and others, they bring us together and build bridges between socioeconomic divides. The last piece I wrote for this newspaper was a story of a dear friend who currently experiences homelessness. I won't assume that you read it, but let's just say that we have a lot of work to do in Nashville to respond to homelessness effectively and efficiently with hope, respect, choice, and love as core values of our approach. Stories have a place and time, but now it's time for solutions.

On the first Friday of 2008, the coordinator of the Homelessness Commission, Clifton Harris, announced the existence of a detailed plan to bring solutions to the complex and sometimes overwhelming issue of homelessness. This plan is entitled the “Vision Plan” and although it is in its early stages and will be revised over the following months, there is hope in what Mr. Harris and his colleagues have initially proposed.

After the Homelessness Commission was created in 2005, it quickly realized that its goal of ending chronic homelessness in Nashville would be next to impossible with the current level of funding and the lack of a well-coordinated and solid homeless service infrastructure. This “Vision Plan” is a response to both of these needs – it details how we will raise the funds necessary to house individuals experiencing homelessness (and retain their housing) and it offers an infrastructure that will radically alter the way that the Homelessness Commission and other homeless service providers conduct their business.

The first structural changes include moving the Homelessness Commission from its current location - the Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency (MDHA) - and establishing itself as its own 501 (c)(3) agency within its own Metro division. Think of it as a nonprofit with quasi-government status. There will be two divisions within the agency – administration and programs. Administration will handle fundraising, accounting, marketing, evaluation,

technical support and training. The division of programming will cover four areas – housing, health and behavioral health, economic stability, and systems coordination. Each division will be broken into departments with various divisional directors, associate directors, coordinators, and specialists.

What's more exciting are the Vision Plan's goals, the values it promotes, and its potential to be a long-term and sustainable approach to homelessness in Nashville while bringing together agencies that do not always work well together. Its goals include developing 1,000 permanent housing units and 800 transitional housing units with services attached. There will be an effort to integrate existing homeless services by sharing more information and encouraging incumbent homeless service providers to align themselves with the goals of the Homelessness Commission. Emergency funds and other systems to prevent homelessness will be supported and developed, and a coordinated street outreach initiative will be initiated to identify individuals experiencing homelessness and to refer these individuals to the new housing and programs that the Homelessness Commission creates and supports.

The Vision's values include getting immediate and long-term results, promoting flexible and individualized services, empowering existing agencies to serve their clients more effectively, encouraging community ownership of the effort to eliminate homelessness, and putting compassion and dignity at the forefront.

This description of the Vision is very cursory, and, as mentioned, the Vision is not finalized as of yet. Some of what was just mentioned may not be new to you or really that earth shattering. The difference between the now and the Vision is that the Vision applies a corporate model to our approach to homelessness and demands immediate and long-term outcomes. There will be a dramatic increase in public and private funding and a strict adherence to best practices and service models that have been proven to work nationwide by getting people off of the streets and saving communities millions of dollars in the process. That is hope for the New Year when we all sorely need it.





Former Vice Mayor Howard Gentry spoke at Nashville's 17th Annual Homeless Memorial at Riverfront Park on Saturday morning, December 15th. The memorial honored over 50 of Nashville's homeless who died on the streets in 2007. Photo by Tasha French

**"Nowhere to Lay His Head"
Continued from Page 5**

There is certainly no evidence that Jesus despised those with a permanent roof. Some of them certainly helped him during his ministry.

(Interestingly, I have never met anyone who wanted to become homeless in order to be more like Jesus. Nor have I ever met a homeless person who says he wants to remain homeless in order to be more like Jesus.)

Certainly there is no shame in being homeless. If it was good enough for Jesus during the course of his ministry then it cannot be innately bad. But getting hung up on the notion of being homeless misses the point of the passage.

We need to understand that in this text Jesus is not making a comment about homelessness. He is neither aggrandizing homelessness nor vilifying those with a regular place to sleep. Instead, Jesus is making a comment about the nature of discipleship. This passage is a warning to everyone, both the homeless and the housed, about the difficulty of following Jesus. The text tells us that a scribe, one who

is educated and has studied the law, approaches Jesus. He calls Jesus "teacher." Clearly he is not a disciple but he most certainly has aspirations in that area. He promises to go wherever Jesus goes.

