



# talking sidewalks

voices. faces. stories. souls.

## To the Readers

*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*

To the readers of these stories in this magazine:

Some of these stories are true and come to life before your eyes. Almost animation. We are humans not numbers.

We do love and live to give love. By all means we do overcome. Some do move on with their lives and help others. I, like most of the people you see on the street or in the gutter, come from a good family somewhat and was given a pretty much good childhood. I was taken care of as far as food and shelter but did not get the stability that most families get. Simply because of a separated family. I do realize that millions of people go on with their lives with the same circumstances.

For me I chose the road less traveled. Got up with the wrong people and chose many negative patterns for my life. Most of what I've done and the choices I've made were learned behavior. I always knew I was going against the grain.

At some point I accepted things just as they came down the pipe. Good, Bad or Indifferent. As I got older I would reach out for help, but when it became uncomfortable I withdrew. Went back to my long time behavior and so-called friends. In and out of jails and institutions, never changed my outlook on life.

Looking back on it I think my biggest problem was trust issues with people. Generally because as a child I did not know who to trust. Always back and forth in court, mostly for who had possession of the children. Not knowing where I belong could have changed my idea about life. I could go on about the How's and Why's of why I think I'm here.

A lot of the cases in this magazine are true and should be prayed for. That's my hope for us all. That if you do nothing else for these human beings with feelings and emotions, just pray for one - this could be the one that changes the world. Somebody surely did this for me. My world has already changed.

Today I live in an apartment on Smith Level road. It's not a lot but it's all I got and I respect it a lot. I struggled a lot when I stayed in the shelter. I did drugs and drank to begin with. Then I started watching the



*Charles Gear*

behaviors of the people that stay in the shelter. It's kind of mind-boggling to watch people depend on three meals a day and shelter at night.

When it becomes the only way to live, you have to question yourself. Is this what I really want? Or is there a way out of this? I couldn't get stuck in this moment and not move on. So once again I tried recovery and as always it was shaking going.

Would I give up? "Never." Why? For one thing I do believe in me. More than that I believe in hard work. Hard work pays off, some jobs more than others. I took a job painting, made some money. Waved a little here and there. Kept going to meetings despite my own ways of thinking and things got better. Fell down a couple of times. Always found the power to get back up through my relationship with God.

Now here's the best part of the story. I was at some kind of homeless gathering at the Hargraves Center. My brother was getting his teeth pulled. So I was in between eating some food and trying to find out where he was at. I ran into this blonde-headed, free-spirited young lady that invited me to a writing class. Her name was Megan.

She helped me find my brother and got him some soup. He had his wisdom teeth pulled. I thought to myself. I could tell she was going out of her way to help my brother. That's all it took, this little chick moved my spirit that day.

I owed her one, so I showed up for that damn writing class and it really has changed my life – sometimes I think more than my AA or NA meetings. I'll be forever grateful for the four horsemen that I met in this writing class. Maggie, Megan, Jon and Virginia. I attend those meetings when I can, working also on a garden on the weekend with these chosen few.

I will not talk anymore about how I found my throne room or what I did to obtain it. Besides, hard work - I told you it pays off.

So I arrive here in December right before Christmas. Still attending AA meetings and writing class meetings. Enjoying my place. Thinking to myself What Peace and what serenity that lies in these four walls.

I've had some tough times in my new found home. My mother has died, and I went back to my old ways. Only for a little time. When I went home after my mother's death, I took a turn for the worse. My father is gone, now my mother. It was only for a couple days. I came back to my senses. I remember the Prodigal Son story. "Come Home Son, just come home."

This is where I regained my strength and character. So life is only one day at a time. It's all we have. The memories we make today are the smiles we share tomorrow. My Life, My Home, "Priceless."



*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*

House painted by Thomas G. Owens Jr. with Shamrock Painting  
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## How Many Deaths Will it Take

*Trefon*

How many deaths will it take  
 Till he knows that too many people have  
 Died?

He wonders on a clear day  
 How many deaths it would take.  
 He thinks about it on a rainy day  
 How many  
 He ponders about it on a cold day.

Another funeral same family, same cause of death.

Somebody tell me why this family, why this drug?

How many deaths would it take?

Then one night it came,  
 The Answer is here the Answer-  
 Was here all the time. Stop the cycle-

Another night it came-  
 Say no!! Fight. Harder.

Another night it came.

It said:

Live life to the fullest, everyday  
 Help someone, serve God. Take care of family  
 Be free, be honest, true to heart, to self  
 Be kind, protect family, laugh, live a stress free life!

## The Insecurity Within

*Paul Y.*



*The Laughing Man*

I have to get out of it. I have to get noticed that is the inner desire. It is that strong urge that is constantly pushing through its agenda.

The urge is so great it generates anxiety. It causes the stimuli within to catalyze the enzymes and the catalysts.

The heart rate increase its beat, the blood pressure rises higher and the fear and anxiety causes inner insecurity.

The fight is great within you that it is on the outside. You are facing a tragic moment.

The moment craves for protection it's being in you wants to hide.

You are afraid of your character. You do not want the people around you to notice your weakness.

You want to be a man, so you are fighting hard to prove it.

You are like a soldier going to the battlefield.

You psyche yourself out but deep inside you are afraid.

So you yell the loudest you want recognition. You want respect. You do not know how to earn it. So you use your might.

