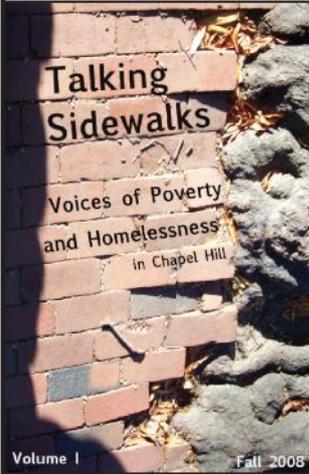


# talking sidewalks

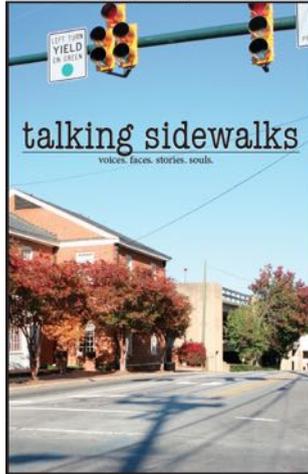
voices. faces. stories. souls.

*Issues I.1 — III.2*

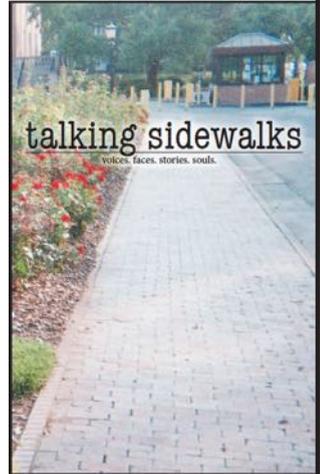
I.1



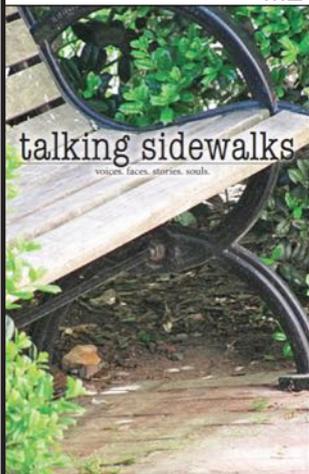
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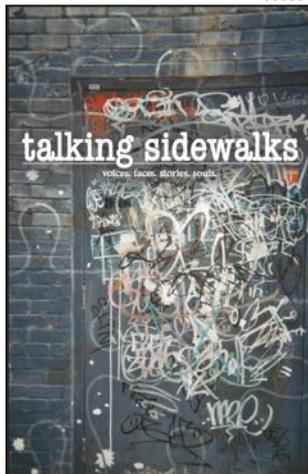
II.1



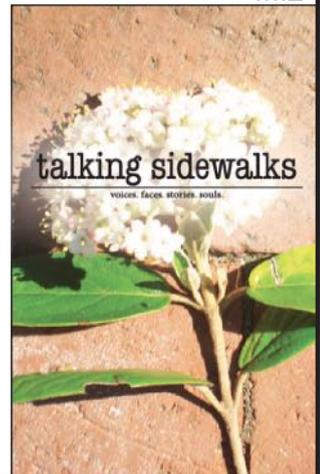
II.2



III.1



III.2



## I.1

A Word from the Writers	R. Michaels
What's in the Bag	Thomas B.
The Things We Carry	Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.
Waking Up	Joseph Sinkiewicz
Label Me	Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.
Homeless in America	Donald
Scary Places	Jason O.
My Sad Life	Nolan Brian
Prophrases and Proidioms from China	Jianling Zhou
Riddles from China	Jianling Zhou
Home Is	A Community Ensemble
Whisper	Ronin
Phoenix	Ronin
English Verse	Isaiah O'Briant
Without Hope	Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.
Seawell School Rap	Emily
A Photojournalistic Journey	Arnold R Moor, Jr
Chasing a Ghost	Michael Jenkins
Oh the Cruelty	Ladajah
The Brand New Life	Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.

## I.2

A Word from the Writers	J & R
Lost and Found	R. Michaels
Where I'm From	Arnold
Almost Famous	The Retro Player
My Life From the Mind of a Child	Amanda
Watermelon	Isaiah O'Briant
Memories	DJ
The Gorilla	Michael Jenkins
A Little Story About My Family	Charles Gear
Lost and Found	A Community Ensemble

A Dream	Anonymous
Oxygen	Anonymous
The Late Blooming Tree	Anonymous
Open Letter to President Obama	Arnold R. Moore, Jr
Lenno W. Moore	Emotional Interference
Time After Time	Thomas B.
What Do you Do With a Lonesome Soul	Anonymous
Leave You Behind	Thomas B.
My Beloved	Mufasa
Freedom	Thomas B.
Tomorrow is Another Day	Jiangling Zhou

II.1

To the Readers	Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.
How Many Deaths Will it Take	Trefon
The Insecurity Within	Paul Y.
America Where Are You?	Karl Marks
The Gift	Erik Brandon Jenkins
The Father's Love	Felix
Sepia Toned; Pictures of Homelessness	Phillip Rodney Personette
D-193	The Laughing Man
Trapped Poetry	DJ
Seasons	DJ
Social Introspection	Karl Marks
My Story	Donna
What is Home?	Paul Y.
Amerikan Series I	Karl Marks
Freedom	Lejhoyn D. Holland a.k.a. Blue
Freedom Has a Price	Cadillac Cowboy
Who Am I?	Cadillac Cowboy
NOISE!	Arnold R. Moore, Jr
Home is where the Heart is	The Retro Player
Hold On	Thomas Gray Owens Jr.
Fear	Cranston

## talking sidewalks

Turn Around

A Miracle

The Wonderer

Untitled

Rock Bottom

Pain is Worse than Death

Untitled

Prelude to Death's Daughter

Death's Daughter

Dios Me Va a Ayudar

At the Bus Stop

Mission Statement

How Will They Remember Me?

Choices

Truth

Trefon

Michelle Martinez

Jimmy Jones

Anonymous

Elijah Coates

Karl Marks

Michael Jenkins

DeAnn Jarman

DeAnn Jarman

Walter

Cadillac Cowboy

Elijah Coates

Equashia Mumeen

Michael E. Wood

Allen Dubey

## III.1

The Real Me

No Place Like Home

What the World Meant to Me at Six

Hurricanes

Rainbows End?

Dead Ends

Don't React

Success

Lost Sheep

No Explanation

My Life as a Six Year Old

Foosball

Life with Parkinson's Disease

A Letter to the Editor

Saying Goodbye to my Best Friend

Ode to a Suicide Bomber

Richard Lambert

Allen Dubey

Donna

David Zachary Bridges

DeAnne Jarman

Donna

Anthony Lener

Anthony Lener

Michael Jenkins

Joe

Dawn Sheppard

Mark Davidson

Cadillac Cowboy

Mark Davidson

Mark Davidson

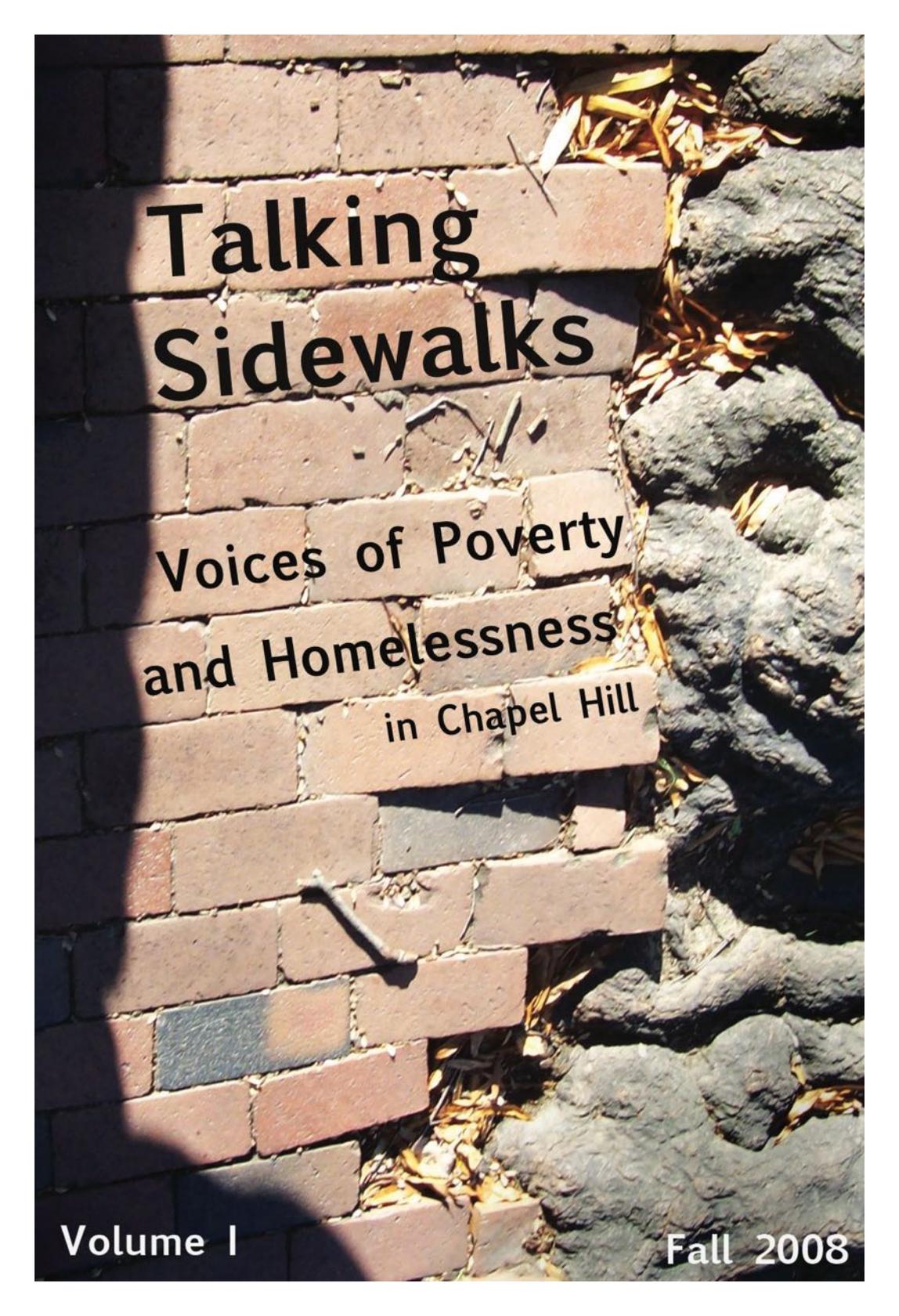
Karl Marks

One x One	Joe
Be4 I Die	Joe
Questions from Franklin	A Community Ensemble
Untitled	Jeff Davis
Silent Tears	Allen Dubey
One Hundred Thirty Days Ago	Mark Davidson
Inside	Richard Lambert
Life	Richard Lambert
Across the Street	R. Michaels
Move On	Cranston Hunter

## III.2

Vision/Creation	Barney Ray
To Be Perfect	From the Soul of a Virtuous Man
If You Wake Up	Michael Jenkins
What Makes a Person Powerful?	Mark Davidson
Although my Task is a Daily Task	Mark Davidson
The Greatest Task	Gary Mitchell
Worthy to be Praised	Mark Davidson
Sadness, So Overpowering	Karl Marks
The Face of a Stranger	DeAnn Jarman
He Comes to Me Nightly	DeAnn Jarman
Sales Tax	Donna
Untitled	Anonymous
A Turmoil of Conspicuous Theory	Robert P. Keairnes III
To be Perfect	From the Soul of a Virtuous Man
The Fight	Gwen Miller
The Biggest Prize	DeAnn Jarman
Once	From the Soul of a Virtuous Man
The Sound of an Empty Stomach	Karl Marks
Still Homeless	Michael Jenkins
F— It!	Allen Dubey

talking sidewalks



# Talking Sidewalks

Voices of Poverty  
and Homelessness  
in Chapel Hill

Volume I

Fall 2008

## A Word from the Writers

Dear Reader,

Here we are, humble and honored to write for you. We are a unique fraternity of people—men, women, and children who have found themselves in a situation that wasn't deemed possible—we are homeless. At this time in our lives we are challenged. We are not the bane of society. We are neither happy nor sad; we just seek to find a way out of our present situation. Most of us believe it will happen.

There are times when we get a chance to reflect on our troubles, and you, dear reader, are the recipient of our labor. Brothers, sisters, friends, and family have all contributed to the following pages. It is our wish that after reading the stories, poems, and thoughts in this magazine that maybe you, too, will experience the feeling, the joy, and yes, the hurt and pain that we endure.

It is to you that these pages are dedicated with tears and laughter and hope for better days to come. Each of us has shed a little light, and where there is light there is hope, and where there is hope there is a promise, and where there is a promise there is a tomorrow, and tomorrow—who knows . . .