Jesus immediately responds with a warning – the path of discipleship is not simple. It has lots of twists and turns. The path of discipleship is not linear. We don't begin in a certain place and go to a certain place and then stop. The path of discipleship is not one of certainty. We never know where it will take us. We will spend a lot of time in strange places, places where we are not at home, places where we have no place to lay our heads.

The warning is clear for the homeless, the housed, the poor and the rich. It is a warning anyone who wants to follow Jesus should take to heart. Following Jesus is not easy, it is not certain, it is not predictable. It requires real commitment and dedication.

The good news is that it is something we can do whether we have houses or not. Thanks be to God.

**"Making Panhandling Safer"
Continued from Page 3**

In the 1980's, I lived and slept an entire weekend on the streets with the homeless with "Hoot Jackson," also known as Bill Boner. I talked and walked with the homeless, and I went to feeding sites all over Nashville with the homeless. I learned that most homeless people are off the streets by 6 p.m. . That is the time the homeless are required to be in the shelters, or else they will not be allowed to enter. After 6 pm there are two types of groups remaining on the streets, the professional beggars and the individuals who refuse or are afraid to sleep in a shelter. One of the most interesting conversations I remember having was when I asked an individual if they would like a house to live in, and the answer was "no". They did not have the organizational skills or the needed responsibility to maintain a home.

I have received many e-mails and telephone calls regarding the proposed aggressive panhandling legislation, and I thank the many people for their input. However, we as legisla-

tors have the responsibility to make this city as safe as possible. The e-mails and phone calls suggest that this bill would criminalize the homeless, make it hard for churches to collect money, and prevent people from giving tips in restaurants. The bill does not address any of these unfounded issues. Public begging after dark is dangerous. I do not know how many of the callers are downtown after dark when beggars go into action. One would reasonably assume that some of the people who called are employed downtown and are back in the suburbs after 6 p.m. It is after dark when many large events take place downtown and many more tourists and locals are on the streets. One other note that the callers might not understand, public begging just does not happen downtown. It happens all over the city, some places more than other places.

BL2007-66 gives the police a tool for dealing with threatening professional beggars, while continuing to allow street musicians and other forms of nonaggressive panhandling that do not cause a safety concern. Homeless people would be free to so-

licit funds during the day in a non-aggressive manner, as long as the solicitation does not take place next to the entrance of a building, an ATM machine, or a public transit stop. Under this proposal, the officer would have to witness the aggressive panhandling before issuing a citation. In addition, a citizen could use the law to swear out a complaint against an aggressive panhandler. Aggressive panhandlers are those panhandlers who become irritable and persistent when their request is denied, walking with people after they have said no, holding parking spaces for a fee, washing car windshields unsolicited and going from place to place throughout downtown and the city collecting large sums of money.

Nashville has become a destination for a large number of tourists. We as legislators should create a community where people feel safe and welcomed, and are not harassed by unwanted aggressive panhandling. The citizens of Nashville and our visitors have that right. BL2007-66 is not an anti panhandling bill. It is a bill that makes panhandling safer.

**"Not 'One of Them'"
Continued from Page 15**

I then moved into a recovery apartment with the help of Urban Housing Solutions, and started working for the half way house Director as he started his own program. I had another beautiful baby boy in September of 2004. Sawyer is a recovery baby and has never had to know my days of addiction and turmoil. In November of the same year, Steven came home.

Shelby still lives with her dad and comes to my house on weekends, holidays and a lot in the summer. We don't have much, and I don't make much, but I have a purpose. I just didn't know how it would play out.

I worked as an Admissions Director for a couple of different recovery housing organizations for a few years. That Director that had taken me to the food bank, and eventually hired me at his agency, passed away in October of 2006. He had become more than a boss, but a close friend and had died of illnesses related to his own battle with addiction. He had

over seven years clean, and had taught me so much about how to treat people. After his death, I became the Director of his agency. I had found a way of giving back and now I was taking other people to the food bank, helping them find jobs, and helping them start their journey.

