



talking sidewalks

voices. faces. stories. souls.

Welcome

Michael E. Wood

It's time for a new issue of "Talking Sidewalks," a magazine whose goal is to give voice to the voiceless. I remember the first time I saw that statement on a copy of the last issue. I was offended. After all I am homeless, but feel in no way voiceless. But upon reflection I can accept that ours is a voice seldom heard. It is my hope that through our collective writing we can give to the reader an accurate sense of what it's like to be homeless. It truly has changed my perspective on so many things.

I would hope that we can describe to you how our lives like yours contain both joy and frustrations. We too have hopes for a better life ahead.

We have opinions on matters that affect all of us. Conservatives who speak of the sanctity of life but believe that government should only concern itself with building roads and battleships. Liberals that create social programs that through the law of unintended consequences can create a trap of perpetual poverty.

With all due respect to you the reader, don't be mistaken and think that because you know that I am homeless, that you know me. I am after all merely homeless and not hopeless.

It is my hope that one day I will be in a position to give back to society that which has been so freely and selflessly given to me. Because today I understand that I can only keep what I have by giving it away to others. You see the most precious thing I possess is hope.

This past Tuesday, I was to enter the gym at the Seymour Senior Citizens Center, an ever too recent effort I am making to improve my physical condition. I met and talked at some length with a tall, thin and obviously very sweet man. It was apparent to me that he suffers from Parkinson's disease, but yet he was very bright, cheerful and inspiring.

He said that his wife had booted him out of the house so that she could relax for awhile. The only response I could come up with was the often used phrase, "Well they say absence makes the heart grow fonder."

And we both shared a moment of mutual smiles. It was clear to me that my new friend Mike was doing the best he could with what he had to work with. I hope I never feel sorry for myself. There are just too

many examples of real suffering out there. Suffering not caused, as in my case, by bad choice but by a bad turn in the genetic crap shoot.

I still think about my new friend Mike. A true prince of a man dealt unfortunately a horrible hand. You see, if I can manage to stay away from drugs and alcohol, I will get better. Mike unfortunately cannot.

If we are successful in our effort to inform of what it's like to be homeless, you might better understand the diversity of backgrounds and personalities that live here at the shelter.

It is my belief that, like me, you may have some misconceptions about us. Maybe by learning how we adapt to the life before us, you might find new ways of dealing with or accepting your own challenges.

I know that I came to this period in my own life not fully appreciating or accepting people from the religious community. I now embrace the Christian philosophy and seek to find the source of the love they share with their fellow man. "So as you do to the least of man, so as you do to me," (paraphrased from Matthew 25:40).

Thank you.



Andrew

For questions, comments, or to get involved, email talkingsidewalks@gmail.com

Read it online at www.talkingsidewalks.com

How to write about people from Chapel Hill

Cadillac Cowboy

They have a name for how Chapel Hill does things. Everything is done Chapel Hill style. Really extravagant. I find Chapel Hill to be a very good place to live. People for the most part are very giving. Friendly and courteous. Even the wealthy people seem to be pretty friendly. All types of people. You have college students and crack addicts. College students walking through cracktown and crackheads walking downtown. Small town atmosphere, but yet it's really a large town. Small city, really. 30,000 students and faculty approximately. Just like a little city. From small town to big city when school's back in.

When school's back in, hustle and bustle. Buses run better. Without the university, it would be zero. A small town. A very poor small town, I might add. The students are the backbone of the city. They're what keeps the city going. The students and university play a key role in making the town. It's kind of known for being a party town. It's fun living here. That's about it, I guess.



Poverty hides in the shadows in Chapel Hill.

Karl Marks

Misfit Application

Allen Dubey

Oh God, here is my prayer, show me the way
I'm looking for work every day
Will someone not judge me by my past
Open their heart
Give me a chance

I have two good hands
Skills that abound
But this past of mine on paper
Follows me around
A criminal record
Most won't overlook
McDonald's will not even consider hiring me
As a part time cook

Liability, a risk they must say
Their insurance dictates that way
We can't take the chance, what can we do?
It's not our fault that he chose to drop out of school
Forty seven years old, I just acquired my GED
Thirty two years after dropping out, you see
I've made my mistakes
People can change, change is a choice
A choice that I've made

I'm sorry sir, your work history is too sporadic
Are you a recovering addict?
I understand, its ok! Tomorrow is another day

Hi my name is Allen
I'm here to apply for the job.

Soulful Thought

DJ

Tear drop fallen from my eyes
like rain during the mid-day
it's Christmas tomorrow like happiness

Sometimes I wish I could just blink
myself away and proceed into the next life.

I found out the key to life,
it just hit me, it's HAPPINESS!!!

Just my luck you can't buy it
you can't steal it

The thing that gets me is
you can be wrapped up all in it and not even know it.

The emotion can fly by you like a shooting star.

To me the American dream is Happiness and I wish it
for every man, woman and child. Peace.



Joseph Sinkiewicz



Tara Mahaley

My Experience of Becoming a Man

Chris

It all started when I was very young. My father was a very angry man, and he never was at home. When he was there he would argue with my mother and beat on her, until one day he almost beat her to death with a hammer. She stayed in the hospital for many days, and I stayed with my grandparents while she recovered. I became very uncontrollable and had to seek professional help from the psychologist for many months. I remember just wanting to run away and never come back.