## America Where Are You?

*Karl Marks*

I stood at the church; they give out food to the needy. The line now so deep. Tempers flare, who was in line first.

The look of acceptance, yet mild desperation on the faces of the families lined there. The private sector doing the government's job.

We will live through this economy, brought on by the 8 years of Ronald Regan, 4 years of Bush senior, 8 of Bill Clinton, and finally 8 of Bush junior. The world collapsed; the rich hide in their gated communities. They drive their gas hogs and complain because they can't afford 4 weeks abroad. When they see the poor they blame them for their laziness.

The people stand in the heat, waiting for the produce and expired goods that the rich won't accept. They are grateful to have anything. The differences are that this time there are families, the parents are educated. They search everyday for a job. This is our Grapes?? Of Wrath. There are those with out of state plates, that come here from the industrialized states, now in recession/depression.

An African-American woman, here with her 2 children stands patient. Her one child obviously challenged, screams "Momma cake, Momma milk," something that most Americans take for granted. All races are represented here, Hispanic, Asian, white, black. All victims of Corporate excess, the jobs shifted to countries where child labor is exploited, lax environmental laws that allow them to expand their bottom line. America where are you? "Momma cake, momma cake, momma milk." I stand as people enter, they get food for the day. There is bread, fruit and vegetable blemished slightly, not perfect for those that believe that only perfection is acceptable. To these people it is a bounty, they will eat tonight, perhaps they will have money to run their cars, to work their low paid job, if they have one.

America where are you? The girl cries again! "Momma cake, momma milk, momma cake" as if it is some chant at the wailing wall. "Momma cake, momma milk, momma cake"

The number 32 is called as was the name, the women and 2 children entered, they filled their bags, the little girl walked out with a large birthday cake, she smiled!!

## The Gift

*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*

Every day is a Gift, to some more than others. To be given a Gift to share with those less fortunate is a gift within itself.

It's twenty bucks and means a lot to someone and to some it's just another twenty bucks.

This particular Gift will be taken from one's possession to see what comes of it, and given to another's to be trusted that it be distributed to the real cause in this here life.

"Giving unconditionally" – no restraint, no rewards, not nothing. The very act of giving speaks to the heart "without words."

The first recipient received two dollars. His response was, "Bless you, young man. Thank you, Jesus." I explained it was not me that gave it to him. Still, his praise to a loving God. He shared with me that five minutes before receiving the Gift, he stepped outside the shelter and asked God to help him get a cup of coffee. I'm sure the emptiness he's been feeling was just taken away by the gift.

The next contestant on "Name Your Price" is a female who I see a lot. There are always two questions she has. One – have you got a cigarette? And, two, have you got three dollars? The way she says it and in the tone of voice she uses, you automatically go to digging in your pockets. So there you have it, contestant number two. Her thanks is a very sweet, "I'll pay you back on the first."

Fifteen dollars later and a lot of giving left to do. To me, this is the reason for the season. The giving, the comforting, and the feeling of a mere belonging to someone or something. "In all hopes of a new beginning" for some.

Five bucks is the next price of a savored yet flavored moment. This guy, well I should say man, is a native of Chapel Hill for about ten years. He enjoys and loves the spirits which alcohol bring to his soul. Although I could never believe that someone or somebody could for one, endure that much pain. But for two, deserve that much pain. Unless that certain soul is possessed by the spirit of alcohol himself.

It's 11 o'clock in the morning and I meet him as I'm getting ready to go to the Home Depot to look for some work. I see him coming and the first thing I think of is what road or roads did he go down to lead to this one. Anyway, the question is, "have you got five bucks?"

“Yeah, for what?”

“I haven’t eaten in two days and I’m hungry.”

“Ok. Let’s go.”

Here we go to the famous Sutton’s Drug Store. He wants a cheeseburger from there. Only one thing, he’s been banned from there. Neverminding what for. The burger overrides anything and everything at this moment. I place the order. It’s a cheeseburger with mustard, chili, and onions. Fries or chips? So back outside I go. His answer, “Chips.”

The plate in hand, I realize nothing to drink. So he gladly take the plate and smiles. I ask what kind of drink, friend? His response, “Nothing man, nothing. This is enough.”

Then the wind blows and I smell the odor of a two-day drunk. I guess that’s the reason for nothing to drink. He’s had enough for that place and time. Tomorrow, who knows.

Well, let’s see. Two plus three is five. Plus the burger boy, is ten. I’m thinking ten is the magic number. Ok, whoever, come on down, you’re the next contestant on the Price is Right!

The next contestant did not walk up. He was thought up. He’s a friend, a man, a human being. He needs to know if he’s loved or if he belongs here. I don’t know the rhyme or reason, but right now he needs this ten dollars because the hunger pains that you can feel while you are in the county jail are sometimes horrific and can keep you up until the next tray arrives. You see, on the outside you live from day to day. On the inside, you live from tray to tray. So to my creative writing partner down on his luck, here’s ten bucks. Just to say, “You do belong and you are loved.”

And to the Giver of this Gift, may God bless you. Let this be the best Christmas yet. From me to you, let me state this one comment: The fruit of a labor of love lives in the harvest and that always comes in its right season.

*It’s been an Honor to deliver these “Presents.”  
But more than that, it has been a Gift for me,  
to respect your presence in these Gifts.*

P.S. Because He Lives.