Helping them to realize that no matter what or where they come from, we are all here now, so "what are they going to do about it?" I repeat almost weekly those same words he instilled in me. In September of this year I celebrated four years clean. Who says

meth addicts don't recover? During these years, I started going to jails and prisons and traveling all over the country to tell my story. I began taking classes to become a Licensed Alcohol and Drug Counselor and was a spokesperson for Governor Bredesen's Meth Free TN, anti-meth campaign. I became a proud member of Judge Casey Moreland's Division X Treatment Team, and began serving on the Recovery Ministry Leadership Team at Trevecca Community Church. Yes, I said church. And the roof really does not fall in on

the heads of drug addicts like me. I always continued to pray for guidance.

I found out God answers prayers in his time, not mine.

In October of this year, I started my own non-profit housing agency called Recovery Community. It is a partnership with a friend I got clean with four years ago, Jeff Phipps. We have the same goal of helping people learn to stay clean, realize their dreams, build relationships in the community and become productive in their lives. We have gone from eight residents to twenty four in just two months. More and more people are calling. They want to get off the streets or off the drugs and get a fresh start in life. We are here to make that happen. Our goal for the next two years is to provide safe, affordable, drug free housing for one hundred people at a time. One day we hope to never have to turn anyone away who seeks a better life for themselves because of money or bed availability. The process is slow, and funding is scarce, but we won't give up. God has not opened all of these doors to stop now. You see life can show up. Addiction knows no prejudice. We can all at some point in our lives, find ourselves hungry.

I am only one person, how can I do anything? I don't know the answer to that, but I sure will keep on trying. After all, I am just one of "those people".

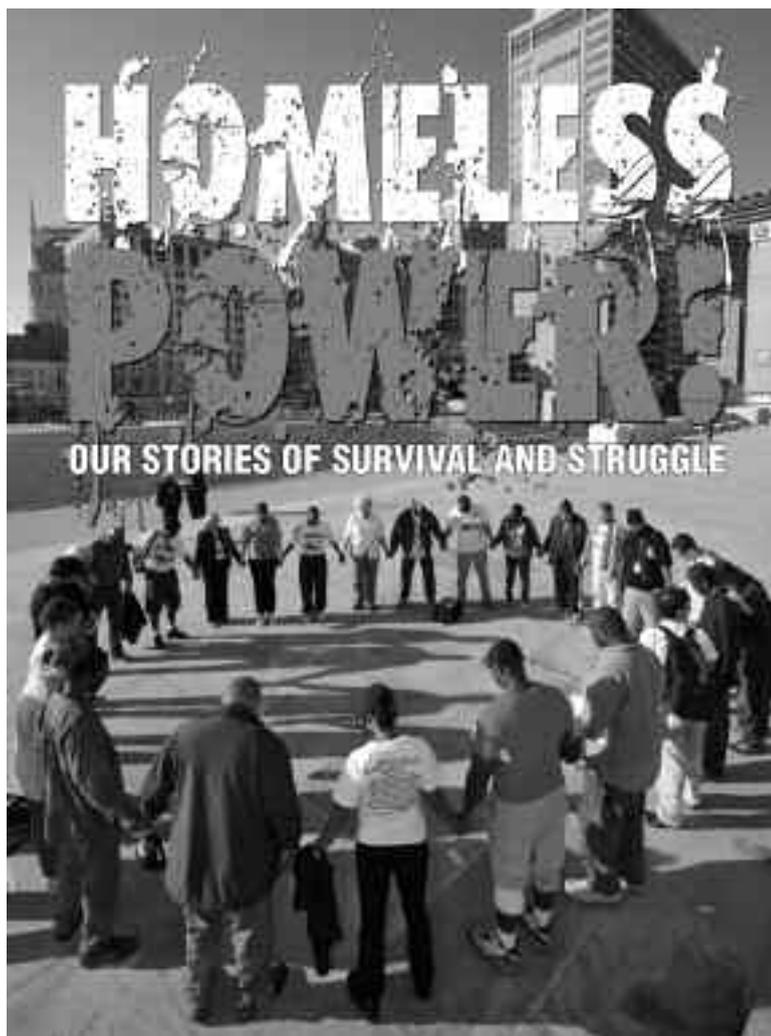
"I remembered buying extra groceries at Christmas to put in the bins at the store for the needy. Tears came rolling down my cheeks. I realized at that very moment that I was "the needy!"