Enjoy,

R. Michaels

*Cover Photo By Joseph Sinkiewicz*

*For questions, comments, or to get involved  
please email [TalkingSidewalks@Gmail.com](mailto:TalkingSidewalks@Gmail.com)*

## What's in the Bag ?

*Thomas B.*



It was a cool fall night. The tension was high, and there was anger in the air. She thought I was cheating on her. You could see it on her face, a look of disgust.

I put my bags that she had packed in the van, they felt so light, and off we went. The journey started to Chapel Hill. I turned to her and asked her, “Why are we doing this?” She looked at me and then looked away without saying a word. I could see she was upset, her face said it all. She turned up the radio.

I started to look at the moon and the stars. They looked so bright, like you could reach out and touch them. The best times of my life flashed in my mind. It's a sunny day on the 4th of July—the church picnic. You can smell the hamburgers cooking and the hot-dogs burning, and there she was. We both said “hello” at the same time, and it all began, love.

## TALKING SIDEWALKS

I turned to her and asked her, “Why are we doing this?” But there was no response. It felt like I was in a ghost-town, alone, with chills running down my arms.

I turned and looked out the window again, and I remember that special day when we got married. She looked so beautiful with that dress on, it was a proud moment in my life. I took a deep breath and I turned to her, “Please don’t do this,” but nothing.

So we pulled up to the shelter, I opened the door, and I grabbed my bags. They felt so heavy, like I was carrying my whole life in them, and I was. I started walking up the stairs to the door. I looked back with a tear in my eye and fear in my heart. She was gone. I got my mat and opened my bags: some pants, my favorite shirt, and some socks. It seems so little for my whole life.

For right now this is my home. This is where I lay my head.  
Do I belong here? Maybe.

Am I loved?



*Thomas B.*

**The Things We Carry**

*Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.*

Food, “clothes,” blankets, pictures, books, medicine, hygienes.  
They put their house in a bag and carry it with them.  
He carries the burden a of a long-lost love that once filled his heart,  
now he fills the void of what could have been.  
Down-trodden he seems, but the hope of another day lies ahead.

She bares the wounds of many battles—  
but the scars you cannot see,  
for it’s on the inside which you cannot touch.

She laughs it all away in the light,  
but cries when the sun goes down.

Could it be maybe a bruise instead of a scar?  
Whatever the case may be, bruised or scarred,  
they both heal from the inside out, not the outside in.

But who’s looking on the outside—  
we are all lovers of the soul. Aren’t we?

## Waking Up

*Joseph Sinkiewicz*

Finally sitting in a soft chair, in a quiet empty room, my eyes begin to fade. I awake in a coffee shop filled with familiar faces. As I look around the room, I'm reminded I am once again alone, surrounded by many. My senses are coming back as I start to feel the pain again. Cluttered idle chatter fills the air. The smell of fresh coffee, with an occasional burst of noise from milk being frothed.

Time ceases to exist or matter, as a feeling of an electric wave flows throughout my nerve endings. As I begin in thought, I can either accept it or not. Looking out of the window with thoughts of my missing piece. A piece or void many will never find. My thoughts and feelings overwhelm.

I look with amazement to see my missing piece outside with arms wide open. The self-inflicted drama and the words that fell void no longer matter; only peace and contentment remain. I ran to her chariot in the warmth of her bosom. I realize what really matters, and am enlightened of our love. Thoughts of when I was young—I found myself stuck in the middle of a thorn patch, pushing my way through the thorns, ripping my cloak of many colors. Now I find myself gliding through the soft felt rose petals.

Lost in thoughts and memories, I think of when I helped an old lady across the street. Things sometimes seem to go so right when I am wrong and so wrong when I am right. I sit on a hard bench, seeking a happy medium. I feel that my mind, body, and soul are awake from the dead, and am aware of my surroundings, of what is really going on. Looking around I start to be beyond my own opinion and perspective. I fall to my knees and get back up. Feeling the electric pulse, taking it all in, passing through me, with complete control. I am a dog no longer chasing its own tail. I take her hand and we walk down the talking sidewalks.



*Joseph Sinkiewicz*

TALKING SIDEWALKS



*Mural by Michael Brown and Scott Nurkin  
Photo by Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.*

**Label Me**

*Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.*

Look out. Here they come.  
Don't stare at him - She's nasty.  
Hope you got some money to give them,  
because I'm ready to go.

If anybody sees me with them,  
I'll never hear the end of -  
Oh no, not me -  
but why.

Should we be kind when they'll never help anyone.  
Ok let's go, I'm scared,  
he looks like trouble -  
Please don't,  
I know, you are,  
"Label me."

**Homeless in America**

*Donald*

It seems in this day and age, for one to be homeless is an intentional act of sabotage. Substance abuse, or an unwillingness to work and pull your load are the first things to come to mind for most. Just as there seems to be a little truth in old stigmas, there is here also. I have seventy-four college-credit hours in the theory of electricity, gained as a high voltage power lineman in the air force, and that was after four years as a nuclear missile man in the U.S. Army. Eighty-four kilometers from the border of the former Czechoslovakia, and the front line of defense in the day that it was an unthinkable act of foolishness. Even in those days (the mid-eighties), things went wrong and people were hurt and killed. When everything is on the line, and people get killed, there are a lot of questions and politics. Well, let's just say that one walks away with a grief that never really washes out.

As a lineman in the Air Force, Oliver North and President Reagan pushed a few too many buttons and the Nicaraguans invaded our friend Honduras, pushing the contra rebels across the border into Honduras. Guess who got picked to go clean up that mess? I can't get into details, but I came home a changed man. It didn't kick in right away, just a dream here and there. A thought, a smell, and suddenly your mind begins to heave.

I worked for ten years in the shipyards off the Gulf Coast as a combination electrician and ship fitter (the one who cuts it and puts it together), and in those years I was rearing three boys. It seemed that everything just didn't seem right. No matter how hard I tried to make things fit together, it was difficult to be around other people who had no clue what the hell I was dealing with inside. I could no longer fit in. They laugh, I spit. They talk about women, I think about little girls who were in the wrong place at the wrong time. They work thoughtlessly while in anger I slammed a sledgehammer.

Long story short, I crashed and was later diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder. They waited too long to catch it. I ended up divorced, and suddenly the whole world changed for me. I think about how hard that was for my boys all the time, but they pulled through a whole lot better than I did. I live on a disability check that will make most of you laugh. The years in the shipyards took out my back, and the years in the service took out my head. And as for the V.A., if you have ever tried to fight the government then you may understand. So I do the best I can. I ended up here after my girlfriend and I broke up, and now it's just me again, against the world again. I'll find my way; I'm a survivor.

Now, America cannot fight an unwinnable war, borrow money from China every day and soak up an influx of illegal immigrants, and expect to be able to have the funds to take care of the sick, and there are many here. And for those who have wandered in the wrong direction there is not much pity for them, but we all lose our way at least once. And those who through disasters have come and expect to be able to have that society we all want—it just is not happening.

In closing I would like to say that there are many good-hearted people in this country who would, if they could, help. And there are those down here in the dirt with the rest of us who work hard every day for that society. The rest just give a glance and drive on. I saw a girl yesterday crying at lunch, and I watched all the people around her just blankly staring forward as they methodically chewed their food. I realized that they were all crying inside, and with some, the tears have turned into hate. Then I understood why nobody cared if she cried or not.

**Scary Places**

*Jason O.*

I am writing about drug addiction. My name is Jason O. and I'm from Wilson, North Carolina. I awake some days thinking to myself, "Will I be in a homeless shelter the rest of my life?" I started out in a homeless shelter in Wilson twelve years ago after spending thirty thousand dollars on fast cars, fast women, booze, cocaine, and pot. This lifestyle only got worse and worse. I had spent all my insurance money from my father's death on being someone that I was not, only trying to fit in. The young lady I fell in love with got out of the picture real quick, soon as the life-insurance money ran out. I felt used, betrayed, and, most of all, hurt real bad on the inside.

To make matters worse, not only did I lose my Daddy, but my first love also. I got news that she started stripping, which was no real shock—I was only mad at myself for being so hardheaded. Everyone told me over and over, "She's only there for the money," but my mind was saying, "Yeah they're just jealous." A few months after we broke up, she was killed in a terrible car wreck. She and her best friend ran a stop sign, then went up under an eighteen-wheeler tractor-trailer at two in the morning. Both were drunk, and the little car was pulled a football field before stopping. State troopers had to get dental records to match their dental records, I found out later, to identify them. I've learned to overcome this now—1996 was way back. I still have thoughts of all this madness very much. So this is where my life took a turn.

I found crack cocaine, and my world shrank into nothing—"The bottomless pit," my friend once said. This was my new wife, girlfriend, my new shoes on Friday night, my new life—it's like riding down a road with no direction whatsoever. Alcohol and the drugs have put me in the freezing cold, teeth chattering, sleeping on cardboard, begging for change once again. I'll go here and it'll be

different—never different—only worse each and every binge run.

At seventeen it was new and stupid; at thirty-two today, it becomes a need that will be met, no matter what, in active addiction! It seems some days like I'm doomed or cursed; then I realize it's only the devil in my little brain again. In and out of detox, hospitals, jails, halfway homes, rehabs, shelters, sleeping in the woods, on the street, anywhere I can lay my head till the next day, to do it all over again. Asked the judge once to activate my sentence, to be sentenced to 8 months in Prison. I stayed clean the whole while, then release day I used. This is the wickedest garbage on the face of this earth. I pray to God one day this desire will be taken from my mind, heart, and soul.

I'm here for something—just don't know what it is some days. I look at life like a gift today because I did not die from this awful drug addiction. Maybe one day I can stay clean the rest of my life.

### **My Sad Life**

*Nolan Brian*

I entered into this world on the date of July 31, 1984. I had only a couple things that were very close to me. My grandfather and my Uncle Darren. They gave me a lot of "hope for myself." When my grandfather died on October 7, 1995, all my hope was taken away. Ten years, eight days later, I lost my Uncle D. He told me if I ever needed anything, he would be there.

Now at this point in my life the only thing I need is my grandfather and my uncle back. Life without them seemed hopeless. I'm writing this to see what kind of feedback I may get, if any.

**Prophrases and Proidioms from China**

*Jianling Zhou - Shanghai, China*

It has been estimated that more than two hundred thousand prophrases and proidioms exist in China today, including thousands that Chinese people use in their daily life. These are sayings and expressions that are often not translatable because they depend for their effects on the sounds of Chinese words, the structures of Chinese characters, references to Chinese anecdotal history, or familiarity with Chinese customs. The following selected sayings have been translated first literally into English, and then figuratively.

*A thousand-mile dike may collapse due to an ant's hole.*

---- For want of a nail the shoe is lost,  
for want of shoes the horse is lost,  
----For want of a horse the rider is lost,  
for want of a rider the Kingdom is lost.  
----A small leak will sink a great ship.

*The trees planted by the forerunners  
provide shade for those who came after.*

---- One man makes a chair and another man sits on it.  
---- Virtue is its own reward.

*The thunder is loud, the raindrops little*

---- Much sound and fury, but little results.  
---- Much bruit, little fruit.  
---- Great cry, little wool.

**Riddles from China**

*Jianling Zhou - Shanghai, China*

- I. Paper wrapping the fire,  
Paper wrapping the wind,  
Paper wrapping the water.

∴ Guess three objects.

- II. Having mouths,  
But cannot talk,  
Having no mouths,  
But talking loudly.

∴ Guess two objects.

- III. A rope for tying with the heaven,  
A silver pebble for paving the ground,  
A pillar for hanging upon the heavens,  
A pearl for watering the flowers.

∴ Guess four forms of water.

I-Lantern, folding fan, and umbrella  
II-Puppet and gong  
III-Rain, snow, icicle, and dew

# Home Is . . .

*A Community Ensemble*

Home is a place I used to live a long time ago.

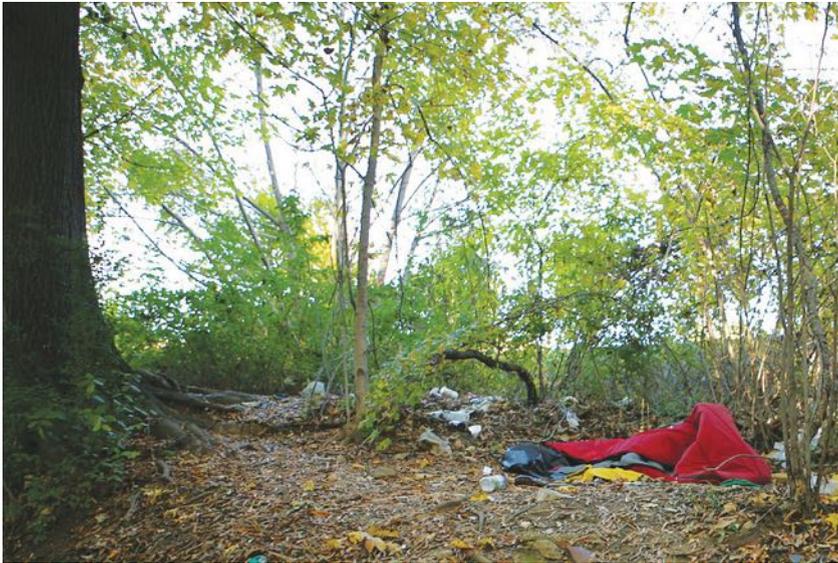
*-Steve*

Home is everywhere and nowhere.