*The Laughing Man*

## **The Father’s Love**

*Felix*

Will you cry for me  
When I’m strong  
Will you cry for me  
When I’m in the wrong  
Will you cry for me  
When I’m weak  
Will you cry for me in my daily walk  
Across the sreet  
Will you cry for me  
My generous friend  
In my bitter End

## Sepia Toned; Pictures of Homelessness

*Phillip Rodney Personette*

Creased through the middle, side-to-side, as well as top-to-bottom, the old photograph had clearly been many, many times folded into quarters. Cracked along its edges, faded all-but entirely away, time had taken its toll on the sepia-toned, black-and-white image of a young, smiling couple. The photo was a charming, dated, standard, studio-style family portrait of the couple, with their bonnet-topped baby.

“That my wife; that my first wife...and them baby be my daughter. She just a baby, then,” proudly boasted the old man who had extracted the snapshot from his otherwise extremely empty wallet.

There was love and pride mixed in his voice; there was like unto that which might be called time-dimmed hints of long, long past tears in his rheumy old eyes. The deep creases in his wrinkled face had the look of courses cut beneath those eyes, perhaps, by such tears as once may have so been shed. His face, for all its crinkly creases and wrinkled crevasses was the same face as in the photograph, but younger, then, so much younger, then...than today.

He had the same smile, too, though now grown past old; snaggle-toothed; greyed and yellowed stumps now grown old; that long distant, shy smile; it had been a hopeful smile and was peering into the camera, past the camera, into a future that was, ‘way, way back then,’ uncertain more even than today’s...bet no bets upon the future; the closer it approaches, the less therein of it there is...

Even his smile was the same smile, changed from the wide, white-toothed grin of a quarter-century past, to a wide smile with but a couple of yellowed stumps to serve, perhaps, as reminders of what was lost now, gone, forever. Those bright, white teeth...knocked out in some forgotten alcoholic blackout maybe, or simply decayed away, neglected and aged as the decades had done the rest of his flesh. Flesh; frail flesh, now failing faster all the time, as the years fled away faster, faster all the time; the alcoholic neglect and decay which was set upon leaving less & less of him. It wouldn’t be, couldn’t be long until what little remained of him was gone...He was once proud and strong and the proof was plain to see in his picture, the photograph he still carried, had carried for years before he came to this plight awaiting the long, dark night of eternity to pour like the dusk over what remains there were of him.

He was used up...lived on the streets, took his meals at the homeless shelter; slept inside the shelter when the nights were too cold outdoors.

He had not so much a scraggly beard, but was unshaved, in keeping with his general condition of unkemptness, matted grey hair grown thinly wispy...a faceless, nameless, homeless man, such as whom you have seen a million times, lolling in doorways, searching the rubbish bins in alleys. His clothing was the ill-attired mismatch of rags and tatters, scrounged from giveaway bins and charity-minded church ladies, such as are always associated with the less fortunate wanderers of city streets and soup kitchens.

God bless ‘em...Such ladies! Such indefatigable workers out to rescue humanity may, someday, prove all the redemption that ever was, *for* humanity. Prayer-circle ladies; candle-vigil ladies...Redemption’s mothers and sisters...of soup and soap, of any hope that ever was, or could ever be.

In such sweet hearts beats ever eternal the drumbeat of which such men as this hear its distant throb and recall all that once was, long ago and all that could, once, have come to be, before they came to this institution of destitution, this homeless shelter.

Extending his trembling hand to me, a’tremble with the slow decay of his aging, or of some nameless ague, perhaps, this ancient man, my homeless peer, and I shook hands...He said, “My name John; John.... Pleased to meet you.”

With his picture, with his story, with his shaking, trembling hand in my own, not-so-great-shape-either hand, we shook. Briefly, we were strangers no more.

A handshake can do that, y’know?

Then, humbly, he was unable to hide any one of every single one of his telltale, craggy evidences of his so-hard, hard-as-was-his life, his so-misspent life that was plain to see was ebbing fast, flowing out of the emaciation that was John.

That was all that was left of John, of whatever once had been John, once-upon-a-time, when-he-used-to-be-young John; John, when he first set upon so living as he *had* lived and as he was now, barely, still living, trembling.

He said, pleadingly “You know, I sho’ needs me a drink.”

He refolded, carefully, his sole possession left of all the things that ever he might have had...one faded, sepia-toned photograph; he fondly tucked it back away into his greasy wallet, his greasy, conspicuously completely empty wallet.

“You can spare me a dollar... fo’ a drink, cain’t you? Can you he’p me out, with, just, *two* dollars? I can git me a forty-ouncer, of *malt liquor*, with two bucks. That all; just two bucks. Really, fo’ a dollar and ninety-six cents. You’ll he’p me, won’t you?”

Tugging out my own thin wallet, in which was tucked away my own last two bucks, what else could I say to old John, grey-headed, ailing old John, with the shakes making his gnarly hands tremble with his terrible, bottomless need for a drink, for a dollar, ninety six cents, for a forty ounce bottle of malt liquor...the cheap stuff that winos drink.

“No. I can’t help you, old timer. But I can give you two dollars for your drink. Here,” and I handed him the pair of one-dollar bills that had been going to be my supper, knowing it it was the cheap way to cop out, to end his ague-like shakes, that trembling that signaled the onset of alcohol withdrawal.