Nashville Homeless Power Project Releases Book

BY STEVE SAMRA
Formerly Homeless Writer
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The Nashville Homeless Power Project (NHPP) teamed up with students from Vanderbilt Human Rights and the Arts to create a one of a kind book that shares the stories of over 40 homeless individuals in and around Nashville. Both groups hope that by providing insight into the lives and the plights of local homeless individuals, community members will help change the policy decisions they believe are the root causes of homelessness.

The book was released at a signing event in the downtown courthouse on December 4th, 2007 and the event was well attended by a diverse group of individuals, including singer Tonya Watts, who performed Cumberland Angels.



Copies of the book are available at the office of the NHPP and via their website at: www.homelesspower.org/bookanddvd.html

"I Have a Problem" Continued from Page 3

I've seen too many scam artists, I've not seen the good of anything I've ever given to anyone and in a couple of cases I have seen the bad immediately thereafter, and I don't know what I can do to help. I don't know what people have given the person who's asking me for help, and I don't have any indication of what shelters are closed, accepting people, accepting people at x degrees. I just have heard a series of answers when I give information that my information is incorrect, that it's out of date, that it only applies in Condition X. I'm told when you're in a shelter and have that as an address that's a black mark against employment.

I'm at the point, where a lot of people I know are, that it feels like if you are going downtown you're going to get into a confrontation, you're going to be accused of being a heartless uncaring person, you're going to

be enabling someone to crawl into a bottle or up a needle and never come out. This is not good for anyone. When I see a person in need I want to think "this person could benefit from something I do" not "this person is going to take my money and use it to stay out here longer" or "this person is going to confront me and I may end up in a fight".

I want a method to give food and shelter without alcohol and nicotine and drugs. I want the person to be able to make their choices as opposed to an organization telling them how through their particular religion they will find salvation. I want to know when I'm being conned and make sure people help the needy, not the cons.

Until Nashville starts working on that and quits trying to pass anti-homeless / First-Amendment laws, we're doing nothing to help solve the issue; we're just creating more confrontation that leads to dark places.

"Motivations" Continued from Page 3

Period. Not so. It's the fact of how you are approached and how you approach others. Humility is better gained by action then knowledge. Respect plays another key factor in the process. If all would have a certain amount of what I like to refer to as "Civil Respect and Dignity", then things could possibly go a lot smoother. Next time you stop and see someone on the sidewalk, really stop and ask yourself, "Who is this person?" and take a moment to do research. You might be surprised the next time you might ask someone for a dollar or two.

In Memory of Brandon S. Coons

BY JENNY GRAY
AND BEN GRIFFITH

With a smile and a laugh, he told me they needed some dry clothes because they'd jumped in the river, just for fun. This was Brandon.

First time we had met him, and he was already sharing a laugh. And it wasn't just a laugh, it was a laugh from deep inside, a genuine laugh and a contagious one. One that told of a life lived truly open for the next exciting moment, be that selling magazines in California, a trek across the country to see a friend, or barreling down Broadway on a pair of rollerblades totally unsure how to stop at the bottom. Brandon lived life with joy and abandon. He didn't wet his toes, he jumped into it. It was impossible not to admire that.

A few weeks ago, Brandon passed away. He was special to us. This is what we celebrate and remember: his smile and his laugh and amazingly reckless abandon. Brandon got more out of life, and he believed it was within reach. He spread this hope to those around him, encouraging and inspiring them to chase down the life they were looking for. Brandon was generous, compassionate, and gracious.

Brandon took care of his friends, especially his little brother. We saw

him give away his food, lose sleep, and walk all the way across town in the middle of the sweltering summer to make sure his brother was safe and well.

Brandon's life wasn't always easy on him, but it never ever saw that get him down. If it was a call from the hospital with a sad story, it would always be followed up with "but I'm ok now." And his blue eyes always had a sparkle, "they call me Blue-Eyed-Devil," he said. No matter what he was going through he always had an encouraging word and a heartfelt thank-you for those around him.