*-Joey*

Home is where I lay my head.

*-Anonymous*



*Joseph Sinkiewicz*

Home is people's sanctuary.

*-Anonymous*

Home is where family meet.

*-John*

Home is the dwelling place of your soul.

*-JAS*

Home is a bottle of beer and a place to go to sleep.

*-Anonymous*

Home is comfort and a good meal.

*-Sandy*



*Thomas B.*

Home is where the heart is; it is where we plant our feet.

*-Thomas*

Home is where there is peace and quiet.

*-Anonymous*



*Thomas B.*

Home is where the devil pervades and peace prevails.

*-Al*

Home is prayer.

*-Ronald*

## TALKING SIDEWALKS

Home is being with your loved ones.

*-Michael*

Home is a gas station.

*-Zhou*

Home is my mother.

*-Anonymous*



*Joseph Sinkiewicz*

Home is where you should have peace, happiness, support, acceptance, security, comfort, love, and reassurance. Home is also a place where you can express yourself with transparency and without fear of ridicule or rejection. Home is not the four walls and roof that you live in; it is like the song says, a place where there is love surrounding you and overflowing. It's a place to gain direction, a place to rejuvenate yourself. A place that stays in your heart long after you've moved on in your life. Home is where we find our blessings, plant our roots, and grow our wings.

*-Anonymous*

**Whisper**

*Ronin*

As I whisper  
I hear my thoughts echoing  
As I whisper  
I see my past coming toward me  
As I whisper  
I feel my future rushing past me  
As I whisper  
I taste a life of despair  
As I whisper  
I smell the world's fear of death

**Phoenix**

*Ronin*

I am the phoenix  
I fly in a blaze of fire

When angered my flames are hot and bright  
When sad I am just charred feathers

I sweat oil and cry gasoline  
I die in a rage of inferno  
Reborn in a pile of ashes

I am the phoenix  
This is my story

**English Verse**

*Isiah O'Briant*

Nine ladies  
all dress in white,  
looking for love all night.

They dance alone  
because there's no place like home.

They dance at night.  
When morning comes,  
They're nowhere in sight.

**Without Hope**

*Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.*

What would you do without it?

Who would you look to for encouragement?

When would you realize that you did not have a purpose?

Where would you go for help?

Why would you even want to exist?

Your friend,  
Hopeful

## Seawell School Rap

*Emily - 4th grader*

There's this girl in Seawell School,  
I think she doesn't like me.  
'Cause every time I'm doin' good,  
She wanna fight me.

I say, "Hey girl, what do you want?"  
And then she puts her hand up,  
And say, "Just don't."  
"Don't what," I say back.  
I think she jealous of my momma's  
New catalack.

She says, "Homey what you got?"  
I say "I'm everything you not."  
She said "If you everything I'm not,  
Show me what you got."

I took a breath and finally said.  
"My name is Emily people,  
Call me Lil E, my birthday  
March 22nd, and you can't see me."

**A Photojournalistic Journey**

*Arnold R Moore, Jr.*

This was to be a “homeless” man’s perspective of life on the streets of Chapel Hill and how to cope with some of them. One of the problems is where to “take a leak.” After some thought on this, I remembered a coffee table photo book about the “Famous Urinals of Europe” or something like that, so I changed my mind.

The editors of this magazine gave me a camera to take pictures of things that you may not notice as I would. So, here is my perspective on the pictures I found interesting . . .

This is a picture of me, a well known “guitar man” around town. I thought you might have seen me “busking” for some of your change. All donations accepted.



Now on with the story . . .



I know that most of the students of UNC-CH are concerned with the security of their stuff, like their bicycles, but this is the best I have seen yet!

DISCLAIMER: I hope no people take offense at this next picture or text, all is meant in fun . . .

This tree has always reminded me of the oriental art of Bonsai. I had wondered why in the WW2 movies the Japanese flyers would stand on their aircraft carriers and shout “Ornamental tree, ornamental tree, ornamental tree!”





Speaking of trees, I went in search of the “proverbial tree” that you can’t see the forest because of. After searching long and hard (outside of my tent), I found it!



The forest in the pictures has been used as a urinal several times . . .  
So has the tree . . .



This well-known clock in the downtown area on Franklin St. had caught my eye and camera lens because it was on the CORRECT time. That had to be a first!!!

Not known to be used as a urinal.

I have talked to many students at UNC-CH, but never about how tough it can be, until I found this light pole in the park that failed an electrical test and had to wear a dunce cap . . .



Not known to be a urinal, but you never know . . .



I traveled all around the area, looking for the things that would only be seen by the insightful eye of a photojournalist . . .

As I traveled towards Carrboro, I found another myth-buster—the saying that pigs can’t fly, well, they can’t . . . but they CAN jump really high!!!

# TALKING SIDEWALKS



In Carrboro, I was shocked to find the Wile E. Coyote is not only REAL, but so is the “Place” he gets all his booby-traps and rocket-sleds from. Yes, the store is located right here in Carrboro, NC.

Okay, okay, I have a very unique take on things. I suppose that my photojournalism days are numbered, but I can say that I have been given a chance to express myself! Now for the rest of the story...



Since I seem to have been going back to the theme that I was NOT going to do, I thought I might as well show you these last two photos...

This is a known urinal for “man’s best friend” and may have been for a few people also.



And finally...after 2am when the bars close . . .

This well-known doorway on Franklin St. HAS been used as a urinal on many a night. I know this for a fact!

Well, this has been a journey for me, and I hope for YOU, too!

## Chasing a Ghost

*Michael Jenkins*

My life's been on the streets for a long time. My dad died. My mom died. My mom's been dead for almost 2 years now, but I've been on the street for a million. 'Cause of crack cocaine. My mama couldn't take it. So I got married, and she couldn't take it either. My life started on the streets when I started using crack cocaine.

This girl I was going with, for 13 years I went with her, and I was wondering why she kept going next door. I said, "Dawg every time I come over she go next door." So I went over there one day. Matter of fact it was at my half-sister's house. I said, "What is more important over there than over here where I'm at—at your house?" She dodged me for a while, so I went over there with her one day. My uncles and all them were over there and they was smoking. I was smoking weed at the time and I said if that's more important to be over here with them than me, then let me try. I threw \$1,000 on the table and asked her, "Which one would you choose—that white stuff on the table or this \$1,000?" And she said, "Well, that white stuff on the table," and left the money—you know? And I said, "If it that good, let me try it." 'Cause I don't think nobody turned down no money; not \$1,000.

So I tried it. Now really, when I tried it the first time, I really don't think I got the full effect of it. So they told me to try it again. They showed me how I was supposed to do. So I done it, and when I done it, I had a feeling like I'd never felt before. And I wanted that same old feeling again—you know?

If you're smoking pot, it's more about what kind of people you're around. Certain people can make you laugh, or it can be a downer. It can make you sleepy or make you forget some thoughts. Like—you be like—I'm going to work today, but reefer be in your mind—you'll be like—oh forget it. Now crack, it hits you different. It's more of a

## TALKING SIDEWALKS

mind thing. It goes straight to the membrane. You will have a type of high—like if there's something on that floor, you will pick it up to see if it's crack. You hear people talking outside, even if there's nobody out there. It's more of a hallucinating high. You'll think the police are out there. And you'll get to peeking out the curtains. That's how crack will do you. They call it (a high) a bus and my bus was tripping off other people that done it. I laughed at them while they was picking stuff up off the floor. I'm like what is really going on? What is really down there?

Really, you're chasing a ghost. Because you're trying to get that feeling you had the first time. And you never won't get that feeling no more. That feeling will never come back that you had the first time. That feeling I got off it the first time, I kept chasing that feeling. It was a ghost because you never get that same feeling again. It get worser and worser. Then your body get used to it and it make you go out there and keep going out there and it make you disconnect from your family.

Before I started doing crack cocaine, I was a hard worker. But my whole family always sold drugs. So I couldn't get out of it no kind of way. So I started gradually pulling myself away from them, and the more I got used to the streets, the more I wanted to stay out there.

It's the devil's playhouse out there, that jungle. I've slept in abandoned houses. I've slept on people's porches outside. Sometimes I don't even go to sleep. I've been shot and all. This right here, I got shot on a drive-by tip between the Bloods and the Crips. They were beefing with each other and I was at the wrong place at the wrong time—that's how I got shot in the leg. There was this dude I was trying to help sell drugs for—that's how I got shot in my arm. They had a beef with the guy because he won't stay on that side of town and I didn't know that. That's how I got shot in my arm. It's dangerous no matter what.

I've done seen people overdose. I used to shoot this guy's arm. I seen how he couldn't function, unless he got this shot. He showed

me how. He was an old man. He's dead today. I have seen my friends. . . I have picked up newspapers and heard about my friends found in houses, dead with their head cut off or their brains blown out. That took a toll on me. But it still didn't stop me. We might cry, but then I go back out to the streets and do the same thing. Life is like this here—it's what you make of it. I chose the wrong path.

I did time for selling drugs. Then, when I got out I tried to change my lifestyle. But that didn't work cause the same old people still coming around. And that ghost won't let you. In your mind—oh I'm getting that same feeling again. And you can be out there for days and weeks and years at a time and never get that same feeling. But that ghost and that gorilla always going to be there. If you go to rehab that gorilla always going to sit, and nag, and pick.

You might do good, long as your pocket is empty. You only got a dime, you might do good. You do good when you're broke. But soon as you get that money in your pocket that gorilla come back and say, "Oh come on, that ain't going to bother you. Oh you can do this once. One ain't going to hurt you." You be saying "Naw, I better go home." And that gorilla be kicking in the back of your mind like, "Come on man, you can handle this. This ain't nothing." So long as you go out there, that one leads to a thousand.

My wife tried to tell me—the kids—that she had loved me to death; why'd I ever do her like that? I chose the streets over them and she got tired of it—that's when I got homeless. Now I've been homeless, like I say, almost 7 or 8 years now. My wife always said if I ever get my life together I can come back.

The girl who really turned me on to it—I still speak to her. I don't hate her because she didn't put no gun to my head to make me smoke. She don't smoke today. She big as that door today. She just stopped, like me. I been clean now four years. In a way it was hard. But I asked myself as I lost my family, "What's more important—that crack cocaine or me and my family?" Like I said, I'd be wanting to do right, but it just didn't let me, 'cause that gorilla was always there. I'd still be chasing that ghost—you know what I'm saying?

TALKING SIDEWALKS



*Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.*

**Oh the Cruelty**

*Ladajah - 7th grader*

Here we lay on shelves of wood.  
They don't realize how we are misunderstood.  
We are not objects, not things.  
We are people, we are human beings.

The sharks are following these horrid boats.  
We are so packed air can barely go down our throats.  
So much disease is here to spread.  
To kill our people so we will be dead.

They think we have no way of knowing  
But we know all right, exactly where we are going.  
They split our families apart.  
Leaving the babies in the dark.

How our heart aches  
Hearing all the screams and the quakes.  
We are nude and exposed  
But they are wearing nice clean clothes.

If you are a slave.  
One's life is torn apart and miserable.  
If you on top level and your skin is pale  
One's life is nonchalant and pleasurable.

There is no explanation for the pain they have caused.  
No doubt in my mind my old life is paused.  
I will go back to my loving home.  
What they did however was wrong.

Oh the emptiness that lay inside me.

**The Brand New Life**

*Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.*

The brand new life,  
Waiting, wanting, wishing, hoping, dreaming.  
Instead of lying, stealing, cheating, conning, scheming.

Sowing instead of reaping,  
Planning in place of acting on impulse.  
Smiling, rejoicing, encouraging,  
giving, remembering, loving, hoping.  
These are the few symptoms of “the brand new life.”

The word “new” to me means existence.  
“Brand new takes on a whole different order,”  
to tear down and build back up.  
Refurbish, rehabilitate.

A firm foundation is a must in this brand new life.  
Nothing old could never be made new without this concrete plan.

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in this publication. Our time spent hearing the stories of our contributors and seeing our weekly gatherings at the men's shelter transform into a strong community of writers and friends has been a life-changing experience. It has been a joy and an honor to work with everyone involved in this publication. We have been humbled by the honesty, the effort, and the sincerity put into each piece of this magazine, and we look forward to creating future editions.