I was so scared of my father, I didn't want another man with my mother and I. Well she met another man, and later married him, and he became my new father at the age of six. At first I was very distanced with him and didn't like the way his eyes were. They were very green and looked as if they could cut right through you. Later on he built a little trust in me and we started doing some father and son events. He would take me fishing, and he taught me how to hunt, ride my bike. Things that I only hoped my real dad could've done. My stepfather also liked to drink alcohol and was violent and of course he showed me how to do that too. At the age of sixteen, I felt as if I had to leave home, because of all the beatings and drinking that was going on.

So I had to become a man real fast and learn how to earn money with a trade. I became real good at building houses, and I just knew this was going to be what I will do for the rest of my life. In this line of work, you see plenty of alcohol and drug use and it only becomes part of you too.

At the age of 21 years old, I was a full blown alcoholic and drug addict. They started controlling my life and I couldn't understand why, because I did these things all the time. It all started as recreational events, parties, and family get togethers. I thought it was the natural thing to do when attending these social events, until later on I was using everyday no matter what happened. I've been homeless from this disease many times now, and it's very hard to do the next right thing. I do attend AA and NA meetings daily and work on trying to do something different today.

I'm still homeless, but not hopeless and feel that no matter what my situation may be today, I don't have to use. My best thinking got me here, so I try not to do much of that and just take it one day at a time. I'm from the dirt road and I don't have a lot of book knowledge, but I do have plenty of common sense, and that's how I'm making better things happen today. If you could see me on the streets today, you wouldn't think I was homeless, you would just walk on by not knowing I needed help.

I hope this is my last episode of my story on the streets of Chapel Hill and find my new way of living to be productive, and predictable. If you have some similar experiences with life and have hit the bottom, then quit feeling sorry for yourself and do something about it. It has to start from within, and you need to be honest with yourself and others who are in your life. Don't wait like I did, and let it get too far out of hand, because we're not promised tomorrow, and today is never too late. Don't live off of mightys and whatifs, because whatifs are just another question, and mites grow on a chicken's butt. Live like there is no tomorrow and be somebody today, and remember only you can do this, no one else.

I hope and pray this experience I've had helps someone today, and gives them something to think about. If you see someone today with struggles in their life, reach out and show you care, don't just give up on them and think it's got nothing to do with you, because you're wrong. My family was the first ones to quit on me, because of all the lies and disappointments that came with the relapses.

Remember if I keep trying to get it, maybe one day I will. So you should keep trying too. Something to think about is, if sidewalks could talk, would we still walk all over them?



Trefron

Untitled

Thomas G. Owens Jr.

In the front of the back porch there seems
to be a snake in the form of a buzzard—
and it must take the form of a bird because it wants to fly.
It's been sentenced to a garden
to slither around on its belly for all the days of its life.
A poor frog does not have a chance around dirt.
For it is only a sacrifice unto the ground.
When the serpent sees its prey it swallows it up whole
no need for moisture in its own throat.
Dry is the way in which to make its day long and scorchey.
Back on the front porch it crawls out for the garden.
Only seeking a row of dirt to climb and hiss over—one filthy varmit.