Let's be honest with ourselves, life did throw some tough times at him. Sometimes this left him a little dirty, a little worn out; jumping into the river headfirst will do that to you. But life never dimmed the light that shown from inside of him. That light deeply impacted us in the short time we knew him. If you caught the twinkle from those blue eyes, you know, you too were blessed to have met a beautiful soul.

Even in seemingly hopeless situations, Brandon pulled through and brought with him as many others as he could. We remember the hope that he held and they joy that he got out of each of life's moments. If he saw into our hearts saddened by his passing, this is what he would probably say "You're doing well, you're awesome, go help someone, go live the crazy life you've always dreamed of." We remember his smile and we are once again encouraged.

"My Oasis" Continued from Page 8

Although I do have an office where youth can drop in and where I answer phone calls and send emails, I also spend much of my time in the library, at the park, and at other places throughout Nashville where I go to search for and meet young people. At first, this kind of mobility confused me. It seemed that I had found the oasis, and was in fact working there! But I also knew that sending emails and scheduling meetings did not resonate in my soul in the way that receiving hugs and handshakes from folks on Second Avenue and Riverfront Park did.

I began to wonder if I'd gotten a little mixed up. As I walked down Broadway, listening to street musicians belt out soulful tunes on the harmonica, and met complete strangers who offered me their only pair of gloves because my hands were cold, it hit me. The real oasis, the place of rest and refuge and comfort and hope, is

out here. I am thankful for Oasis Center, and I believe that every person here works hard so that the center really does live up to its name. I am thrilled that Nashville has a place where youth have amazing opportunities to learn, grow, succeed, and give back to the community. But being an outreach worker has brought me to the incredibly freeing realization that the real oasis is right here in front of me, with me, wherever I may go in this town. I have found it when someone sits with me on the sidewalk and tells me about their children. I have found it when I share a Korean meal at McKendree United Methodist Church, so much hot sauce laddled onto our plates of fried rice that we begin to sweat as we eat. I love that feeling. I have found it when I see people sharing with each other, encouraging each other, and caring for each other. I see it every single day, and I sigh in relief, knowing that I don't need to escape to green fields and palm trees. The oasis is already right here.



The Self-Deprecator

In Search of the Historical Panhandler

SATIRE BY RAY PONCE DE LEON
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As the controversy continues on the legalities and moralities of the panhandling issue, perhaps we can find answers in the way panhandling (the world's second oldest profession) was dealt with in ancient times. In our search for the historical panhandler, our sources lead us all the way back to the Garden of Eden when Adam asked Eve if she had any spare apples.

George Washington, who had always scorned beggars, threw a silver dollar across the Potomac to keep an aggressive panhandler from getting too close. In doing so, George slipped out of the boat, which spawned that famous saying, "George Washington slipped here."

At Julius Caesar's funeral, shifty Marc Antony asked Friends, Romans and Countrymen to lend him their ears. Ha! Everyone knew Marcus never paid back his debts, so he was really panhandling for ears of corn. Et tu Trampe_?

Edgar Allen Poe must've been a persistently annoying panhandler. That's probably why the Raven kept saying, "Nevermore!"

Paul Revere's famous, "One if by land, two if

by sea" meant that he'd learned the hard way that landlubbers were less generous to panhandlers than sailors. (And a lot less friendly too!)

If you got good grades in Greek mythology, you'll remember that Pan was a creature who was half-man and half-goat. Legend has it that gay Plato was a Pan handler, but that's another story.

Back to the Bible, we've discovered that due to an error in translation, the original Greek manuscript said that Jesus cast out of the temple the money SPARE-changers. (Can a panhandler make it through the eye of a needle?)

If you search YouTube for videos of old doo-wop groups like the Platters and Danny and the Juniors, you'll note that they sang with open-handed gestures in remembrance of their struggling days of singing doo-wop on street corners for hand-outs. This is also reflected in the original titles of some of their hits, like "The Great Panhandler," "Smoke (from burning citations) Gets in Your Eyes," and (Put) The Magic Touch (on the

Tourists.")

The founder of Motown, Barry Gordy, obviously got his start as an aggressive panhandler, since he wrote: "The best things in life are free, but you can give them to the birds and bees, I need money—that's what I want!!"