We hope that by reading these stories, any negative preconceptions you may have of poverty and homelessness will be reconsidered, fade, and even disappear, as ours have. We encourage you to personally bridge the gaps in your society, to reach out, to eat dinner at the shelter every once in a while, to donate your time, to contribute your compassion, to look people in the eye and say "hello," and to give everyone the second glance and second chance we all deserve.

Wonderful things can happen when a community stands together, and this magazine is concrete evidence of that truth. Thank you for taking the time to read these stories. We hope that you will remember them, knowing that we all want to be heard – that all our voices count.

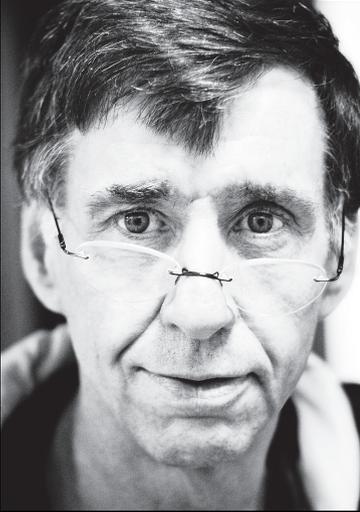
Best regards,

*HOPE (Homeless Outreach Poverty Eradication)*



*For questions, comments, or to get involved  
please email [TalkingSidewalks@Gmail.com](mailto:TalkingSidewalks@Gmail.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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voices. faces. stories. souls.



## A Word from the Writers

Dear Reader:

Here we are again—hopefully you enjoyed our first edition, this one is also for you.

The margin of society is a society in and of itself. It exists in parts of the world where many people fear to tread. This society, made up of other tiny societies, contains a variety of different people, all of whom come from different circumstances, values, and ideals. They fall into cliques that resemble that of a high school—small groups comprised of friends and acquaintances that make up the citizens of these margins.

As members of the proletariat we remain an important part of society because we still have a voice, albeit a quiet one. This magazine is only a small representation for that voice. For poverty abounds throughout the world.

So here we are, have a good read.

J & R

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

*Read it online at [www.talkingsidewalks.com](http://www.talkingsidewalks.com)*

*Cover photo by Joseph Sinkiewicz*

## Lost and Found

*R. Michaels*

I grew up in Chapel Hill when it was called a village. As a teenager, trips to downtown Franklin St. were always a source of excitement and wonder. Along the walk, doors were always opened, at night they were never locked. I wouldn't have noticed a homeless person if they were staring me in the face. Many things come rushing back to me as I recall my growing years, but first I must take notice of what I have lost. The regimen in the shelter is quite strict, up at 5:30 regardless, out of your room no later than 7:00—if you don't want breakfast, you're out on the sidewalks by 6:00—I don't choose breakfast but a green ice tea and a newspaper at a local coffee shop. I usually proceed from there to where the real lost and found is, the rocks in front of the church. That time of the morning gives me much time to reflect on my life, my town, and my memories. I was away in the 70s and 80s due to education and service in the U.S. Navy. It's true you can never go home again; we all find this out in different ways.



*Thomas B.*

What I have lost is a respect for the village I grew up in. Gone are the days of people simply acknowledging each other. If one doesn't dress right, or not shaved that day, they are brushed aside without a simple hello. Lost is the feeling of community, the golden rule, and human decency. I don't agree with panhandlers in front of businesses, there are Interstates for that, but sometimes it's the only way. It's ironic that at least they try and are honest as opposed to various CEO's around the world.

But sometimes, sometimes, I can sit on the wall and regain memories of a better time. When Mr. Russell would set fire to the tires up and down our favorite sledding hill so the kids could sled at night. Little league baseball games where the fans were always there even when some players seemed like they weren't. Or the time when a small child dried tears from his eyes because the manager of Roses let him in after closing to get his coveted Lone Ranger coloring book.

As Dorothy Gale from the Wizard of Oz said, "If I ever go looking for my heart's desire, I won't look any further than my own backyard, because if it isn't there, I never really lost it to begin with."

Well, Dorothy (and Toto too), my backyard is the sidewalks of Franklin, and as you remarked about Kansas when you landed in Oz, I don't think I'm in Chapel Hill anymore.



*Jason O.*

**Where I'm From**  
*Arnold*

From greatness to  
Slightness  
from doctor's Hand  
from my father's stand  
from my mother's eyes  
the beauty of all  
from dark and black  
a crown of Kings  
from dreams to tears  
from slavery to smears  
of two-hundred years  
from broken chains  
to no more pain  
from rain that often  
falls and now from  
Jesus who is us all  
from never having to  
fall. So from where I am  
are you still there.

## **Almost Famous**

*The Retro Player*

I was almost famous,  
I almost made it.  
But when my dreams failed,  
I became frustrated.  
I grew up in The Hood  
And I always  
Felt misunderstood.  
Truth is I wasn't working  
As hard as I should.

So lost my roof  
And with no one else to talk to,  
All I had left was  
Talking sidewalks,  
Who became my new bed,  
A very hard place to lay my head.  
The blood in my veins ran cold  
As if something else controlled my very soul.  
I lied to myself again and again  
Then I felt the presence of my inner-man.  
And I knew that with Unity Strength & Ambition  
I could make it,  
But my self-esteem was so low  
So I faked it!

It took my daughter "Karma"  
and my son "Fresh" to get me to reconnect,  
So I went from a dead-beat dad  
To learning how to be a father again.  
That's when God released the inner-man  
And the Master Plan.



TRP

## **My Life From the Mind of a Child**

*Amanda*

Since I was a little girl I have never felt like I was in the right place. I have always felt as if the life that I was living was some kind of dream. How could so much bad be attracted to such a small child? Since I could remember, there have been bad things happening in my life. They say that all things happen for a reason and that you should ask God to see the better in your situation, but I never could. Don't get me wrong, I was born into a religious family. This is why the thought of asking God for help was such a joke to me.

If there was a god then why would he allow so many bad things to happen to such a young girl? I mean, I didn't know who my real father was until I was eight years old. I lived with my stepmother and her husband. I had two stepsisters. One younger and one older. They got away with everything; I got punished for everything they did. I remember when I was five years old the beatings started. Every night at two in the morning, when my stepfather got off work, I was made to hold onto the bedpost and they would beat me with anything that came in handy—belts, hangers, wires, etc. The horrors didn't end just with the beatings. I was a small girl doing what a teenager should have been doing: laundry, dishes, taking care of my younger stepsister, cooking simple meals like mac-and-cheese. The whole seven years I was with my first stepparents I don't remember playing or even laughing. I don't remember getting a birthday or even a Christmas. I don't think I ever met a kid that didn't get anything for their birthday. I didn't get a card, anything. Then one day when I was seven I received a call from my father telling me he had just gotten remarried and that she would be picking me up. My father was still in prison and had met his third wife through a pen pal program they have in the Michigan prison. I was born in Florida, by the way. My mother who I met when I was ten moved to Texas while my father remarried and moved to Michigan, taking me with him, only to get arrested.

July Fourth another woman entered my life. The moment I saw her I felt as if I was saved. She took me into her arms and held me tight. I met my new family that day. I had two stepbrothers, grandmothers, and pets. They brought me to North Carolina, where I had my own

room. The first year with this family was rocky because I didn't know how to be a kid. All my new mother wanted was for me to have fun and be carefree. To everyone's dismay I was damaged goods. No matter how much I tried to be a kid and behave, I kept getting into trouble. I was like a dog you adopt from the shelter and you know that it's been abused, so you give it all the love and affection you can, but in the end the dog is too far gone. I was that adopted dog. I was too far gone. My thrill for adventure was no longer there, my curiosity was no longer there. I had seen some of the world and it scared the shit out of me. My father came back into the picture when I was eight. Not that he had really been in the picture to begin with. My new mother, who in the end I consider my real mother, went to pick him up. He got me my own puppy, a Great Dane that he named. From the moment I saw my father I could not stand him. I was eight years old and I felt a hate I thought could never exist. He moved in and tried to be the caring father, but I saw him for what he was truly, a bully and a con artist.

My father always had big plans on how to get his life in order. He had big dreams and he was determined to make them happen, as long as he didn't have to work for it. Whenever I did something wrong he would yell and belittle me. My stepbrother, Brian, would do things and everyone would blame me. He would eat something that wasn't supposed to be eaten, he would mess up the living room, things like that. No matter how much I denied that it was me, they wouldn't listen. So, to save my breath, I would tell them I committed the crimes. I was an outcast in this new family. I ran away from home, they put me in homes, and after a while I stopped feeling. I didn't get mad, I didn't feel sadness, I was never happy, I just didn't feel anything. I was numb. The world had taken its toll on me at an early age and I had had enough. Things just didn't matter anymore. By the age of nine I had altogether stopped crying. I just couldn't summon up the energy to show any kind of emotion. I felt that if I was unreadable and unshakable I wouldn't be hurt anymore.

My new stepmother tried to understand me; she said I was a free spirit and I had to fly sometimes. She said that she never worried about me because she knew I was tough and that I would find my way home. My stepmother was a good woman and she tried to reach me, but I was lost. And I always felt lost, still do. I felt like I was in the center of

a tornado and everything around me was spinning. All I wanted to do was grab something and hold it still. But I could never find anything or anyone to hold still. It was as if life was pushing me forward and no one noticed that I hadn't caught up with the times. The choice was made that maybe what I needed was to meet my real mother. They packed me up and moved me to Florida to live with my real grandmother until my mother could come from Texas and get me.

My grandmother was a selfish woman. She didn't like you to touch anything or mess up her schedule. I remember I cracked my head open and she got mad because she missed Matlock taking me to the hospital. There isn't too much to say about my grandmother though. I'll move on.

My real mother came and got me. I met my brothers and sisters for the first time. I had an identical twin sister, along with two other sisters and two brothers. I also had another stepfather. My first night at my new home was the worst experience.

The trailer they lived in had no heat or air conditioning and there were huge holes in the floor. Then my oldest sister told me that the stepfather was raping her. Later I found out that he had been raping everyone but me. Not that he didn't try. He was later arrested and was given five years. How's that fair? That never made any sense to me. I had learned that my mother had known that all this stuff was going on and was allowing it. She sold her kids to this man so she never had to work. How could a woman that gave birth let someone commit these acts toward her children? Soon after the arrest my mother moved us. My older brother started beating us and my mother finally sent him away. The family was like a mafia. Only the strongest survived. I became tough. I became the head leader of the children. They did what I said all the time. I only became the leader to survive. I began to hate my mother and didn't care about anything she stood for. She was the enemy. Everyone had become the enemy. Why? I don't know. She, like my father, never deserved my respect. I hated life with her. I hate her. I hated my siblings because they were weak. They always played the victim. I didn't understand it. I refused to be the victim. Even when I had a boyfriend that beat me in the head with a two-by-four and made me go blind and deaf in the left side of my face. I couldn't take charge of my life, but I wouldn't be a victim. I ran away numerous times and finally was sent back to North Carolina.

Soon after I got back to North Carolina my brother died of leukemia. Brian was the only one that with a look could say so much. When he died the rest of my being died. I didn't care anymore about anything. Life just didn't matter anymore. I ran away from home and ended up in Burlington. I hooked up with a boy who beat me for five months. He brought me to Chapel Hill. He finally got arrested and I hooked up with another guy. He beat me and made me feel so low.

So, here I am today. Am I still in the tornado? Yes. Life hasn't slowed down and I don't know what to do. Sometimes I just want to stop the whole process, but then again, I'm curious about what happens next. The only thing I am sure of is that my dog will always need me. If nothing else in this life comes and if I could be remembered for something, it would be that I never played the victim.



## Watermelon

*Isaiah O'Briant*

My food family  
will be watermelons.  
Watermelons, because  
they're fruit.  
When it's large,  
it's ripe and ready to eat.  
Won't bounce because  
you will think it's asleep.



Easy to carry,  
because of its size.  
When it's broken open,  
it will revive its meat.  
Plucked from the vines  
with many mouths to be filled.  
The juices  
go straight to the head.



*Drawings by Isaiah O'Briant  
Photo by Thomas B.*

## Memories

*DJ*

One day I awaken and  
my childhood is gone,  
like the dream I had  
during my sleep.

The thought of something new on  
the horizons thrilled the hell out of me,  
also it scared the hell out of me too.  
Wondering what happened to those  
daydreaming days and popcorn  
movie nights and cartoon mornings  
over breakfast.

One thing that is amazing to me,  
life is like that blooming flower  
that shows its true being, you know,  
between spring and summertime.

I guess what I'm trying to  
say is, I'm maturing and becoming  
a man.