At the homeless shelter, you see it all the time, among my “peers,” who populate the streets and rummage through the rubbish bins. My insides cried out in my own silent agony at knowing, praying anyhow, that I am what the social workers say is a “transitionally” homeless man. In other words, a non-addict, non-alcoholic, non-mentally ill, non-felon and one of but damn few who are. At the homeless shelter, you find few “transitionally” homeless men, like me...I’m a cripple who just had my pension check lost in the mails, winding me up here, at the homeless, hopeless shelter.

I am one of the fortunate few; I have a single reliable limb, one is amputated, that one’s my right leg. Two other limbs, an arm and the one leg I have left, I refused any more operations on, after two dozen major orthopedic surgeries. My right arm, thank God(!), is the sole reliable limb that I have left. When next I am paid my pension, I’ll “transition” back to a place of my own, cheap, but mine.

Yaahhh, I am one lucky guy, ain’t I; one of the “fortunate few?” John got up, mumbling, “Thanks,” to stagger off after his malt liquor. No, I had no help for John and there’s no hope for John, either... just two dollars, my two dollars for him and a rumbling, empty gut for me.

John’s bellyful of booze would stave off the “DT’s,” which means “de-toxification,” in some parlance and which is the acronym for “delirium tremens,” in other, more harsh and more realistic parlance.

DT’s often cause convulsions, during which the alcoholic body’s shrieking for booze can and often does lead to hallucinations, to ever-worse convulsions, that’re worse than epileptic seizures. The DT’s kill, too; just as does drinking oneself to death; not drinking oneself to death kills too.

Homeless people see it all; all people see when they look at the homeless is what you want to.



Thomas G. Owens Jr.





*The Laughing Man*

### D-193

#### *The Laughing Man*

Once he was a young writer, with everything to ask for. Love, a son, and the family he always dreamed of. A home, a job, and a college career all seemed well. Then one day the telephone rang with news no son wants to ever hear. His mother is ill; death will follow in due time. He put everything on hold first making sure his home was secure. With finances in place he boarded the bus, kissing his love for the last time. He arrived to find his mother ill, liver failure the cause. They told him six months and she'll be no more. Those six months turned one year. That year turned six months more. Then one afternoon the last phone call came thru. As he sat in his class the instructor warned him not to fear, he said to him, "she was with the lord now, all is to be well". He sat in pure silence; the world seemed gone. Not one tear, not a single

word. He stood up to walk to his car, never were his classmates to see him again. As he sat in his driver seat his mind was now perfectly numb. This was that day he knew was to come. No son wants to believe it; no son wants to accept this. This was his life now gone to the worms. With his mother laid to rest it was time to go home, just one problem existed. He phoned back home to find a voice not familiar. The voice was that of a man he did not know. "Who the hell are you?" he said. It was then the line went dead. He phoned home one more time to find his love on the other end. "I have something to tell you. I'm leaving you for some one I met. Can we still be friends?" She meant every word with a bit of shame. Now he has lost everything. Now no place to call home it was then he had thought, he too may as well be dead. Flipping thru his phone book to call every one he knew. Not a single soul would save him from the darkest day he knew. Not a single soul that could, at least to say. For his best friend he had not seen in years was not far. He called him and began to tell me all. "I'll be there in the morning"; is all he replied. That night was the hardest with no place to go. The morning finally came, as did his best friend. He took him to Raleigh where he found the life he must now know. In this life he knew now his life before meant nothing. His name, his past, and all he once knew. He was now just a number, another homeless who sleeps on the floor.

I want you to know this story is true.  
I know for the young man is my-self.  
I wish not to give you my name, just  
know I am twenty-one. Also all of  
this one-day can just as easily happen  
to you. This is not always our choice.  
Not ever our fate, some may give up.  
You cannot understand un-till you  
have lived in our shoes.

## Trapped Poetry

*DJ*

It would be like a panther  
asking a panther hunter for some meat, all  
high school dropouts R not Dumb  
all unemployed aren't lazy  
and there R many days I hunger  
but I would go hungry and homeless  
before the American Government gets my soul.

I'm going into this not knowing what I'll find but I've decided to  
follow my heart and abandon my mind and if there is pain I know that  
at least I gave my all and it is better to have loved and lost than to not  
love at all. In the morning I may wake to smile or maybe to cry but first  
to those of my past I must say goodbye.

## Seasons

*DJ*

Fallen tree branches  
and moonlit street lights  
make the heart shift into  
one accord with the pulse.  
Old friends turn into new enemies  
sometimes I think that's life's way  
of shedding its old skin, like  
a snake out in the mid-west or something  
Stop – red light!

The beginning of the end  
starts a new beginning  
I'm not one to hold your patience long  
so I just drop a quick line and move on.



*Charles Gear*

## Social Introspection

*Karl Marks*

Baby sucks a withered tit,  
Looks into the crowd and cries.  
Haggard mother knows not what to do.  
She lacks the support of her culture.  
She finds none here.  
Tears fall, no one sees,  
They think please go away.  
I don't want to feel the guilt.  
The fucked up culture wants her to hide.  
You're ruining my day,  
Go far, far away.  
This isn't Darfur,  
Is it?  
Perhaps it is more criminal.  
We have the resources,  
Blame the suffering.  
It's their fault.