The beautiful Cleopatra did her panhandling by jabbing shoppers in the derriere before they could put their change in their purses. This was known as Cleopatra's needle!

Finally, in 1849, prospectors in California employed a form of panhandling called "panning for gold." They turned aggressive when a rumor started that this would give them a "rush!" And California hasn't been the same since.

Who knows what forms of panhandling will be employed in the future? (Beam his wallet up, Scotty?) Only time will tell.

"Tom Sweet"
Continued from Page 2

I happen to be one of Steve [Samra]'s kids and this man has done a great deal to bring some light into my daily life. He got me into attending Park Center where I had the opportunity to ply a skill I love so much. I was privileged to cook lunch Monday through Friday for the members of Park Center. They also helped me to get housing. I am no longer on the street. I am no longer homeless. I once told Steve that I had no clue what to do with myself any more since my wife passed away, that I had no purpose in life. This is what he told me. "Why don't you go back to school?" WOW. Now why didn't I think of that? Well, that is exactly what I am doing. I have applied at Nashville State and will be starting soon. My life is looking a lot better, and I do have a purpose and a goal, thanks to some people who care. We should never give up or give in. There is help out there and there are people who care. Sometimes we have to be patient and long suffering and keep our eyes on the prize.

HOBOSCOPE

By Blueenigma

Formerly Homeless Psychic

Aquarius

This is the dawning of your age getting older. For being known as a humanitarian, you've sure spent a lot of time on yourself recently, Aquarius. This year, show you've matured with age and take a look at the people around you, see what they need and make an effort to help them out. What you'll achieve within by helping others achieve their goals will leave you with something infinitely more enjoyable than selfish gains, and help you earn wisdom with all that maturity as well.

Pisces

Fluttering butterflies. Soaring eagles. Flitting humming birds. Busy bees. There are many wondrous flighty creatures. Flighty humans, however... not so much. Fear, be it of causing harm to others or oneself, often contributes to such erratic behavior. It's time to cowboy up, Pisces, and make changes happen rather than letting changes happen to you. You're much more likely to be pleased with the results.

Aries

"Dashing and daring, courageous and caring", the Gummi Bears theme song seems to be written for you, Aries. In the new year, tap into your flexible gummi side and learn to roll with the punches. As the song goes, "magic and mystery are part of your history", so by also accepting the unfamiliar you may open yourself to a new world of possibility.

Taurus

So your holidays might not have gone the way you'd hoped, Taurus. But it's time to move on and realize you've only got 300-some-odd days until next Christmas. With your persistent nature, however, that should give you plenty of time to make the 2008 holiday season everything you've dreamed it could be. Though controlling the weather or in-laws may be beyond your capabilities, it's still well within your reach to make it a season to remember.

Gemini

Oh dear, sweet Gemini, you may be the life of the party but being a constant drama queen (or king) can be a major buzz kill and ruin any soirée. It's time to take a chill pill and quit threatening to take the whole bottle. Apply your creative skills to imagining a more serene life. Then use your cunning crafts to make it a reality.

Cancer

Ah, Cancer. What a paradox you are. Both parental and childlike, persistently seeking out those to take care of and always longing for someone to take care of you. This year, focus those nurturing instincts internally, giving yourself the attentiveness usually reserved for others. You'll find yourself stronger for it.

Leo

"A patronizing disposition always has it's meaner side." -George Elliot. Proud Leo, sometimes you just can't help yourself. But despite your mighty roar, meanness isn't what you're about. This new year is the perfect time to trim those claws. Tap into your generous nature and have some empathy for your fellow man.

Virgo

New Year's is all about resolutions and making plans. But you know what they say about the best laid plans. Admitting defeat isn't your strong suit, but in the words of the wise Kenny Rogers, "you gotta know when to hold 'em; know when to fold 'em; know when to walk away; know when to run." So this year's resolutions, Virgo, should include flexibility and the willingness to move onto "Plan B" if "Plan A" turns out to be a bust.