## **The Gorilla**

*Michael Jenkins*

The Gorilla is always there, you know. He never leave you. Just like the devil, he try to get you at your weakest moment, at your weakest point. When he nag you, he wait till you mad at someone, or you fussing at your mate, or something like that there. That's when he pops up. He be there like a little voice in the back of your head saying, "Ok, since you want to act like that, come on, you don't need but one, one ain't going to hurt you." You try to fight it as much as you can, but when you angry and mad at someone that is when it really sticks its claws in you and he be messing with the back of your mind saying, "You can do this one. It ain't bad." It's looking in the door like a thief. He waiting for you just to make that mistake. He waiting at this point, but he always peeking in. It's a struggle like if the preacher were preaching saying about the flesh and the spirit fighting against each other, that's the way that Gorilla is. Really, the Gorilla is more of a fight against you and the world out there and the consequences of the drug game out there. It runs you out there, but once you get out there, he leaves you, know what I'm saying. He leaves you hanging.

Then, you're on your own. And then you got no way to turn back. The voice is gone now. But he's still living cause he still got you out there chasing. You sleeping in abandoned houses and stuff like that when that Gorilla like, "Ok, look at you now. See, this is where it's at. You know you like this. This is part of life here." There ain't nothing good about the Gorilla. The Gorilla is ugly; he's mean. The Gorilla, he'll steal and destroy. He'll rip out your heart. The Gorilla is hateful. He'll come in and destroy your home and your family and tear it apart. It don't have no conscience or no meaning. He come to destroy you. He come to take you out.

When you don't have nothing and nowhere to go, that's when you know he got you where he want you, in his claws. When you got nothing to look back on, you can't go back home or nothing like that there, he got you then. That's when bad things happen to you. You go out here and he'll make you steal. He make you rob. He make you steal from your own mama. It's bad when you can't go home to your mom.

And when you can't go home to your mom because of all the wrong things that Gorilla made you do. You steal from your own people. They don't want you around. They hate to even see you coming. That's sickening.

But it's always there. It never leaves you. You can be clean for like 20, 30 years and know what you done been through. But like I say, it sneaks in at your weakest moments. It don't hit you when you're doing good and you got real strong people. It comes at your weakest time. Or your time of trouble, like say you lose your job. That's when it sneaks in on you. "Oh, I can get him now." Most folks, 9 out of 10, if you ain't strong, it will get you. And it will put you right back out there in that cycle where you ain't got nothing. It takes and rips everything apart, your loved ones, the people you care about. It make you hurt other people that you don't be meaning to, but . . . it's just insanity.

The Gorilla got to get some people down near death before they realize what's really going on. Like me, I done been shot up. I done been run over. But I still went back out there at that point in time, as soon as I got out of the hospital. It's like I didn't learn nothing. But the last time I got shot, I learned something and I told my people, I'm outta here. This is it for me. It took me getting run over and shot to let that Gorilla know I mean business. Before I realized I'm tired, because I know what's coming next. Next one's taking me out.

The moment I decided that was when I got shot in my arm. The bullet kept going through and I felt my fingers drawing up. But I didn't want to go to the hospital, now that's sickening. So I don't know who called my people. But they came and picked me up and snatched me in the car, bandaged me up, then dropped me off at the hospital. I realized then, that day in the hospital, they were trying to do something to my arm, the bullet went straight through and took out a chunk of my nerve. The doctor operated on me and tried to put it back together and it still ain't doing no good. When I woke up after the operation, I knew then that I wasn't going back. I realized I used to have a good life. I said, I know I'm going back to the good life, if I have to fight the rest of my life to get it right. The Gorilla do try to sneak in sometime now, but I tell him, I can't let you bring me back down. I come too far.

## **A Little Story About My Family**

*Charles Gear*

My name is Charles Gear. I'm fixing to tell you a little story about my family. When I was coming up, I was a little bitty boy, my mama was a great mother. She lived her life a Christian life. My daddy was a great, great lovely man. He loved fishing. He loved softball. He hit the ball really good. My dad was an alcoholic. But he take care of his five kids. I loved my daddy. We went fishing. We played basketball and we played cards together. Spades and Bid Whiz and Tunk. My daddy was good at that.

My daddy, he was a chef at sorority houses. He loved to cook at sorority houses and fraternity houses. He loved to cook for students. My daddy was a breakfast man. He fry up white potato, onion, and sausage or ham and eggs with some cheese in it, pancakes, and grits plain with butter and salt and pepper. And he make homemade biscuits every morning. He never had to measure. He rolled them out with a pin. He got a glass and cut them out and put it in the oven at 350. He was never rushed about his biscuits. He would always say, "At 400 they're going to burn at the bottom." So, he always cooked them at 350.

I remember when my daddy and my mama separated and got divorced, that really hurt us. I'll never forget that first Christmas that my mama and my grandma bought us. My daddy went into the house and stole it for some liquor. But we still had a good Christmas. My mama paid for somebody to come dressed up like Santa Claus in a van. He came in a blue-and-white van and he had on a Santa Claus suit with a white beard and white hair and black boots and a big stomach. Santa Claus sat down and ate dinner with us. He brought all four of us a bicycle. He brought clothes. Back then, it wasn't like now with kids being greedy. It was a good Christmas with our mama and our daddy.

So that went on. Then they got a divorce and that was it. My daddy moved back home with his mama. My mama and daddy was still seeing each other. My mama was staying on Sykes Street and my daddy was staying on Gomain Street with his mama so they could still go out the back door and the front door and see each other.

For a while, my mama was on welfare but I told her when I got my first check from UNC hospital that she had to get off welfare. So I brought

my first paycheck home to my mother. It was like \$900. I said, Mom come get off welfare or they are going to take us from you and we're going to have to split up and we don't want that. And my mom said, "Ok." I told her I make enough money to help her and the kids pay the bills and the household expenses. And I bought my kids Christmas. I was 16 at the time. I was doing patient transportation and housekeeping.

My mama used to work at the university and she never did much cooking except on Sundays. I used to cook for my mama five days a week. I'd do whatever my mama asked for. Monday through Friday I'd do fried chicken or something or pork chops or spaghetti or a tossed salad or lasagna. But every Thursday, she wanted fish. She got off at 4 p.m. At 4:15 p.m. when she walk in that door I drop the fish in a hot grease pan and I know it be good and hot when she walk in the door. So I cook fish, coleslaw, hush puppies—that's on Thursday. Friday and Saturday, we pick up sandwiches. Then Sunday my mama go in the kitchen and cook up a big Sunday dinner like she got 50 kids out there. Mama had fried meats. Long time ago before she got sick, she fed a whole neighborhood. She had everything—chicken, potato salad, macaroni and cheese, ribs, barbecue chicken, chicken and dumplings, pound cake, collard greens. She made the best pineapple cake. Her coconut pies and her potato pies—oh, you ought to taste them. It was great. She made all her stuff from scratch.

My mama got sick and then I had to take care of my mama. I was in the hospital day in and day out. She worked at the University for 39 years. When she came home retired, everything was wrong with her. She had a stroke. She had a heart attack. She had two blood clots. She had a tumor inside her brain. And she had asthma. Then she just went away peacefully. God called her home. He said, come home with me. Time to get some rest. And she went away from here with a smile on her face.

She passed away when she was 58 years old and I had to take care of the three kids at home. I can't ever forget, it was January 12, 1999, that she went away from here. It was a hard time for us cause we didn't have no Christmas, no Thanksgiving or New Year's without my mama. It was rough on us.

My dad just passed away January 6, this year. So this year my daddy went to the rest home. And then at the rest home, my daddy had a stroke and a heart attack. He fell out of his wheel chair at the time and no

nurse and no doctor were around at the rest home. So they sent my daddy to UNC hospital. He was 69 when he died. He had a stroke and a heart attack and he fell out of his wheelchair at the nursing home.

I got on drugs really bad. I went to rehab. I came out of rehab and I fell again. After my mama's death, I went back out there. But after my daddy's death, I didn't go back out there. I been clean now almost six months after my daddy's death. Not drinking. No drugs at all. I tell you it's a nightmare when you're out there chasing for that ghost. You spend your last on drugs, trying to get high. When you got no money. It's late but you don't know where you're going to get your next meal from. You don't know what you're going to do. But after I came in, Michael is the one who took me and said, "You know Charles, you ain't got to do that no more." Since then I've been hanging around him. He don't do drugs. He been clean for almost a year now. I look at that and say, *you know Charles, he can do it, you can do it, too*. It was hard out there. I had to make up my mind, it was death or prison. I was going to get killed.

Right now, I'm a nurse. I take care of old people at nighttime. From 11:30p.m. until 8 o'clock in the morning. I been doing it almost 15 years now. I take care of them in their homes. I love old people. One day, we're going to get old. We're going to need some help, somebody got to help us when we get old. You can't treat old people any kind of way you want to treat them. Let them be loved just like you want to be loved. My mama and my grandma told me as a child, "You got a heart for old people. Why don't you just take care of old people?"

Right now I'm staying with my nieces and nephew. I want to see them grow up, go through college. It has to be greater than high school; it has to be college. I'd be happy if I see all that and God can take me home then.

That's the end of my story.



*TRP*

# Lost and Found

*A Community Ensemble*



*DJ*

I lost my heart, but I found hope.

—Thomas B.

I lost everything and found God.

—Mufasa

I lost my way—lost how to live, and found my way back—a way to survive.

—Jimmy Jones

It seems once I've lost all of my fears, then I will find the confidence come back at once.

—Jianling Zhou



*Thomas Gray Owens, Jr.*



*Thomas B.*

I found that I have power inside, the power to do what I want.

—TRP

I lost my guilt and found forgiveness.

—R. Michaels

I lost my home.

—Jimmy Jones

I lost my keys and found my car.

—R. Michaels



*Thomas B.*



I lost my home and just  
can't seem to find my way  
back to it.

—Steve

I lost my mind, and I still  
ain't found it.

—Mufasa

*Jason Owens*

I lost some of that good feeling spirit, but I found some bright points of  
light that still shine in the dark of night.

—Arnold R. Moore, Jr.

I lost one line to be the prime mover  
in the wrangle, then suddenly I find  
that as matter of fact my space of sky is  
limitless, endless and so.

—Jianling Zhou



*Jason Owens*

## **A Dream**

*Anonymous*

I dreamed in black and white

Saw you staring through the night

Without color the vista is clear

You holding me holding you near.

I asked, you acquiesced

That night we stood face to face

Had a kiss

A moment to embrace

Like a kid with a toy

I was ensconced with joy

It wasn't meant to be

The bottle—my folly

Pushed us apart

Crushed my heart

The bottle—my folly

Hold me closer while you drift away

Lost in melancholy

A dream

Just

**Oxygen**  
*Anonymous*

Heart beating fast  
the oxygen coming in  
or is it  
Can't breathe  
or can I  
Face and Hands going numb  
People crowding round  
get the hell away from me  
I'm getting too much air  
Oxygen is suffocating  
tears on the floor  
Hands clinched  
Scream  
Breathe in, Breathe out

## **The Late Blooming Tree**

*Anonymous*

A revolt as a sapling  
Would have been so grand,  
Before I ever grew a branch.  
The lessons, early, would still stand,  
But, instead I had to wait until the late,  
The summer into the autumn of my life,  
To taste this sweet freedom.  
Right before the cold winds blow—  
When all of the gardeners have given up,  
And some of my branches have fallen off,  
Is when I see where my strength comes from.  
Fresh blossoms, late to come,  
Changing into a delicious golden fruit,  
Cling to my dark, rough bark.  
My ripening wisdom, sweeter than gold.  
Come pick from me...  
The late blooming tree!



*Joseph Sinkiewicz*

## Open Letter to President Obama

*Arnold R. Moore, Jr.*



*Thomas B.*

This economy stinks. I know you fell into this, willingly, but with a belief that you could help. This open letter is to that cause. We, as a country, need jobs to build a viable nation. A job would rebuild a stronger tax base, fuel the economy for business, and give self-esteem back to our working class heroes.

Now, where to find these jobs? We have a growing sector in the green area. Many new and not so new technologies are emerging towards making a cleaner, natural and more earth-friendly environment. This can be a very intense market for labor and other highly skilled jobs.

This is called HOPE for the FUTURE. Our nation has not been involved in large-scale projects, such as the Hoover Dam, the Panama Canal, etc. for way too long. We need a major project to get behind to create JOBS. This is what I propose...

Plastics of all sorts are put into the landfills. Yes, we have some recycling of these plastics, but more is needed. ALL plastics must be mandated to be recycled. ALL PLASTICS! Body parts from wrecked cars to the scratched plastic glass in your kitchen cupboard, the lids on soda fountain drinks to the Styrofoam coffee cup you had this morning, they all MUST be recycled. Although one may argue that many plastics won't stick together, they ALL have a common element, CARBON. Using carbon binders and heat will combine these plastics! This could create jobs for researchers to investigate.