A Mother's Love for Her Children

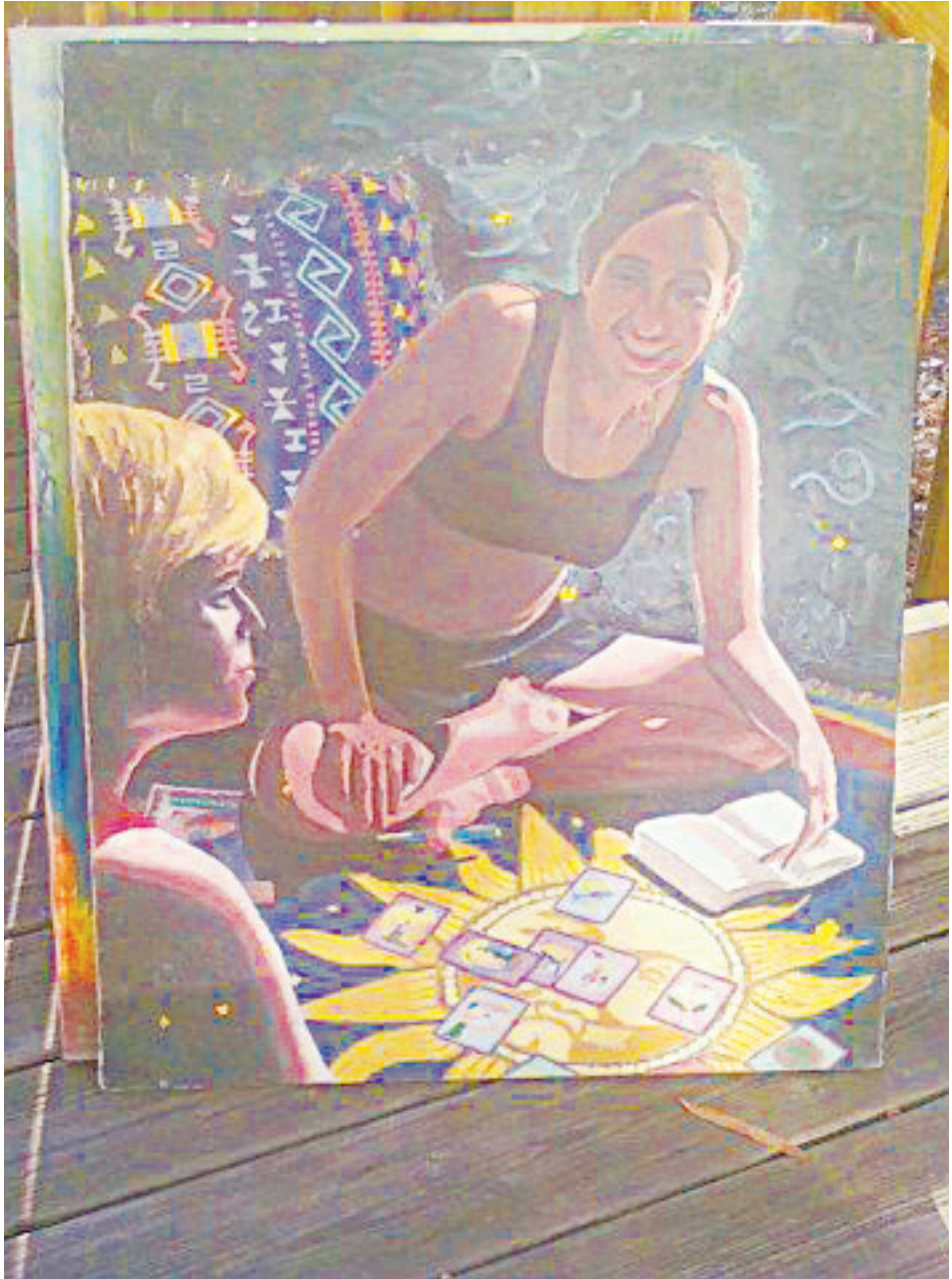
Sharon Norris

I love my two children with all my heart,
I will always love them 'til death do us part.
These two children are beautiful smart girls,
They are also innocent children with a head full of curls.
Now, don't get me wrong 'cause they are different in their own way,
You can see it by what they do and what they say.
Rachel has short beautiful hair with natural curls,
She loves to ride her bike and dance with a twirl.
Now, there's a part of my baby you've never seen,
But, if you stick around her you'll see what I mean.
God gave me this sweet child from heaven up above,
A sweet child to cherish and to love.
Heather is my other child from the good Lord upstairs,
Another child to love and share my cares.
She's a sweet child with a very special gift,
Keeping her out of trouble is quite a lift.
But, like I said she's my child from heaven up above,
An innocent child to cherish and to love.
I'm a good mother, listener, and friend,
I will be these 3 things until the end.
As you all know my part in this poem,
Is a good mother of 2 children as my life shall go on.



It Could Happen To You

Karl Marks



painting and photograph by Tara Mihaly

My Story

Michael Jenkins

My name is Michael, and this is my story.

My story begins in the streets with the homeless people. You can wake up tomorrow and be homeless and it ain't got to be because you are on drugs. You can lose you job tomorrow and be homeless.

A lot of people out here think being homeless has a lot to do with drugs but it don't. A lot of men leave because they don't want to bring their family down with them.

When you can't go home to your mom or daddy because of the things you took them through, it hurts. I know how it feels to hurt the ones you love. It is not good when you can't go home and ask your parents for help. They hate to even see you coming. They turn to the streets, and when they do, they get caught up with other things. Like I said, you can wake up tomorrow and lose everything.

Whatever you have done, you need to try to get it right. Everybody has problems. I figure the Lord ain't going to put more on you than you can bear. It's up to you to stand your ground and be that man to survive.

Sometimes the shelter, they don't want to accept you. Then you got nothing else to do but turn to the streets. You got to survive the best way you know how.

When you are homeless and are trying to survive, you have the tendency to wake up in abandoned houses. You are trying to find comfort, or a shelter to go to when the storm comes. The only one you have to turn to is yourself, and that is why most people do what they got to do to survive. They might stick you up. Sometimes they might con you.

Most people are scared when the homeless people come up and ask them for stuff. They think someone is coming up to rob them or hinder them. More people turn their nose up at you. They look down at you like you are nothing, but we are still human. We just got lost in the mix of society, but we are trying to find our way back. Trying to blend in.

When people come to ask you for something, they are really asking you for help. We are crying out for help. That is all. When they come up to you and ask you for money, I ask you not to give it to them because it's only feeding the purpose. You are just as bad as they are. You

give them the money, they might go get drugs to relieve their depression or their problems. But they still have the same problems the next day. I feel that if they are hungry, you should go get them something to eat.

We are all still human. A lot of people out here do have skills: college degrees, master degrees. They have just run across a stroke of bad luck. We are just crying out to you to try to help us. We ask you to give us luck. Give us a type of guidance to get back on the right track.

We have a life, but we chose the wrong path. Sometimes it takes another person to get back on the right path. We are just asking the people, out in the world, to give us a chance. Give us a start.

Yes, that does hurt to keep them suffering through the agony you took them through. You leave your house to keep from bringing them down. You know, I have seen bad things, and I have seen good things in my life. The street is a new experience for me too.

When that gorilla comes into your life and it destroys you, at the time, he is your best friend. Then at the next time, he is not. It is something like the devil. He has come to kill you and destroy you. Once he got his claws in you, there really isn't anything you can do about it. He has you at your weakest moment. You might be arguing with your wife at the time, or you might get mad at your momma at the time. Then he comes in at you. He tries to pick at you. "Come and go with me," he says. Then he got you out in that world, and he ain't waiting for nothing.