*The Laughing Man*

## **My Story**

*Donna*

It all started in Iowa. I was living there with my boyfriend. Then on Dec. 6th, 2009 the police knocked at my door and told me that my oldest daughter had died at age 26. Shortly after the funeral when I returned to Iowa, my boyfriend started using and drinking again. Then he picked up a woman at a bar. Next thing I know, I was in court to get my stuff, then out on the street in the snow. Lucky the motel gave me a room and job. I had food stamps. Then I waited for the tax check, 300.00 dollars and moved back to NC, where I was born. Then I went back to driving tractor trailer. Then on March 16th, 2009 my health brought me off the truck. I went from a paycheck to Homestart shelter here in Chapel Hill. Here I am now awaiting disability and section 8 housing and that's my story.

## **What is Home?**

*Paul Y.*

The idea of a home is connected to a family unit. We love the concept of home and the feeling of belonging. Most of the time, we are born as children who are endeared to their loving parents.

The growing process demands that we mature both physically and spiritually. These two factors are interconnected to each other while at the same time demand separation and independent lifestyle. While we are younger we often make our wishes and desires known to our peers, as we should what we would want to become when we grow up.

For example a young lad yells, "Daddy! Daddy! When I grow up I would like to be a policeman." Then suddenly after only a few years in our teenage years and early adulthood, we realize that we are growing up too fast and life is catching up with us so fast.

Our parents have expectations on us and they proudly look upon us to deliver our childhood dreams and make them a reality.

The Holy Bible states that for this reason man shall leave his Father and Mother and shall cling to his wife and the two shall become one.

The reality is, we must come into terms that we must always find our own individual homes and leave our parents' homes and set our own individual homes. We must work hard and build up our individual inner sense of belonging and find our own concept and feeling of achievement.

East or West, Home is the Best.



*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*



*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*

## Amerikan Series I

*Karl Marks*

I awoke as if from a dream, everything around me seems as chaos. Was my past life a dream. It seems so long ago. There was a big house, a happy family, a car, luxury what seemed like happiness.

Now I stand in the world alone, having taken a vow of poverty that was not chosen. I have renounced all worldly things and I travel through this sad culture, begging bowl in hand, giving blessings wherever I can.

The life of a sadu is stark but in some ways beautiful. There is little if any attachment to the worldly cravings we have been programmed to believe are our reality.

In this culture you can be invisible, no one wants to see you. They all go about their mundane struggles/successes, but never find the inner peace of disattachment.

Amerika – land of excess, obesity, food as sport, fill the vacuum of your life with consumption. Where is the connection with the universe greater than ourselves. When we die there is only a small ripple in the constant. It disappears in an instant and we are dust. Only those we have touched have a memory of us.

Leaving the house, I walk through town, my sandals barely touch the earth, the heat is oppressive. The woman with two babies in a stroller, shuffles past me. Not seeing my plight. I would give them a blessing if they wanted, but they are too caught up in the western way of life and see nothing but their desire for the physical, material things to be hoarded, the things that they covet which with their money they believe

they can buy happiness.

I made a turn on to Main St. There are two panhandlers there working the corner. “Spare change,” they asked. I show them my brass bowl, shiny yet empty. With a sigh they go on with their crazy banter as if speaking some ancient language not understood by the common man.

“I will give you a blessing,” I tell them. “That ain’t going to buy no mother fucking wine,” they shout in unison. “No brothers, this is something more important, it will help you through your day.” “Get lost you freak,” shouts the older of the two.

I move on realizing that they, like myself, are invisible in this land. People walk by briskly without even noticing them. They are our un-touchables, the unwanted caste of this society. Left with the struggle to get their daily needs and drown their alienation in cheap fortified wine, only to disappear into the shadows from which they came.

Disappear from the sight of their brethren, until basic needs force them to reappear in the daylight. I walk by the shops and the shoppers all in a hurry; I think how has it all come to this, as a success I moved in and out of the throngs of humanity, I was noticed, the gods had shined on me. I had the Gucci shoes, the Rolex watch, all the things that made me visible in the light, now all gone, I am not seen.

I turn up an alleyway and pass a man working his minimum wage job, disposing of the wasted food from an eating establishment.

“Brother, are you hungry?” he asked. Yes, I reply. “Let me get you some food, wait here.” He enters the back door of the restaurant and returns with bread and some soup in a styrofoam container. “Here you are, I know what it is to be hungry.” Thank you, I am most grateful.

Setting down my brass bowl, I consume the gift and marvel at the splendor of this humanity. The man goes on with what he was doing.

“Thank you again,” I say. “Why is it that you see me when others don’t?”

“Because I, too, have been invisible in this land!!!”

“Come here my friend.” I take out my red paint and give him a blessing, the red mark above the bridge of his nose. “You will be blessed today my friend.”

“Thank you,” he said; simple but beautiful was his act of kindness. Perhaps it is true and only those that have walked the path can see those that walk it now.

*Chalres Gear*

## Freedom

*LeJhoyn D. Holland a.k.a. Blue*

What makes one feel that there are no restraints that bind them to a particular plane of existence. Can you believe that you are only as Free as your mind allows you to be. Elevation of the mind is an ascension of the soul to heights unknown and feared. Like the Peak of Everest, Freedom, true Freedom is daunting. Not to be had by all, but for the few that dare to scale the treacherous slopes, Freedom awaits with its exhilarating blend of happiness and joys for the daring few.