These combined plastics would then be extruded into pipes, more jobs. These pipes would be put together along the Interstate System medians, ugh...jobs! This Interstate Highway System is an artery system that reaches across the lower "48." In these pipes would be WATER. This water would come from the Atlantic, Pacific, Gulf, Mississippi, and Great Lakes. The Saudis have very good desalting plants that we could build to make this water usable, BINGO...JOBS. This clean water would be pumped using SOLAR and WIND power (jobs) to be used by farmers ZOWIE...NO MORE DROUGHT PROBLEMS.

The water could be used by the Forestry Dept. for underground sprinklers to keep the forests wet. WOW...NO more unplanned FIRES (installing jobs). The Insurance Industry would be happy about that in California, alone.

As I hope you see, this would create many jobs in maintaining this system for many, many years. We ALL need HOPE and this would give HOPE to so many, just in the near future, as well as beyond.

Thank You for your Time,

Arnold R. Moore, Jr.



*Thomas B.*

## Emotional Interference

*Lenno W. Moore*

See, as a young buck the OGs told me to, “always use your head; stay in the moment son; never allow your heart to gain entry into the decision-making process.”

See, the difference is this, the heart is ambiguous at best while at the same time being overly compassionate. Now when it comes to relationships this can be a very dangerous thing. Now that’s the meaning of Emotional Interference.

When things get bleak in our darkest time, we tend to start using our brains, as opposed to our d—s. Our saying: resolve as well as street wits. We find God and all the apostles when we fall hard on our luck.

Trust and believe, would’ve never come to this had I’d listened to the OGs and kept my wits.



*Thomas Gray Owens Jr.*

## **Time After Time**

*Thomas B.*

The fences are high and the barbed wire looks razor sharp. I walk across the yard—there are the inmates, and then the guards—I ask myself, “How did I get here?” Love, where it all began. I am laying on my bunk looking at the ceiling, thinking back to the day I took her flowers to her job. I was so happy doing that, I was going to make her day. So I walked up to the counter and asked, “Is my wife here?”

“Your name isn’t Ken?” I said no. My smile went away. I turn around and walk away and said tell my wife I love her. At this point in my life I had to get a grip and move on. So I met a friend, he was 74 years old with his gray wrinkled face and bushy eyebrows. We became friends, he did not belong in prison. He had Alzheimer’s and can’t remember things so we help each other talking, and I started writing letters for him.

It’s funny the people we meet in our lives that get us through life. Today I am going to live life, and get through and meet new people who can encourage me to get back where I was before. I seen a lot when I was in prison and am going to learn from my mistakes and am going to be love and give love when she comes around. Today I am grateful for the little things in my life. The shelter, the food, and the groups that come there.

As for you, the reader: please pray for healing in my heart and for encouragement to get where I want to be in my life. Thank you.



*DJ*



*Thomas Gray Owens Jr.*

## **What Do You Do With a Lonesome Soul**

*Anonymous*

What do you do with a lonesome soul.

Do you bury it and put it in a hole.

Do you put it on a mountain high,

A spectacle to passer by.

. . . or do you shoot it with a gun.

Do you play with it for fun.

Do you laugh at it.

Do you sing it a song.

Do you kiss it. . . Kiss it,

All night long?

## **Leave You Behind**

*Thomas B.*

The day your heart beat with mine  
I saw your eyes glisten  
And I saw your fears fall;  
I saw your lips tremble  
When my name Jesus called.  
It was just a matter of time  
In this old life of mine  
Until the day I had to leave you behind.

I know you still remember  
That day so long ago  
The day our last kiss  
Told me all I need to know.  
I know your tears were real  
I know the pain you feel,  
For in that moment held in time,  
Your heart beat steadily with mine.

I saw your lips smile,  
I saw you walk away,  
And I heard your loving whisper,  
Darling, we'll be together again someday.



*DJ*

## **My Beloved**

*Mufasa*

My Beloved is the lily of my heart.  
She is my Beloved and I am hers.  
I close my eyes and I see her.  
The wind carries her smell, her sweet scent to me.  
I feel her in a way so deeply, one only I can understand.  
She is my Beloved and I am her man.



*Thomas B.*

## **Freedom**

*Thomas B.*

I stand in the  
Mystery of the  
Great unknown  
Looking, wandering, and Free.

The wind dances  
And it takes my breath away  
Ecstatic each day just to be free.

I sing with laughter  
Watching the stars go by  
Hearing the waves by the sea.

For the spirit is  
With me unbounded  
And free.

## Tomorrow is Another Day

*Jiangling Zhou*

How many times were you told,  
“Tomorrow is another day?”  
Every morning it sounds like someone’s repeating it,  
But replaced “tomorrow” by “today”;  
Today is another day,  
Ho-Ho, time is exactly life,  
Time is wealth with no replacement,  
Time is much heavier than gold, diamonds. . .  
Like it or not,  
Another day begins today.

Wake up, it’s 6 o’clock already;  
Hurry up, it’s 7 o’clock already;  
Are you ready for another day?  
Another day could be usual,  
Another day is a plenty thing you could spend,  
Another day is cheap stuff everyone could waste,  
Another day might begin the day after tomorrow,  
Two days after tomorrow. . .  
It may never become another day.

It’s like a cycle,  
Day by day,  
Week follow week,  
Month after month,  
The sunshine is the same golden bright,  
The moon light is the same silver white,  
The stars still twinkle in the sky. . .  
The tide is coming and is going,  
But the stream sings a song to run in the sea,  
Just like yesterday never came back.

Have you felt life is short?  
That moment might be the end of your teenage,  
Might be now.  
If you feel that way,  
You should say,  
“Today is another day,”  
You become a manager of your life,  
You become a master of your life,  
How many tomorrows in your life?

Unlimited or limited?

## Community Reactions to Issue 1

“I read “Talking Sidewalks” and was so impressed by both the content and the layout. . . . I think this is a great idea and I hope it brings attention to those stories largely unheard.”

—*Carlo Robustelli, Mayor’s Assistant, Chapel Hill*

“How wonderful! Congratulations. I hope it can get into the hands of many, many people.”

—*Sally Greene, Town Council Member, Chapel Hill*

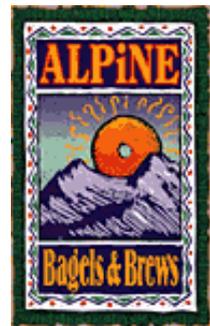
“Until now members of the homeless community have had little opportunity to share their stories. Finally, it’s their turn to do some of the talking. . . . The project is a move towards social inclusion by letting the homeless engage with the rest of the community and vice versa. Community discussions about important social issues like homelessness are not complete unless everyone has the chance to speak. We can learn a lot just by listening.”

—*Daily Tar Heel Editorial Board*

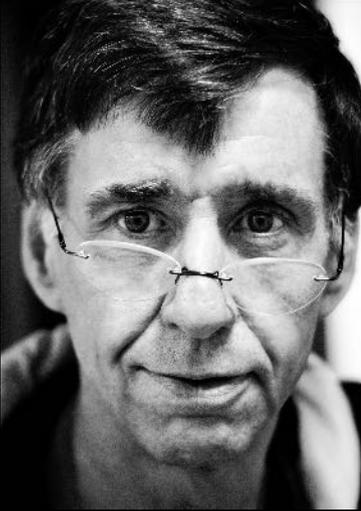
For questions, comments, or to get involved, email [talkingsidewalks@gmail.com](mailto:talkingsidewalks@gmail.com)

Read it online at [www.talkingsidewalks.com](http://www.talkingsidewalks.com)

### With Support From:



# In Memory



“Homeless people see it all; all people see when they look at the homeless is what you want to. My own goal is a literary periodical, with items by what I’d have to call the local “literati”...It’s one of the sad truths, it is up to us to bring to public attention, keeping ever in mind we are of no more value at the level of worth and our souls haven’t any more value in God’s eyes...Let us continue this joint effort and just see what we come up with. I have a feeling it will be worthy, indeed.”

**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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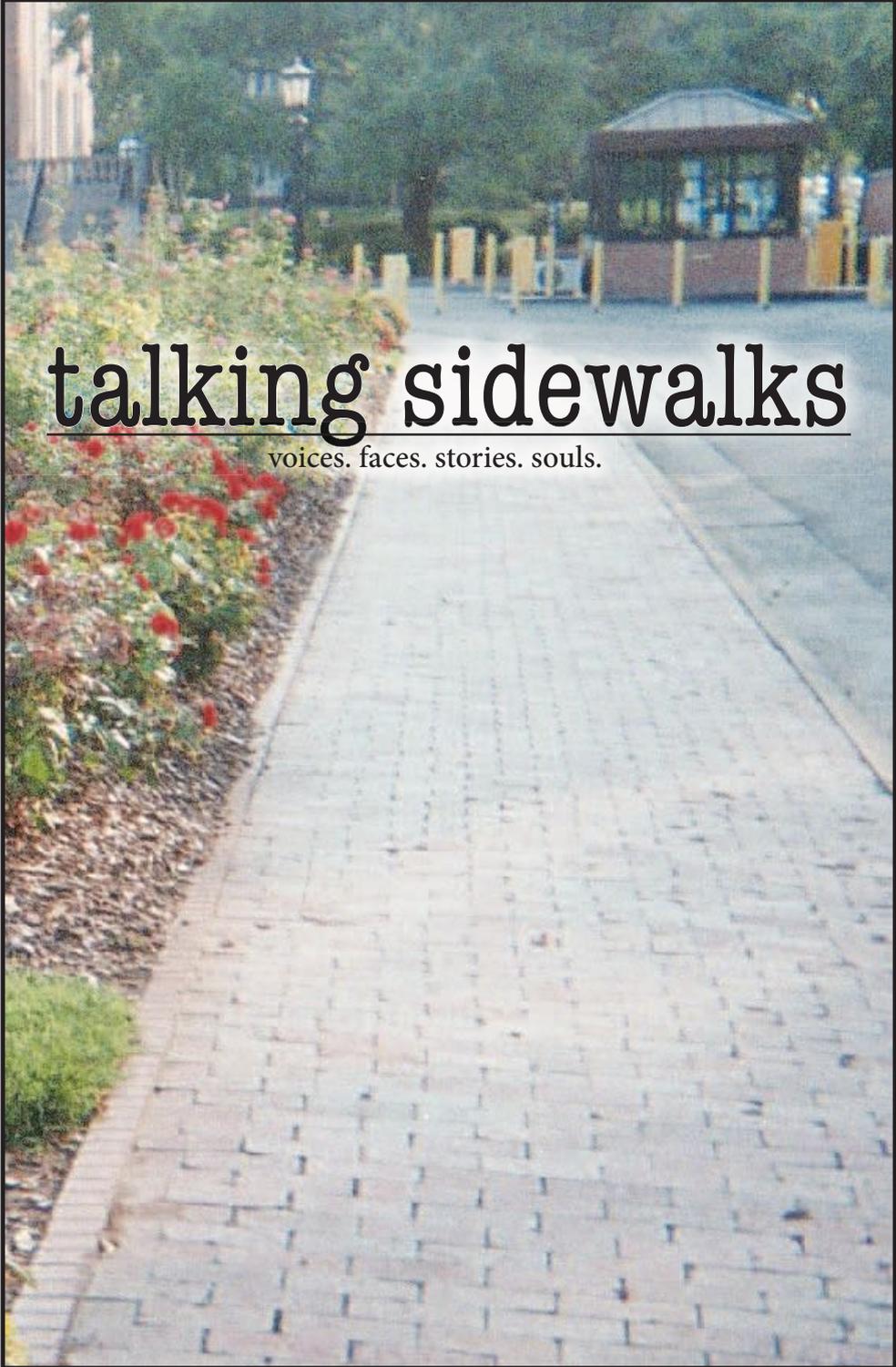


*For questions, comments, or to get involved, email [talkingsidewalks@gmail.com](mailto:talkingsidewalks@gmail.com)*

*Read it online at [www.talkingsidewalks.com](http://www.talkingsidewalks.com)*



talking sidewalks



# 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  
[www.shamrockpainting.org](http://www.shamrockpainting.org)

## 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?

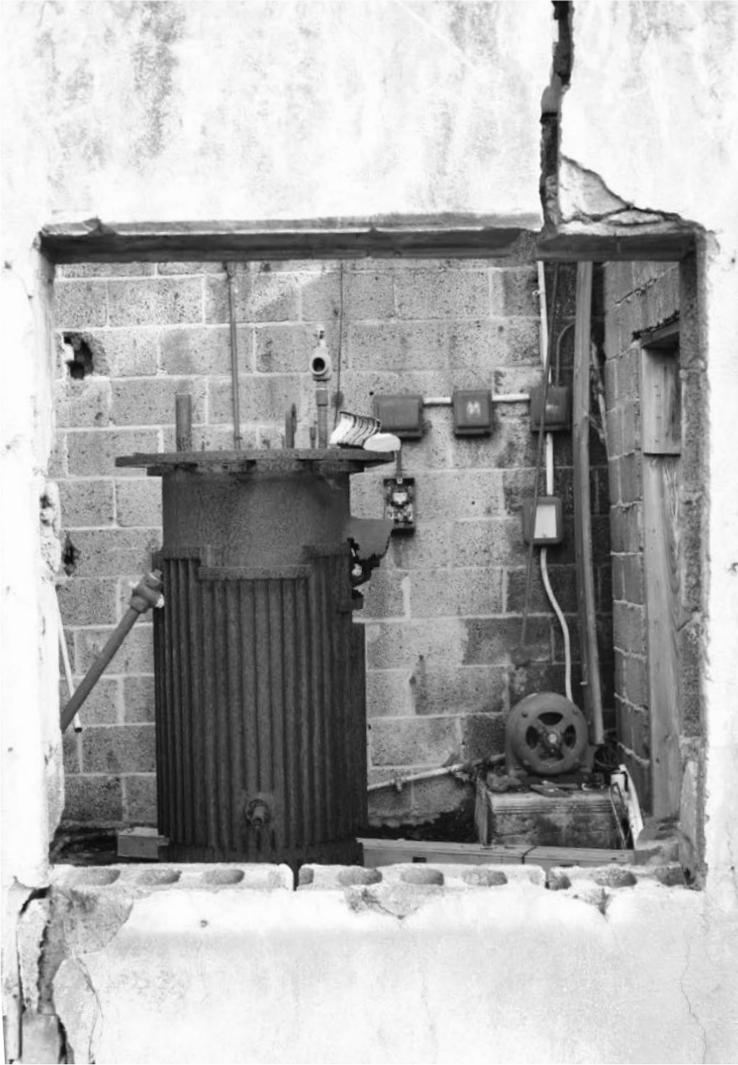
Then one night it came,  
The Answer is here the Answer-  
Was here all the time. Stop the cycle-

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 Laughing Man*

## **The Insecurity Within**

*Paul Y.*

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.