Don't give up. Still fight for what you need and what you want. Even though you are going through a situation that you started on your own. It ain't fun when you are watching your friends die and you wake up beside your friend because of overdose. You know the stuff we go through, some people can't even take it. Some people would rather kill themselves than go the life we are going through. I understand that but to me, that's a cop-out, a weak way out. They are still standing with the problems. Instead of standing there and fighting through the problems, they are still trying to do harm to themselves.

We are not really angry at y'all or with the world. We are angry at ourselves. You do know that as long as you got the Lord in your life, you can make it.

Untitled

Thomas G. Owens Jr.

Let the “Mind” of the Master Be the Master of your “mind”

No man can take away my faith. Only one man can give me this kind of faith.

Life is not all it would be handed down to be
Life is what shall be lifted up.
The form of man is being questioned every day.
But man’s image can never be questioned.
There is a way which is given to us all – Do we believe or turn our ear to the silence of sin.
That which rings out “loud.”

We have two appointments. Already have we seen one. Can you believe it. Sure you can. If you trust that you are breathing—
Then trust that on one of these old days you will not gather up this earthly air for the taking. It will be taken. So it is with all of us.

We must go through our own resurrection – that results in eternal life.
So when we think of life as but a vapor –
This is the truth as it is written – but for the ones that do not believe –
Do you have to read it or can you see it with your own eyes there’s no black and white?

Well it has been written and now – you know.

The Angel Without One

Andre' Lee

It was the 8th of the 9th month, when a baby boy had entered the New World in the year of 1981. His mother was ecstatic at the fact that he wasn't the only embryo within her womb. It seemed that her first born, André, had a brother on his way out, shortly after his own departure.

"There wasn't a chance for one of her boys," The Doctor said to his mother before asking her what she would name her (now) new-born twins. Quickly she implied what the first of her offspring was to be named. She'd prefer to address him as Andre', and his brother would be named Andrew, which was simply in sync with his own name. Neither one of her boys had a father present, and this absence made her feel unwanted. She wouldn't let this spoil her joy, after hearing from the head Doctor that both of her children were going to make it, and what was once bad news turned out to be good for the better. Tears falling, from the eyes of the twins' grandmother, and aunt, their mother's sister. There was a gentle knock at the door after the good news had surfaced the room...

"Come in," yelled the voice of their mother, as the Doctor had taken both of them, and began wrapping them in cloth to be weighed, once their vital signs had been taken. Cries came from the mouths of 'Dre & 'Drew as their uncle entered the room. He was the youngest of their mother's three siblings.

"Let me hold them please," asked their uncle. The doctors and nurses all agreed. As he was newly acquainted with his two nephews, tears began to surpass his cheek line, as he said thank you to the Doctor, after he had been given permission to hold his nephews.

They now were being escorted to the nursery, as one of them began to feel cold to one of the nurses. Their mother saw the look of the eyes in him, and she began panicking and crying all over again. Don't worry, it's probably not that serious, although deep down he knew himself he was telling their mother a lie, to her face.

Quickly the twins were rushed back to the nursery and placed upon breathing machines, within a respirator. This procedure was to monitor their breathing, heart rate, and change of color. As is, most children come out greyish-purple if they are African American descent, but for some strange reason they had turned to their ethnicity far too late than expected.

"Oh my God," the doctor said as Andrew's heart rate and pulse began fading. This was hard to manage in the eyes of their doctors and

nurses as the twins were about to be separated forever, and they hadn't even had the slightest idea. Tears began crying from the eyes of all the white coats in the room as the doctor walked out and slid down the wall outside the nursery.

"Why, God?" he uttered as he readied himself to give their mother what was once bad, turned good, and now bad once again. That one of her boys had left his brother's side, and he, she, and her family would soon mourn the loss of their mother's second born, Andrew. Andre' was now alone, without his better half. He was 2 pounds, 7 ounces, and his now deceased twin had been 5 pounds and 10 ounces. Andre' had no idea, but he would learn the truth once he was old enough to understand...

Pieces Of Me

DeAnn Jarman

(for M, N, & J)

When my body turns to ash
And is scattered to the wind
Will you carry pieces of me in your heart?
Will you stand on your own two feet
Like tin soliders and not fall apart?
Will you have no regrets
Knowing our love was so strong
Will you be able to continue
To carry on
Cry for me not, for my spirit still roams
'Til we meet again
When your body also scatters to the wind
For in death, my sons, we truly go home.
Carry on my legacy
Carry on, with pieces of me