Through Freedom we learn to give and share of ourselves, those things that make the world and living a boundless cascade of joy and pain. From which we grow to become better and more compassionate to the needs and desires of all that we encounter. Freedom is to appreciate our very existence, by not just looking but seeing the majesty in the many vistas that surround us. Knowing that man is small when compared to the wonders of the world, the vastness of the seas. We are here only for a time while those things endure the test of time. Freedom to know and to achieve is the path of man.

## Freedom Has A Price

*Cadillac Cowboy*

Freedom is worth dying for. I'm saying that because I fought in Vietnam. I could die for my country, but I couldn't drink. I was 17. Ironically, I quit drinking when I was 21. It just wasn't fun anymore. I think freedom is the most valuable asset we have. I think we should try to protect it any way we can, to do whatever necessary to remain free. Once you lose your freedom, you've lost everything. For me, freedom is being able to do whatever you want to do. I've traveled all over the world and I've seen lots of things, and America is the greatest country in the world. I love America. For me, incarceration is the worst thing. You lose your freedom when you are incarcerated. It's part of the punishment. My girlfriend is in rehab right now. Sometimes freedom comes with a price I guess. Freedom is not free. The price for freedom is your life. It can cost you your life to stay free. You have to lay your life down for freedom.

## Who Am I?

*Cadillac Cowboy*

I am a man of flesh and blood, skin and bones, tissue, organs. I am a man of feelings, spirit, soul, consciousness. My flesh and desires are fulfilled by the world. My spirit is fulfilled by the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. My spirit is fulfilled and is hungry for riches and empathy. My flesh is weary and tired. Ready for renewing and replenishing. I think to survive in this world and be happy and whole the spirit is as important as the flesh. Maintaining a good balance between the spirit and flesh is the key to a successful and happy life.

**NOISE!***Arnold R. Moore, Jr. (Ron to my friends)*

No, this is not just another boring article about Noise Pollution, but maybe it is! I am a “street musician” in Chapel Hill, NC. Many of you may have seen me downtown, playing my guitar, or have read my articles in this magazine. I try to make my living by “BUSKING” (playing music for tips) on the streets, and this is an important issue to me.

The issue of noise in the downtown area of Chapel Hill should be a large concern to all the people who visit the shops, bars, eateries and the kids museum, most of all. I would think that the town board members would be concerned about the gentle ears of the children that come to the downtown area!

Having the construction noise from welding machines and generators in the area is above the safe level for most people, much less for children, I would imagine. Imagine is what I have to do, as I have not seen any safeguards or any noise containment, or any assurance of safety from the Environmental Protection Agency. Yes, progress has its own rewards, but at what costs? The town fathers have shown NO CONCERN!

I say this as our streets show the degradation of the pavement from the heavy cement trucks and tractor trailers that go through town (not the local delivery). The loud sounds of these vehicles are a blight on this small community. The city buses are loud, but we need them. The thru traffic, we don't. Most small towns are friendly to people for having gentle conversations without having to yell at each other.

I have seen many small towns place signs at the edges of town saying “NO THRU TRUCKS”. I wonder why? Maybe they give a sh\*t about the noise level in town? Oh, didn't they build a BYPASS that these vehicles could get to ANYWHERE in town from? Hmmm...

These statements are self-serving, as I am, above all, honest.

I try to make life in Chapel Hill a little more pleasant with music. I try to make my living, such as it is, from being heard as I play. The combined noise from all the above is not only hurting me, but is hurting the very ones who visit this small, well known, town.

Our children have the right to their hearing.

Parents...SPEAK UP for them!!!

**Home is where the Heart is***The Retro Player*

If home is where the  
Heart is  
I lost my heart  
So I'm not only physically  
Homeless  
I'm also psychologically and spiritually  
Homeless

A broken man with a  
Tireless spirit  
A lonely man in a valley  
So deep but somehow

I know I will arise from it  
I should not be influenced  
By my invisibility but  
Either people look at me  
Like dirt even if  
I'm in a suit  
So what does that tell you  
Or they look through me

Yet I'm learning how to ignore  
Them even though I still feel  
This pain in my chest  
Because I feel rejected  
I feel rage but will escape

Cage I could go on—  
But I gotta get ready to show  
My skills to the mansion  
Tonight I bid you  
Wonderful people farewell

## Hold On

*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*

The words flow from his mouth,  
Like a river with no dam.  
Finally knocking him to his knees,  
“Speechless,” he cannot breathe,  
Not a soul runs to relieve him,  
Everyone is at ease.  
Silence and stillness, his only reprieve.

Pushing up on his glasses,  
He reaches for a hand,  
No one is there, except  
For the sound that he shares.  
His voice is so loud.  
The screams so real,  
Creating a knot in your throat  
You naturally feel.

Never understood  
So we'll never understand.  
The grips of selfishness,  
Lie in the palm of his hand.

The yells from the night  
Should intensify your fight.  
You cannot win  
Though you'll try again,  
You must give up the thought  
Of ever fighting at all.

Run, hide and play,  
It seems to be the only way.  
The game never ends,  
Until the old man wins.  
Another bout with himself,  
From which he depends.



*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*

## Fear

*Cranston*

Fear it's what's kept peace between us brain dead spoon-fed the chaos of war through media's many strings and threads people close-minded to trying to understand one another children mentally malnourished by knowledge cut-off through generations erasing the thoughts of ancestors by systematic deconstruction of the mind by the genocide of fears born through violence of people through the ignorance of love and growth of hatred of the many dictators through time and the withering dying life span of love all that remains is fear deep gripping fear cutting off the circulation of the blood of peace. Fear resides with us all and in time to fear we all shall fall because what are we all but human.