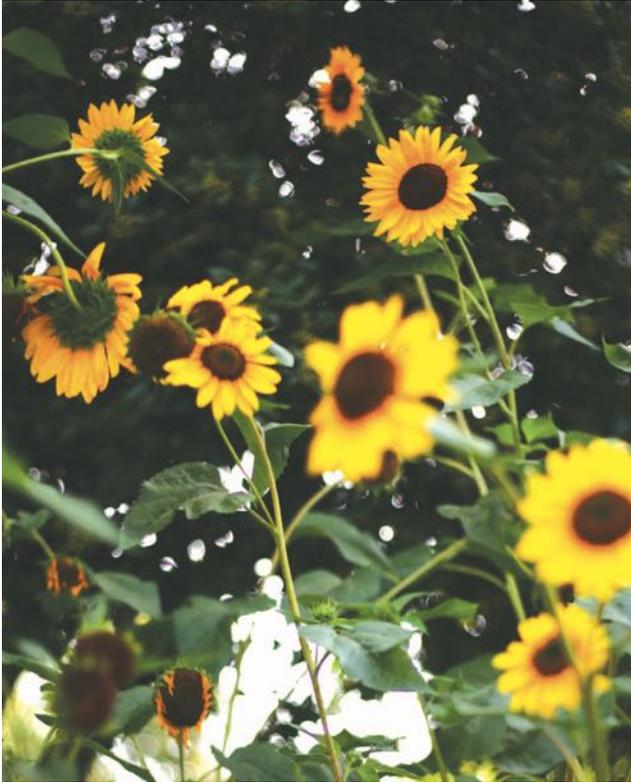
Well, let’s see. Two plus three is five. Plus the burger boy, is ten. I’m thinking ten is the magic number. Ok, whoever, come on down, you’re the next contestant on the Price is Right!

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 street  
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.



*Charles 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? Hmmmm...

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 is 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.



*The Laughing Man*



*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.



*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.

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.

## **Believe in Hope**

*Thomas G. Owens Jr.*

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.

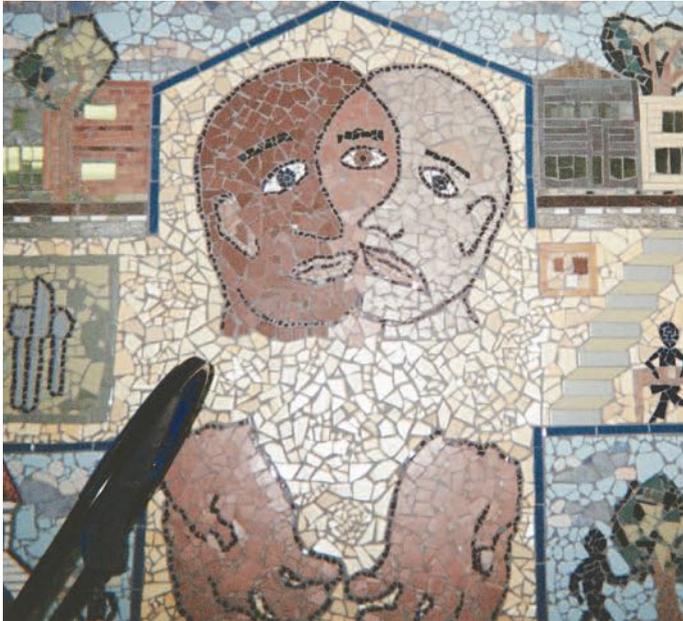
Hope believes that one can continually see lives changed.

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*

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*Read it online at [www.talkingsidewalks.com](http://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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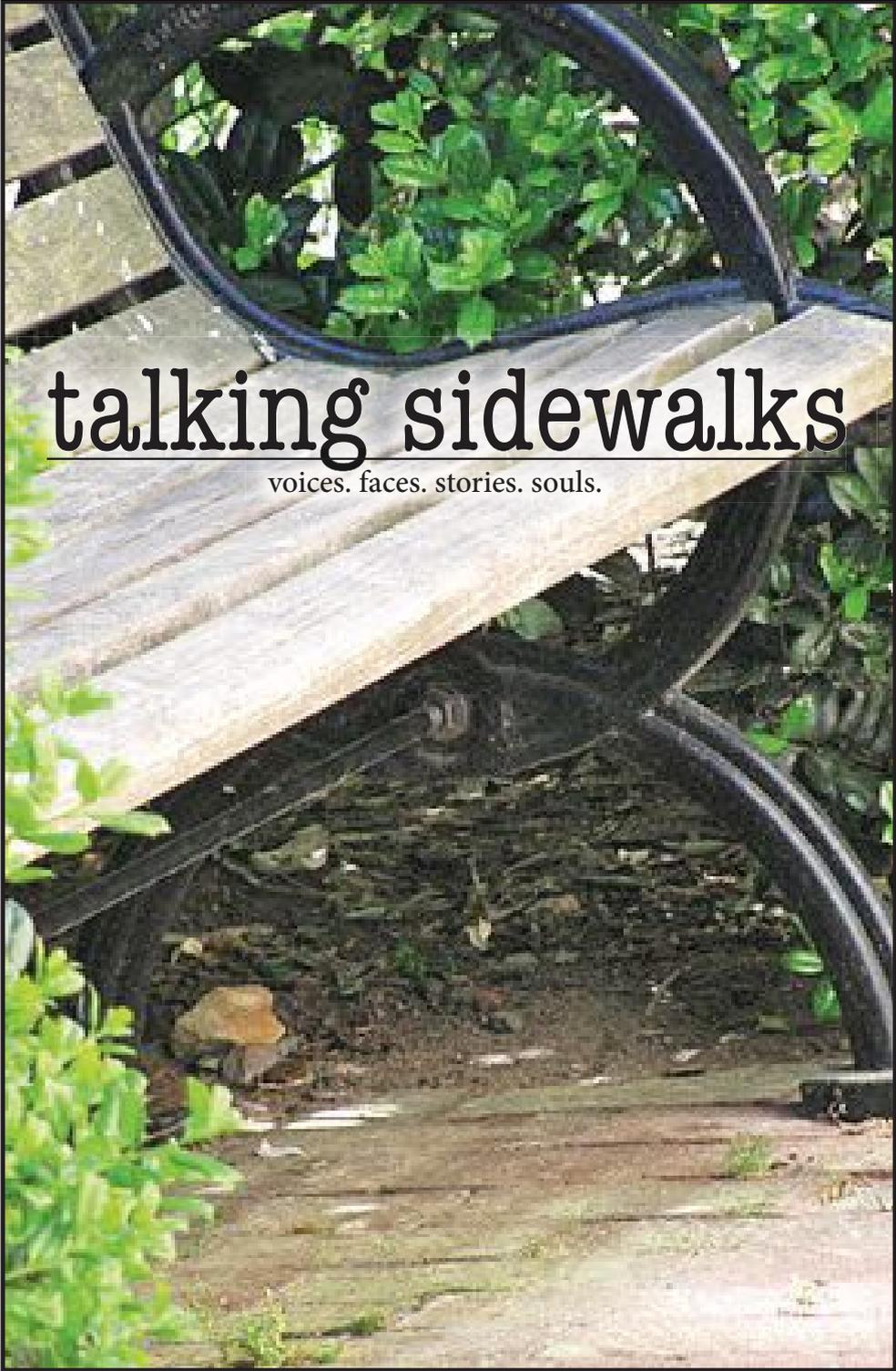


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Cover photo taken by Charles Gear



talking sidewalks



# 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*

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## 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**

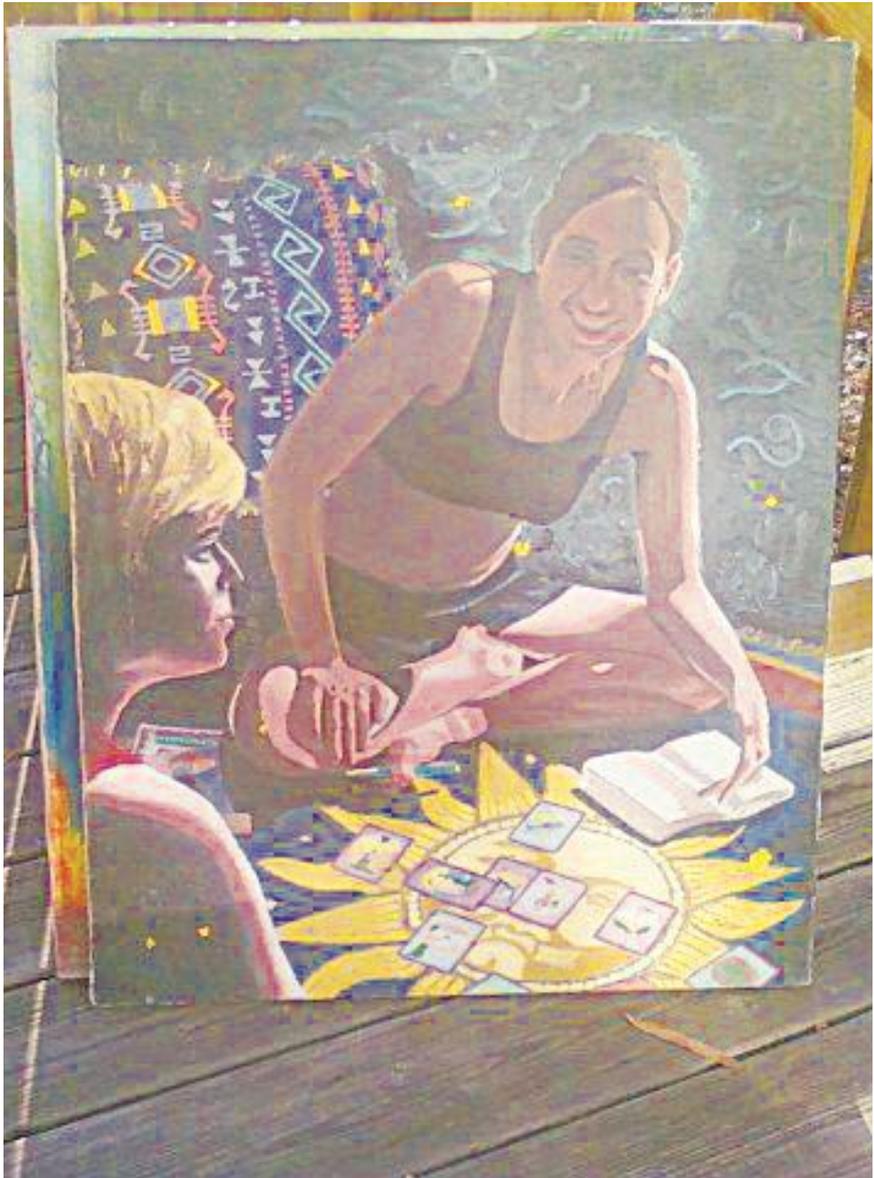
*Sharon Norris*

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)