Libra

Hmmm... "self-indulgent, easy going, indecisive, sometimes gullible." The list of Libra traits sounds like the perfect candidate for cult recruit. Luckily though, "flightiness" is listed as well, implying you'd not be that willing to stick to strict cultish convention. Perhaps it's time to view all your alleged "flaws" in this light. Whether taking value in the lessons learned from your mistakes, or looking for positives in seemingly negative attributes, a lot can be gained from taking this optimistic outlook.

Scorpio

You've got such a magnetic personality, Scorpio, you're practically Velcro™. The only problem is that Velcro™ tends to pick up bits of lint that no one really cares for. Lately, you may have a few hangers-on that are becoming unwelcome or unseemly. Time to wipe the slate this new year and clean up. You'll find it easier joining up with the right people once you've let go of the wrong ones.

Sagittarius

A new year promises new adventures, Sagittarius. But your optimistic outlook won't keep you out of trouble if you don't reign in your recklessness. Thailand may have beautiful beaches, but their prisons make the American ones look like Disney World. Exploration is exciting, but due diligence shouldn't be ignored.

Capricorn

Your intense focus on details can tend to keep your attention away from the big picture, Capricorn. Coupled with your pessimistic propensities, getting bogged down in the small stuff can shut you down. Take time this year to stand back and see the forest through the trees. You may see beauty where before there was only briars and thorns. At worst, you may be able to spot a solution that's been alluding you.

Chef Nick's Recipe of the Month: Oven Roasted Roast Beef

This is one of my favorite recipes that I serve at my meals.

- Buy the cheapest 11 to 13 lb. roast you can find (I use chuck roll). Don't worry about the tenderness of the cut. Cooking it this way guarantees tenderness.
- Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees.
- Place meat fat side up on a sheet pan.
- Cover the top with kosher salt (course salt). Don't be shy with it. If you think you used too much, I promise, you haven't!
- Cook for about 13 min per pound.



- When that time has expired (about 2 1/2 hours for an 11 lb. roast), with roast still in the oven, move the temperature up to 400 degrees and cook for an additional 20 min.
- Turn oven off and let roast rest in cooling down oven for 1 hour.
- Remove and you have a roast beef cooked medium rare. If you prefer your beef more done, do 17 min per lb. to cook medium.
- Use pan drippings to make a delicious brown gravy.

• Slice and serve. - Yummy!!!!!!!!!!!!!!



Chef's Note: I love you all very much and look forward to seeing you all under the bridge. This is a season of overflow. Come ask me what that means.

I love to share what God has put in my heart! The next 2 months we will only be feeding at the Jefferson street bridge from 4 to 7 and we will return to Tent City in March.

"Christ I Came to Know" Continued from Page 9

I found Christ in the outcast – exactly were Jesus told me he'd be when I came seeking.

"Seek and ye shall find..." Indeed still the truth, the very essence of our walk of faith and our all-too-meager and often hapless works of mercy. But once we take that first step on the path of light (often not brightly illuminated at all), the journey is all that matters.

The coda to this story is a poignant dream I had some weeks after Walt's death in February 2002. In my dream, Walt and I were sitting in some fine Barcaloungers in front of the James Robertson Apartments, watching passers-by and chatting about nothing of import. The

dream was remarkable because one of the cruel medical vestiges of Walt's years on the streets was a noticeable speech affect, an aphasia caused by years of uncompensated seizures. In my dream, however, Walt spoke clearly and without any remnant of his speech impediment. And the last thing he told me before the dream ended, in ungarbled, clear voice, was that this was what heaven was like – a warm day, seated with friends in a Barcalounger, and that if I could believe that for just one moment, then my earthly life was going to be all okay.

To this day, every time I sit in a reclining chair I marvel at Walt's wisdom and how blessed my life really is.



Free Tax Service for Homeless People

BY STEVE SAMRA
Formerly Homeless Writer
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Starting the first week in February, 2008, homeless individuals who have worked will be able to collect their back taxes up to the previous three years, thanks to Lorie Oden, who works with the Nashville Wealth Building Alliance, a United Way financial stability initiative.

Ms. Oden will be at various shelters and soup kitchens throughout the downtown and in the East Nashville area, providing free income tax filing to anyone who requests it.

Last year, she provided this free service at the Campus for Human Development and was able to get refunds for about 15 people, with the typical refund averaging around

\$300 dollars.