Turn Around

Trefron

I have made a decision to turn my life around. I have been through the detox program at VA, and I follow up with a visit to a transition house for vets that have alcohol, drug, and depression issues. I like the house and the things they offer, like transportation, meals (good), your own room, a counselor four times a week, access to 12 step support meetings, and a 24 hour psychiatrist on call for any suicidal thoughts. You may have experienced trauma, war, etc. This is a 16 month program. After 16 months you could stay indefinitely until you have all the tools you need. For instance, car, job, support system in place. I took the time to explain this, my reason is this last Thursday I tried suicide. In the detox program, in this exercise, I had to play out a part of me telling my sons that their mother committed suicide. I could not find the words to do it. I ran out the room in tears. Then after a long thought process and finally doing the exercise I still could not do it. So when the therapist ask how do I think their mother will feel if she had to do it--this was at 10 am on Saturday, thoughts running across my mind--suddenly, I said out loud, "God give me strength to help me." I prayed, got up, walked the hallway about 3 times (I am lazy), fell asleep, missed lunch, got up hungry for dinner, then a nurse there shared a personal trauma she had. And after, the old lady she use to take care of always quote this quote from the Bible: Phi. - 4:13, "I can do all thing through Jesus Christ who strengthens me." I begin to have hope. So I made the decision to turn my life around. No more alcohol, drugs, take better care of my health, live to the fullest of my potential. Don't mistake, about this shelter. It has been an anchor for me, and this is a chapter of my life I will never forget. I believe in my heart this the right program and the right fit for me to accomplish my goals in life. With my return back to God and fully serving him, I can do this. Loving myself is what I need most at this point in my life. Don't care who judge, or criticize me. It's my life and I will live it from here on out.

Sincerely,
Treffy



Michael Jenkins

A Miracle

Michelle Martinez

A miracle—the miracle of life! A beautiful baby girl taking her first breaths of life in this new world. There is a problem- the doctor says- no- no there is not- she's fine- 10 fingers and 10 toes. But wait- why is her head shaved- what's wrong? My mother asks the doctor. Well ma'am – your daughter has undergone testing- you see- she's severely physically and mentally handicapped- Notice how her eyes are crossed. But she looks normal- she seems fine, my mom replies. She is missing the upper part of her forty-second “Y chromosome,” thus explaining the reason why. She'll never walk or even talk- That's OK- I love her just the same! Jennifer Leigh- a beautiful angel! Innocent for ever more- She can do no wrong. Well that doctor was right- She does not talk, but she walks and we love her just the same. Twenty- eight years of silence... I wonder what goes on in her brain. I think she sees angels, because she looks up at nothing and scans her eyes from left to right- laughing and enjoying the games her angels play. She herself is an angel, an amazing innocent and beautiful soul. I love my little sister- even if she is a little slow.



Andrew



Michael Jenkins

The Wonderer

Jimmy Jones

Life is not real easy. I have realized things here lately I hadn't thought about before until lately. I never thought I would be in this situation, but I guess it could happen to anyone. Life just happens, you don't plan it. It just happens sometimes. Life isn't easy but you have to live with it, try to the best you can.

Untitled

Anonymous

Hot days bring many shades
Glasses umbrellas trees
Out of the bushes come bumble bees.
Wipe the sweat from your eyes - it bothers me.
Squinted face's seemed to change the places
While we await on the darkness that come a little late.



Karl Marks

Rock Bottom

Elijah Coates

I was getting on the elevator at the shelter and out of the corner of my eye I see this guy I know from work. He's a man that I see routinely at my job; I'm a janitor. This guy recently received a promotion and started wearing neckties. He worked in the kitchen before and he wore collared shirts like mine except a different color; a terrible teal.

No one at work knows I'm homeless, except this guy now. Maybe. I'm not sure he saw me. He wasn't looking at me when I stepped on the elevator. He was looking at the front door. I think he was thinking of somewhere else he'd rather be. I was thinking I'd rather be someplace else so maybe I'm just projecting.

Some of the people I'm close to at work or the ones I speak with say, "At least you've got a place to live. You should be thankful." They say that whenever I mention my year-long search for full-time employment. People assume. They assume I have an apartment. I've lied about it before, though, so some of them have good reason. I've

said, "Yeah, I've got an apartment and a roommate." I only lied because I was questioned directly. Maybe that's not a good reason.

But, I've got this whole imaginary life going with my fellow employees -- consisting of a bunch of contradictory lies. It isn't all that great, though, this imaginary life. Most people have sports cars or beach homes in their imaginations. I've got a security deposit and maybe two or three sticks of furniture. I'm eating beans at every meal, but I have "a place to live."

I saw the guy from work and I'm not sure what he was doing at the shelter. When I see him during the day he is all smiles and waves. He says my name. I don't remember his. Whatever it is. I don't ask because I can get away with "Hello," or a nod while I push the mop. We went after the same job at a higher payrate. I would have escaped the shelter. But I would've needed to switch departments, the position was in Dining Services and he already worked there. He got it -- I mean, he likes to smile and wave a lot. Now, he wears neckties when he smiles. It doesn't bother me.

I smile most of the time. They don't know anything. So, I smile like an idiot. It's not exactly part of the uniform, but it's an unwritten rule pretty much everywhere you go. It's peoples' preference all around. It might be your preference too. Hell if I know.

This guy has the smiling and waving act down pat. He's successful. I may be stumbling onto his secret.

Now that he has more money and a raise in rank, I see him much less. But when he used to see me, he'd say, "Hello Elijah!" and wave. He didn't see me in the shelter. I don't think he did. If he did and he plans to just wave some more, then I'd rather not look in his direction. He'll be acting like I don't have an imaginary life and I do.

Maybe we'll just nod and pass one another in the halls. I'll be vacuuming, cleaning up another mess.

If he saw me, then there isn't much that can be said. I could comment on how hard the rock is at rock bottom, but he might already know. He's been there, sort of. I don't know why he was at the shelter, but I can tell by looking at him. He had a shit job before all the Steinmart ties. I can see through him.

I'll mop up the spot where I hit and maybe just watch him grin and bear it.