## Then I Was, Now I Am

*Paul Y.*

Then I was younger, energetic man in his mid-twenties. I was born the first in a family of six siblings (two sisters and four brothers). That number includes me, but I have two parents too. My family was a moderate middle class family. We lived in that beautiful Capital city of an African East Coast country. The country is a common tourism attractive site. I desire greatly to live in the United States. So one day I migrated to live in the United States as an immigrant to live here permanently.

Now I realize that life can be what you make it. Then I thought that life in America would always be great and enjoyable. Now, however, I find myself homeless and in an underemployment situation and in the midst of health reform debate in America. Now I realize that the inequality and greed, the political differences, the conservatives, the independents, the democrats, the republicans and the liberals are interest oriented groups that control the outcome of people's livelihood of life in the U.S.

Now I realize that the conservatives are mostly connected to republicans but that they protect special interests that are not best for the majority of Americans.



*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*

## Home

*Trefon*

A mother only parent  
Fun at times-  
Sad at times-

Now things have changed  
I am on my own  
Joined the Army-

Met my new friend "cocaine"-  
Met my 1st wife-  
Lost my wife-

Rehab  
Rehab  
Rehab.



*Elijah Coates*

18 years later- 2nd wife  
2 years later divorce  
1 year later shelter life

It's hard  
It's fair-  
Time to go.

What is this job?  
What is this apartment?  
What the Hell is this?

Clean, drug free  
A member of society again  
Free to explore.

Living free  
Living free  
I made it.



*The Laughing Man*



*Elijah Coates*

### **Another Fallen Hero**

*Paul Y.*

The picture tells a lot  
Another fallen hero, the night has finally come  
out of love and patriotism he served his nation.

Homecoming yes, but the hero is asleep.

Draped with the stars stripes, honor and respect.  
It is a sad moment, the faces tell it all.  
Oh dear, why did you have to go.

The widow, the children, the nieces and the nephews  
all here to witness, to bid thee well

All are tongue tied, helpless nothing but to watch.

The men in uniform, honor guards on duty.  
The loved ones standing by watching the service,  
the group is gathered you can see the relation  
you can feel their pain.

It is a quite painful moment a cold chilling time on a winter day.

### **Precious Mother**

*Jason Owens*

Mother, mother it's me wake up!!!! I just walked in the cold, yet painful room. It's me momma, feel me holding your soft warm hand. I hear the machines beeping, oxygen machine help my angel breathe. I look into her beautiful blue sparkling, twinkling eyes. I look to the sky and ask Jesus to help me. I start thinking of me and her as a kid. This is not real. It feels as if she is my only friend. I'm still standing here ma, unable to take the pain any more, my little heart just a beating away. Faster and faster it goes. I can't take it anymore. I crash, tears are just a rolling. I'm wounded, torn apart. I can't stop weeping. Confused and telling her not to worry. I still comfort her. I take a deep breath, pull myself together. My emotions are very shaky, my heart is shattered. I feel so helpless and alone. It's nothing I can do, without aid or help. My aunt rushes over to comfort me, I almost break down.

Holding your hand telling you it's going to be ok, wasn't easy for the baby boy to do. Don't want to say goodbye, your time is coming mother. I love her so much, if she could only hear me. Soon you'll be resting in God's Grace. No more pain mama. I'm unable to express what's going on, I just stand there. Everyone surrounds her bed. I watch it take from each one's soul, one by one like a match and gas. We all grieve. The whole family, fondly together in the same room, wow I think to myself. Everyone's life is put on hold. Can she see us, can she hear us, only God will know. Tears stream down her eyes, doc said, it's normal. I know better, she can feel my hand. Her heart is hurting on the inside. Precious Mother, so young and gorgeous. I miss taking pictures of you as a kid. My friend, my mother, a lot of days my daddy you were too. My love for you is unconditional, your love never ends!! Never got to tell you the last few years, you had my heart, all of it and more. Soon we will be reunited. I lost my key. Your memories no one can take. This letter is for you Mother. Thanks for giving me life, carrying me to the beach every summer, and just loving me.

## What a Heart Holds

*Erik Brandon Jenkins*

The love in my heart you will never know.  
 This time apart has made it grow.  
 It has overwhelmed every ounce of my being.  
 This is what everybody around me is seeing.  
 I go through life in another world .  
 One where you are in it and still my girl.  
 I just can't let go of our past, cause I have  
     always wanted it to last.  
 I know I have done you wrong and now I care.  
 Cause I realize you are not there  
 Please give me the chance to show you I have changed  
 This way if it does not work I only have myself to blame  
 I want you to know what I say is true and from the heart  
 And I am trying to show you I will make a new start...

## Time Spent with You

*Erik Brandon Jenkins*

Time spent with you is something I miss.  
 The warmth of your smile  
 The taste and touch of your kiss.  
 These are just a couple of things I miss.  
 You laughing at the noises I make when I eat.  
 Embracing you and holding you when we sleep  
 Feeling your body close to mine  
 These are things I will remember until the end of time.  
 So many memories we have shared weigh on my mind  
 I wonder if they will ever pass in time...

## Free Verse

*Trefon*

I watch play after play –  
 No one can get the first down –  
 One coach calls time-out.