According to Ms. Oden, it is a common misperception of many that if they don't file their taxes each year, the IRS instigates penalties. The truth is, if a single individual earns less than \$8450, they are not required to file; however, if they do, the IRS will almost certainly owe them money. Furthermore, individuals are allowed to file a return for up to three years of past work wages and the IRS will refund any monies owed during this filing period.

If an individual would like to get copies of previous years W2's they can call the IRS at (800) 829-1040.

For more information and the times and locations of Ms. Oden's services, please contact (615) 780-2460.



The Contributor

is seeking interns for:
Vendor Recruitment and Training

Flexible hours, 5-10 per week.

Responsibilities include:

- Canvassing meals, shelters and streets seeking qualified individuals to sell papers.

- New vendor training.

Contact us at 615-598-0061 or
thecontributorstaff@gmail.com

"Mr. Lee"
Continued from Page 1

Also, shortly after the original piece ran in The Contributor, we received an email from a Ms. Adrienne Lippard, MSSW, who is the Director of Living at Home Services with Senior Citizens Inc. She referred Mr. Lee to Ms. Anne Whitlow, a staff member with Senior Citizens Inc.

Ms. Whitlow paid a visit to Mr. Lee the second week of December and she and Mr. Lee discussed his situation, and provided him with some potential options for pursuing his issues further. As of the printing of this issue, there has been no word on any developments on this front.

Meanwhile, Mr. Lee continues to fight his leaky roof and bad plumbing, but believes good things are headed his way in 2008, thanks to the help of concerned Nashvillians.



"Vendor Conduct"
Continued from Page 2

We believe that the community will unite behind this so long as our vendors conduct themselves in a manner befitting a concerned and proud member of our community.

To all our vendors who work so hard and follow the simple rules of conduct, we are immensely proud of you and we salute you! Please keep up the great work!

To our community members who have stopped and congratulated our vendors for their efforts, we thank and greatly appreciate you, too - we need you all on board in order to make this a success.

To report vendor problems or congratulate a vendor for a job well done, please contact The Contributor at: 615-579-9510 or 615-598-0061, or feel free to e-mail us at: thecontributorstaff@gmail.com



WHERE TO FIND HELP IN NASHVILLE



Provider Name	Address
Alcoholics Anonymous	40
Assumption St. Vincent Outreach	3
Behavioral Health Access	39
Belmont Church	35
Bridges to Care	39
Campus for Human Development	1
Centennial Park	24
Community Care Fellowship	2
Department of Human Services	45
Domestic House	7
Downtown Clinic	14
Downtown Presbyterian Church	33
East Nashville Cooperative Ministry	38
Family Life Center	5
First Response Center	32
Fourthly/Provision International	38
Goodwill Industries	28
Gordon Memorial Church	34
Guest House (Campus)	1
H.U.G.S.	32
Hope Center	38
Ladies of Charity	41
Loaves & Fishes (Holy Name Church)	30
Matthew 25	8
Matthew Walker Health Center	18
MDHA	13
Mental Health Cooperatives	20
Metro Action Commission	37
Metro Street Services	40
Myra: City Mission	47
Nashville CARES	37
Nashville General Hospital	21
Nashville Rescue Mission	3
Next Door: The	38
Oakus Center	10
Operation Band Down	8
Pets Center	9
Project Return	13
Riverton Park	23
Salvation Army - 142 N. First	55
Salvation Army - 631 Dickerson Pkwy	4
Samaritan Ministries	31
Samaritan Recovery Center	50
Sloan Family Health Center	19
Street Works	42
TN Career Center at Metro Center	35
TN Career Center at Nashville South	48
Traveler's Aid	3
UNHS - Cayce Family Health Clinic	18
UNHS - Northeast Family Clinic	51
UNHS - Southside Family Clinic	52
UNHS - Wickerly-Bairson Clinic	17
Urban Housing Solutions	11
V.A. Medical Center	22
Vine Hill Clinic	15
Vocational Rehab	39
W.O.M.E.N.	44
Temporary location during Howard School building renovation	



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Any questions or comments regarding this brochure should be directed to:
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