Pain is Worse than Death

Karl Marks

Every time I see you,
Then you go away.
It is as if the sun came up,
But with eternal eclipse,
All light has gone away.
My mind begins to wander,
To the days when you were born.
Forever would my life be changed.
That soul that had been torn,
By all the death and destruction,
Like the phoenix I arose,
That I could love anything so much,
I never could suppose.
It all had been so easy,
With feelings hidden beneath callous,
The protection from the guilt,
Of actions without malice,
Like plunging the dagger to the hilt.
Before I only felt alive,
When threatened with death's touch,
Perhaps wanting that finality,
To end the pain I felt so much.
When confronted with your innocence,
It was as if reborn.
Some mystic incarnation,
Of a soul so beaten and torn,
Holding you in my arms.
And watching your first breath,
Life seemed to take on meaning,
From all the carnage and the death,
The spinning of my Dharma.
The universe like a wheel.
Being separated from you both,
Was the worst injury I would feel.

Neither bullet in the back,
Or the machette's slicing cut,
Was so ever excruciating,
As this pain deep in my gut.
Like a dumb dumb bullet,
Tearing everthing to shreads.
A wound so hard of healing.
Sometime wishing I was dead,
And feeling that way every day,
I've truly come to think,
And I have to say,
If there truly was a god,
It would not be this way!!!



Karl Marks



Trefron

Untitled

Michael Jenkins

Before I got shot up I used to sell drugs, me and this Jamaican guy. I used to stand on street corners selling drugs and chasing women. Then one day I got hooked up with the wrong crowd, called the Bloods. And my brothers didn't like that I went and got some more foot soldiers. I wouldn't let my brothers make no money and so the Bloods didn't like that. They tried to hang out for a while, but then it started getting ugly because they wasn't eating as much. So I said, 'Why should I let the Bloods eat over here in my neighborhood? We build this empire from the ground.'

So as the years went by they retaliated back by gun play. They send some of their soldiers out. They came back doing drive bys. So I left that time, maybe things will calm down in a day. I came back to help them out again so three of my best friends got hit. That's the night I got hit in my leg - shot in my femur bone. Besides me getting hit, some of my brothers got hit with me.

So all of us were laying in the hospital with no means and no where to go. So we came up with the solution to let them eat again. But I didn't want to have that when I got out.

One night it was storming storming outside. This white cadillac came creeping by. They shot up three of my friends, including me. We had gone retaliating back, including my god sons. We didn't mean to kill a boy and his daughter. So we said, "Fuck it, forget it, she shouldn't have been there."

Till now the police said stay away and don't come back no more. It's alright to visit but I can't come back to stay. So my brothers told me to go ahead on and stay away from Durham. Got a dude shot me in my arm and took out a chunk of my nerve. I figure they was trying to get revenge on what I had done. But I still say to this day, "We didn't mean to do it."

I still ask God for forgiveness. For my actions my baby brother is gone today all because of some drugs. But I say to myself today, God already had forgive me, so stop beating myself up for it. But I thank God I did come back and tell her momma. She forgive me and that's when I make peace with myself and I stopped selling drugs. I figure God has something for me to do. They say three strikes and it's over, but God got me through three times so I figure he's got something for me to do other than selling drugs. So I came through Chapel Hill for the third time.

P.S. Y'all changed my life around too. Y'all made me have another way of living. Thanks to the writing class.



Joseph Sinkiewicz

Prelude to Death's Daughter

DeAnn Jarman

Where to begin... Shall I begin with the normality that used to be my life? Or the plunge into darkness, though it seems like the black cloud of destitution had always hung over my head like an old friend. Starting with the death of my mother at age eleven and the total abandonment of my brothers and sister afterwards. My youngest brother and I, the baby, became the forgotten ones, discarded like dirty tissues in a waste basket, but that is another story in itself.

It was August 24, 1991. A day we shall never forget! I had just gotten off work at my third shift in sunny California. I lived with my husband, mother in law, and oldest son who was six at the time. We were headed to Disneyland with two of my best friends whom were visiting from North Carolina. I rushed home and woke everyone up to get started on our vacation.

Highway Five, which runs north to south is ironically referred to as "Death Valley." Now I know why! The valley is filled with thousands of windmills which are used to help produce energy, I later learned that the winds that rip through the valley have the force to knock eighteen wheelers onto their sides. The proof being on the news. Poultry and produce scattered the highway like beads being ripped from a cheap necklace.

I remember going home that morning but what I am about to tell you now was what was told to me after I awoke from the coma by the people that were there.

My son, husband, and I were headed down the highway doing seventy when the wind blew my little Mercury Lynx up a very steep embankment. My door flew open when the car flipped sideways and I was thrown seventy feet into the air landing in the fast lane of the freeway. They said that I bounced twice, the first time cracking the back of my head on the concrete, causing my brain to swell. Then breaking my floating rib which punctured my lung, causing them both to collapse. I died for the first time on the Highway. My "husband" told me that the car continued to roll seven times sideways before flipping end over end twice. If I had been wearing my seat belt, the roof of the car would have decapitated me. Thank "God" for small favors?

The second time I flat lined I was being air lifted to the trauma center. I was given a 25% chance of surviving twenty-four hours. Then a fifty-fifty chance of having brain damage and being wheel chair bound for the rest of my life. To the doctors, I was already dead. They advised my husband to call my family in North Carolina if they wanted to see me one last time. What do doctors know?