Thinking to myself –  
 It's my time to shine –  
 My time to show –  
 What the rookie can do.

Nerves suddenly jump in  
 My number is called.  
 Nerves are raging.

Excited.  
 Scared,  
 Pumped up.

The play is given,  
 On to the field I go.  
 Nervousness takes over.  
 I shouted the down play.

The ball is snapped;  
 We score;  
 Crowd cheers.

Not for me, damn it.  
 For the jock with the ball  
 I just blocked.

Alarm clock goes off,  
 Time for work  
 Dream is over; it's real,  
 But it will never come true!  
 Too old –  
 Too fat –  
 Too slow –  
 Too many damn bills.

I dream now  
 For the kid who dreams  
 Of playing in  
 The Big Game one day.



*Charles Gear*

## Rubber Man

*Elijah Coates*

Frank stood on the ledge of a 7-story hotel in downtown Orlando. He was excited; smiling with glee. He was rubbing his hands together.

“Oh boy, oh boy,” he said. “It’s a big crowd. Big crowd.”

Frank stepped backward onto the roof. He giggled, removed his glasses, and used his shirt to clean the lenses.

A police officer stood 7 stories below. He spoke into a megaphone. He said, “Frank! Don’t jump!”

Next, he’d say you have everything to live for. Frank had heard it. He believed he had some things to live for. Frank rolled his eyes. He peered over the ledge. “I’m made of rubber! I’ll be fine,” he said.

“Did you hear that?” the megaphone cop asked a policewoman. She shook her head and kicked a pebble at her feet. She was chewing bubble gum. She blew a bubble and stepped away.



*Elijah Coates*

Frank paced on the roof. He massaged his buzz cut. He pulled out a comb and straightened his graying hair. He slipped his comb in a jacket pocket and adjusted his thick, black rimmed glasses. He sighed and continued pacing.

The police officer called up to Frank. He said, “Your mother’s here, Frank. She wants to speak with you.”

“Great,” Frank cried.

He leaned over the side. The crowd of onlookers gasped.

“Hey, Ma!” Frank exclaimed, waving.

“Hi Franklin,” his mother began. “You get down from there.”

Frank walked to the center of the roof and then back to the edge.

“I’ve done this before mother!”

Frank’s mother turned to the police officer.

“He’s made of rubber.”

“Rubber?” the woman cop said.

“Yes, sometimes he’ll jump and bounce. One time, he-”

“Tell him he can’t do it, Jim,” the woman police officer said.

Jim looked at Frank’s mother.

“He’ll bounce,” she said. “He’s upset about losing his job, but he’ll be fine.”

“We’ll get him for Disorderly Conduct on this,” the lady officer began.

Frank’s mother glared at the woman. She shook her head.

“Frank,” Jim began, using the megaphone. “You can’t do this, rubber or not.”

Frank looked over the edge of the building. There were several police cars and fire trucks. The group of people watching had grown.

Frank thought a running leap with a twist would be best. Then, he considered a back flip. He thought for a moment. He decided on a front flip with a tuck.

“Definitely, a tuck,” he said to himself.

He started to unbutton his shirt.

Jim cried out, “Frank! How are you, Frank?”

The lady police officer said, “We have to treat this like a suicide attempt, ma’am. You need to move back, now.” She pushed Frank’s mother back behind the yellow tape.

## Believe in Hope

*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*

Frank's girlfriend was waiting.  
 She said, "Can I speak with my boyfriend, officer?"  
 The policewoman looked at Jim, she spit out her bubblegum. Jim offered Frank's girlfriend the megaphone.  
 "Frank!" Lisa began.  
 Frank's head popped out over the ledge. He waved, again.  
 "I love you, Frank."  
 Frank yelled back, "I love you, too!"  
 "Don't do this!" she yelled.  
 "It's too high. You'll knock your teeth out."  
 Frank yelled, "I hope not!"  
 Lisa rolled her eyes.  
 "I was wrong. I can't talk to him," she said, handing the megaphone to Jim. Lisa stepped back, ducking beneath the yellow caution tape.

Frank was out of his shirt and pants. He was wearing a black leotard. He stretched, crossed one arm across his chest and then the other. He did some jumping jacks and swung his arms in circles, warming the shoulders. Blood coursed through his arteries and the tingle of perspiration tickled his skin.

Frank wiped sweat from his brow and put his glasses in a hard case. He squeezed his arm. He touched bone with his forefinger and thumb. He released himself and watched the skin bounce back.

Jim called out to Frank on the megaphone, "Frank! What's going on up there, Frank? Where are you?"

Frank took three big steps back and charged toward the edge of the building.

Hope, is never giving up.  
 Hope is not allowing yesterday to make the outcome of today.  
 Hope is believing a dream and watching it manifest itself.  
 Hope rises out of ashes that once were put out.  
 Hope seems to find a spark of concern in other peoples' life.  
 Hope is the wheels that turn in my brain.  
 Hope believes that one can continually see lives changed.  
 Hope puts on a new hat everyday and delivers a new message for anyone that will listen.

We carry a message of hope in our daily walk and talk.  
 Hope is a very powerful tool to keep in your back pocket.  
 Hope is the very breath you take.



*DJ*

For questions, comments, or to get involved, email [talkingsidewalks@gmail.com](mailto:talkingsidewalks@gmail.com)

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# 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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