With tubes in my shaven head to stop the brain swelling and tubes in my lungs to pump out the blood and fluid, since I managed to survive the twenty four hours, the doctors were more concerned with infection. Life support was shoved down my throat all the way to my stomach, oxygen up my nose, and a machine breathing for me. I looked like something out of the Twilight Zone or a borg from Star Trek.

I woke up with a body that was broken and a soul that felt like it had been newly reborn into Hell. Paralyzed on my right side like a newborn baby that was learning to walk and talk and feed myself all over again. I had to have surgery to somewhat repair my vision and spent three months in a wheelchair while nurses bathed me and wiped my bottom because I could not.

To this day, I still have paralysis in my face and the loss of motor control in the fingers of my right hand along with nerve damage in my leg. Social Security says that I can still work even though now I have to see a therapist just to be able to cope with my own mortality. My son who is now twenty five suffers from post-traumatic stress and to top it all off, I am currently living in a homeless shelter. DSS took my children not because of drugs or alcohol, but because I am homeless. I am fighting for my divorce because of mental and emotional abuse along with the seven times he cheated on me in the marriage. He said that I changed after the accident, but I gave him the option of walking away. The woman, the soul that dwelled in this body, died August 24th, 1991.

The love of my children is the only thing that I have that keeps me going. I am learning to love the me that now resides in this body. But alas... I'm still broken.

Death's Daughter

DeAnn Jarman

Darkness is bliss.
Surrounding, developing, overcoming, uninviting.
I find the solitude comforting
Soothing as I have become death's daughter...
Not once, but twice has he refused to take me home.
Hurling me back to society
A harsh, cruel, un-accepting place,
Never changing... judgmental lonely
Humanity, like rats searching for the proverbial cheese.
I sit alone and watch from the shadows
I scream... "There is no truth in what you seek!"
But they hear me not
Seeking the normality of this world
I withdraw...
Pushing myself deeper into the abyss,
Away from the light....the unknown...
The sanity of it all.



Joseph Sinkiewicz



Trefron

Dios me va a ayudar

Walter

Spanish

Quiero tratar de no fumar. No voy a comprar mas cigarros y no voy a tratar de comprar cervezas ni voy a pensar en cosas malas como drogas ni andar con amigos drogados. Voy a tratar de ir a la iglesia y ponerme un buen hombre sano. Necesito tener fé en Dios que voy a conseguir un trabajo. Dios me va a ayudar. Amen.

English

I want to stop smoking. I am not going to buy any more cigarettes. And I am not going to buy “cervezas” (beer), nor am I going to think of bad things like drugs or walk with friends who do drugs. I am going to try to go to church to become a good and clean man. I need to have faith in God that I am going to find a job. God will help me. Amen.



painting and photograph by Tara Mihaly

At the bus stop

Cadillac Cowboy

- What the hell is that?
- That was our bus.
- We'll have to catch the next bus I guess.
- Lord have mercy. What are we going to do now? I took the bus because I have no money, I'm trying to get to Carrboro Plaza.
- The Carrboro Plaza bus should come pretty soon. It'll be 10-15 minutes. I'm taking the J bus to Wendy's. I'm hungry. I wish the J bus would hurry up.
- I got to get to Carrboro Plaza and get my driver's license renewed and get a pack of cigarettes.
- Here, I have a cigarette.
- How much do you charge for a cigarette?
- Nothing, just take it. You give me a cigarette when I need it sometime.
- Here comes the bus, I've got to go.
- My bus is coming too, I'll see you later.
- Take it easy, have a nice day.
- You too.



Andrew

Mission Statement

Elijah Coates



Karl Marks

Today, it happened because of some strong coffee and the Rolling Stones' "Sympathy for the Devil" on my mp3 player. I mean, damn, I was on top of the fucking world for about 45 minutes.

My productivity level picked up.

Seriously, I worked faster. I pushed a mop faster and I told myself that my business plans were gonna take off like a space rocket ship, zoom out of the atmosphere, and deposit a satellite. Mission accomplished. Houston would want to award me with a medal. I was that good.

I didn't come down right after that. I hung around, stayed in orbit and looked over my pathway to success - from this amazing height. It looked great! Fantastic. I didn't want to convert to optimism, but I decided to stay awhile. Then, on second thought, I asked myself, "Why come down?"

When the shuttle breaks up, then I'll admit we have a problem. In the meantime, I'm gonna see what I can do to man this ship and, for me, that will be like rocket science. It's gonna take physics and miracles to believe I can't fail because failure is mainstay. Failure has hidden minor victories.

But, now that I'm in space, I intend to keep listening to Mick Jagger or David Bowie and his "Space Oddity." And, then, I'll think optimism is a good thing in the stratosphere and on earth.

How Will They Remember Me?

Equashia Mumeen

From where I began this journey there were many houses from which I came, most with a different roof and a unique frame. Among these houses the occupants were from many lands. We spoke different languages, came from different backgrounds and social statuses; however, all of our facial expressions were common- it's a look called despair.

When my life took a downward turn and I arrived at a place graciously named "Home Start." This was a special house; upon arrival at this house you would not guess that the occupants of this house would become a friend first to you. Someone you can trust and support you, next they are a part of your family. So now, a look of despair, I used to have, is replaced with a unique love in my heart and kindness in my soul, my tears are tears of laughter from happy thoughts.

A lot of times my mind wanders and I think "what if." Instead I think not to use the words "what if" because only God knows the "what ifs." Instead I think maybe I should have thought things through, made different decisions. I am very honored I met these ladies, I have learned a lot from them, they have encouraged me, cried with me, laughed with me, oh yeah, most of the time they laugh with me. Motivated me to put my plans into actions and not tuck them away or place them on a shelf, to finish the things I started. Smile more, love myself more, and stay informed, read about the things and people that matter. They have advised me in matters of the heart. By living with the ladies of Home Start shelter, they are the medicine that aids you, I often joke telling them it's against the law to practice medicine without a license. They are the glue who holds you together when you feel you are at your lowest. I'm glad I took this journey, through this trail.

I now have come to realize life has many roads, paths and highways and all things have beginning and an end. So that means we live and we die. The most important question we should all ask ourselves is, "How will people remember me after my death? Where will I spend eternity?" I ask myself these questions, "Have I done enough with my life to make a difference in someone else's life?"

Choices

Michael E. Wood

Choices are not necessarily a luxury. If winter is a time for reflection upon one's life and I believe that it is, then a winter spent in a homeless shelter is reflection on steroids.

My poor choices in life are exactly what have me in my present situation. But instead of lamenting my bad decisions, it is I think to my benefit to embrace my current loss of choices and how it can help to focus my life to a more positive outcome.

Before my choices were based on a selfish desire to run away from anything remotely unpleasant, as opposed to meeting life on its own terms. I once read in one of those self-help books that children would not be happy if their parents weren't. Since this seemed plausible to me, I immediately made plans to separate from my wife and abandon my two young children, then move to Atlanta and pursue the financial rewards of the big city. Oh I supported my children financially, but they were in Chapel Hill and I was far away in Atlanta. Money without love don't get you much. I felt guilty, my family felt alone and abandoned, and I greatly regret that I didn't stick it out and do the right thing.

Invariably as I have come to the crossroads in my life, I knew which road to take, but I was too self-obsessed to take the rightful course of action. It was just too damn hard or it required too many sacrifices on my part.

Before becoming homeless I had lots of money and all the potential for choosing that which money allows one. What it got me was a horrible drug and alcohol jag and a 50 inch girth. Six months ago I weighed 260 lbs. and had to take a 5 minute break between tying my right and left shoe. I smoked 3 packs of cigarettes a day or more. The only exercise I would get would come if the batteries went dead in my remote. But like Prince said, "Parties aren't meant to last." I eventually ran out of money and parents to rescue me and finally I am forced to deal with the consequences of my deplorable behavior.

I eventually ran out of food and although I didn't have the courage to commit suicide, I very much wanted to go to sleep and not wake up. But I've heard, it's said that it's okay to look at the past, it's not okay to stare at it.

I now have hope. I've been sober for about 90 days and 1,000 nights. I've learned to accept the acceptable. I know I can't live without money forever but for right now I see it as a positive.

My perspective on life has changed. It's as if I've been given a new set of eyes.

I'm so, so grateful for the help of this group and the other resources made available to me. The volunteers in this program are a prime example of how you can indeed make a difference. The choices you all have made are selfless and therefore you will be blessed by your decisions to help your fellow man.

One more thing and I'll stop for now. I used to look upon Christians with disdain. How dare they proclaim to know God's will? After all, what kind of God would give Beethoven his amazing gift to compose beautiful music and then allow him to go deaf? Beethoven's 9th Symphony, and more specifically "Ode to Joy," I think this is his most joyous of compositions. Today, I believe it was his lack of hearing that focused his talent. If he could have, I'm sure he would have chosen to hear. I think because he couldn't hear, the melody tormented him until he got it out for all of us to enjoy. Sometimes our lives can be defined by the obstacles that we overcome.

So in summary I say sometimes less is indeed more. If that seems overly optimistic, maybe. Like the zen master said, "We'll see."



Andrew

Truth

Allen Dubey

The light in my eyes
Slowly grows dim
As I look at reflections
Of places I've been
Time's running out
My chances are few
The walk I walk, it is
Misunderstood. Addiction and lies,
Promises broken. Oh what the hell,
I'll just keep token. I'll do it tomorrow
And lie for today.
Now yesterday's gone, my children are grown.
What have I accomplished, broke and alone.
My life soon to end up as an urn on a shelf
For those to flip ashes in I've never helped.
Truth of it is, the choices I made put me
Where I am today. Homeless and old
Now ready to change, is it too late to join in the game.
If sidewalks could talk, I'd have the chance to join
In the game, learn how to dance before the light
In my eyes is gone, new vision of hope keeps me
Keeping on, walking this talking sidewalk I'm on!



Karl Marks

*For questions, comments, or to get involved, email talkingsidewalks@gmail.com
Read it online at www.talkingsidewalks.com*

In Memory



“I’ve been a very arrogant and elitist man in my life and got swatted like a bug until there were only pieces of me left, and I perhaps would like to redeem myself by giving a voice to people that have no voice. It reminds me of the title of one of the old science fiction novels, called ‘I have no mouth but I must scream.’ For those that have no voice, I would like to do some of the screaming, and I do.”

Phillip Rodney Personette
1953 — 2008

This publication is in memory and honor of Phillip Personette and his work as a literary advocate for the homeless community.

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