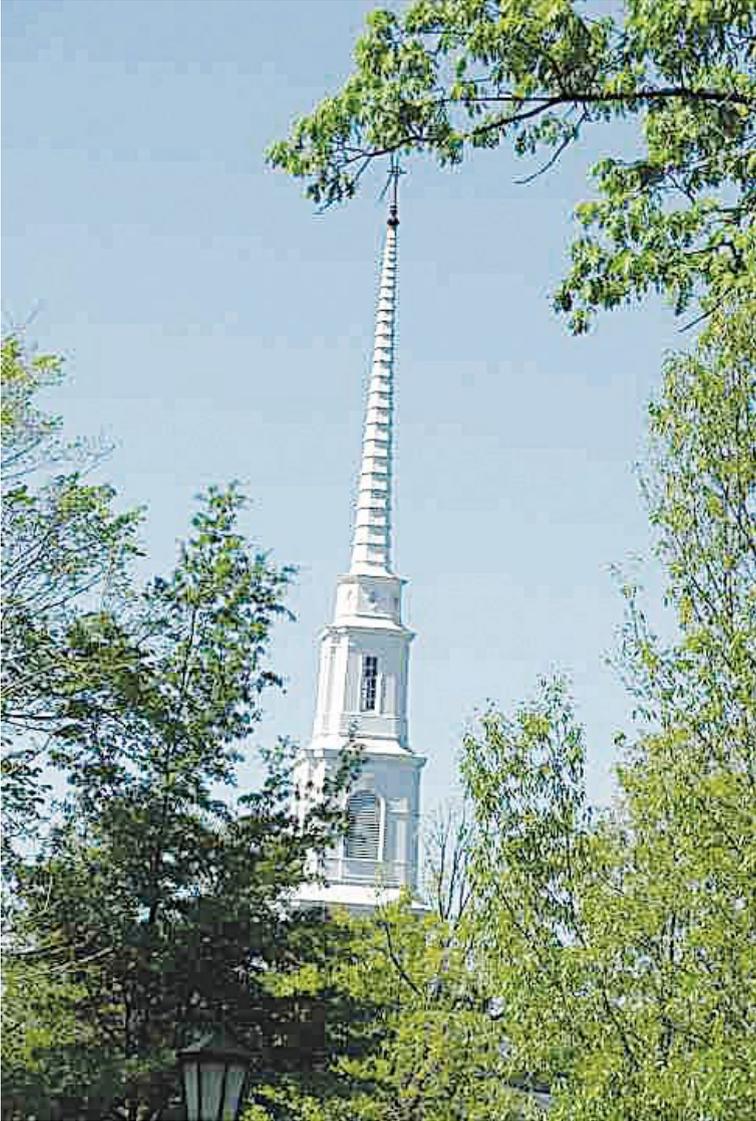
When my body turns to ash  
And is scattered to the wind  
Will you carry pieces of me in your heart?  
Will you stand on your own two feet  
Like tin soliders and not fall apart?  
Will you have no regrets  
Knowing our love was so strong  
Will you be able to continue  
To carry on  
Cry for me not, 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 somewhere 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.

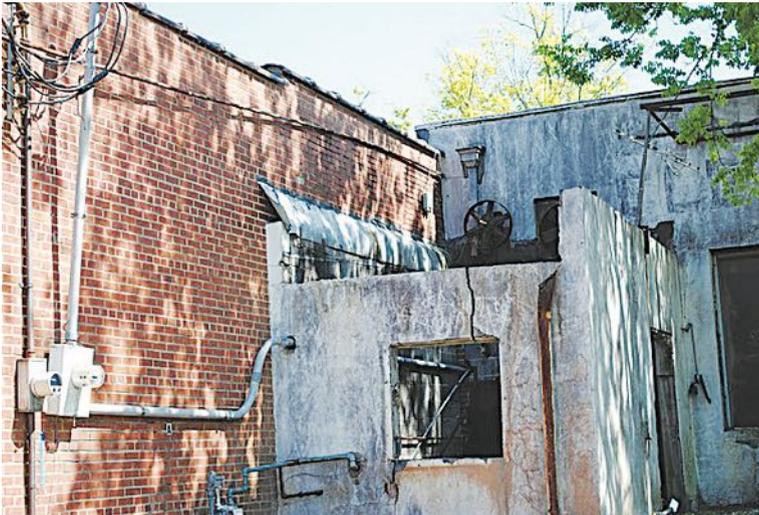
I’ll mop up the spot where I hit and maybe just watch him grin and bear it.

## **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 trully come to think,  
And I have to say,  
If there trully 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 24<sup>th</sup>, 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 drogas. 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 tokin. 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](mailto:talkingsidewalks@gmail.com)  
Read it online at [www.talkingsidewalks.com](http://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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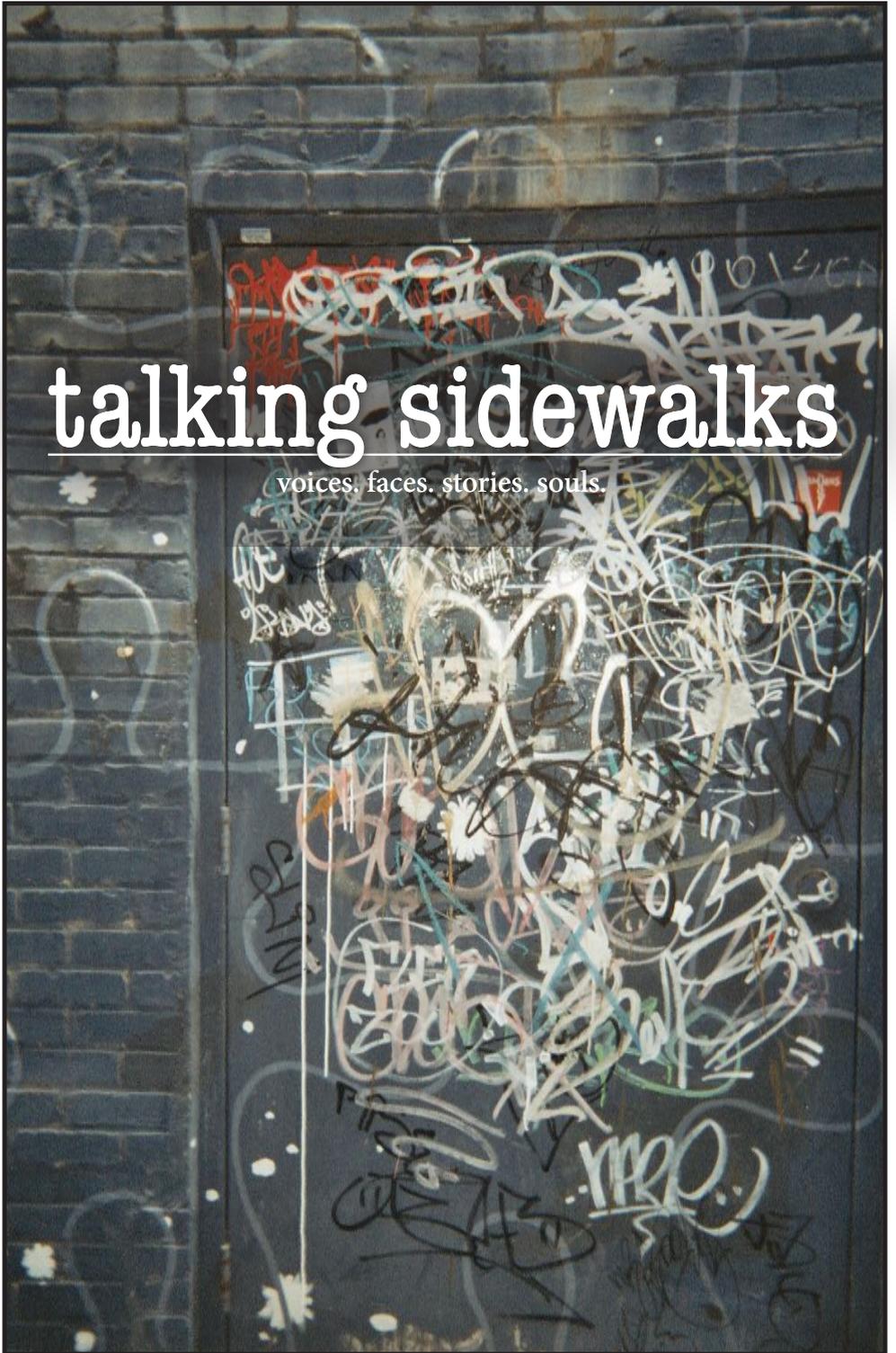
Cover photo taken by Trefron



talking sidewalks

# talking sidewalks

voices. faces. stories. souls.



## The Real Me

*Richard Lambert*

When you see me on the street don't look down on me. Open your eyes and see the real me. Look on the inside that is where I am. Not on the outside just because my clothes are in a sham. I am a person just like you. Just understand I have feelings too. I have a heart and a mind but rather than look you choose to be blind. I am me. Just take a chance to look inside to take a good look at the real me.



*Karl Marks*

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*Read it online at [www.talkingsidewalks.com](http://www.talkingsidewalks.com)*

## **No Place Like Home**

*Allen Dubey*

There is no place like home, unless you have no home and are homeless, in which case there is no place at all.

It's 3:30 am and so cold. Shaking my arms and jumping up and down in a vain effort to warm myself, I search frantically for small twigs, leaves, pine needles, and anything useful for kindling a fire on a small wooded lot near downtown. The temperature has been dropping steadily after dark from 40 degrees and is now holding at 29 degrees. I'm tired. Absolutely exhausted, dirty, and hungry, I claw my way through the brush, trembling from the cold, lighting match after match, looking for kindling. Dear God it's cold, I cry out! I'm wearing a T-shirt, long sleeve shirt, a lined wind breaker, pair of blue jeans, and work boots. With every breath I take the frigid air hurts my lungs. My body is so weak from malnutrition and lack of sleep, nevertheless, slowly I get together a small pile of leaves, pine needles and twigs. I have half a book of matches left of the two small books I got at the Quick Stop the day before. Now on my knees in a small clearing on the wooded lot near down town, I lightly blow on the small flame bringing life to the fire. I spend the rest of the night between gathering dead wood to keep the flames going and sitting near its warmth thanking God for fire and asking that the time pass quickly, that I may soon see the sunrise. A tint of gray in the sky to the east, I throw the last of the dead wood on the fire and move closer to its warmth, longing for the sun to rise.

It's now 6:30 am, the fire is down so small that what heat it is producing has little effect. Being able to see from the dim light of the oncoming sunrise, I kick dirt over the fire to put it out and begin pushing my way through the brush and small trees to work my way out of the small vacant lot. I head for downtown in search of some place open with heat.

McDonalds! Shivering uncontrollably walking through the door into the McDonalds, feeling the warm air encapsulate my body, I smile giving a sigh of relief. I go into the bathroom and turn on the hand dryer and stand there rubbing my hands together under the warm air.

Once warm, I wash my hands and face, comb my hair ,and try and brush what filth I can off my clothes. Walking out of the bathroom I take a seat in one of the booths in the warm dining area. I'm really hungry. I watch people watching me as they eat. I'm not eating. I have no money. What a sight I must be to the onlookers.

Intuitively I feel the uprising of the semi-silent persecution of my presence between the patrons of the McDonalds and the staff working there, all of whom are completely oblivious to my struggles. I know it's time I be moving on. I am reluctant to step back out into the freezing air.

I say a small prayer, sitting there thanking God I am alive and if somehow someday I may rise above this. I walk past the people sitting there in McDonalds, saddened by their look of fear at just the sight of me. I step through the doorway and out onto the street. There is no place when you're homeless, and there is no place like a home.



*Cadillac Cowboy*



*Marian*

## **What the World Meant to Me at 6**

*Donna*

Basically the world was a Big dream Land.  
You pretended to be anywhere or anything.  
You spent days at play. Not knowing any of life's stresses.  
You ride the Merry-Go-Round then the monkey bars.  
Then you swing, seems like for days.  
Then I think my most favorite part was going on the farm,  
one on one with the animals.  
Taking care, learning to take care of each.  
We had chickens, rooster, and also ducks, pigs and my favorite horse.  
The world was anything you wanted it to be at that age.

From going up a slide backwards to going to your  
pretend friend's house for a tea party and a sleep over.  
A world full of dreams and hope.

## Hurricanes

*David Zachary Bridges*

Hurricanes—I think a lot of people know about hurricanes, but only what they know about them through the media. The experience is quite different; quite unnerving.

The Sounds. The wind howls and is probably the loudest noise you'll hear, even over the occasional tundra. It is also the scariest part for me, at least. But the saddest and most heartbreaking part is the sound of your house creaking, moaning, and ripping apart to the tremendous force of the winds. It's probably one of the most helpless feelings you can imagine. The sound of your siblings, who sit next to you, crammed beneath the pillows and blankets in the bathtub, they whisper, "what was that?" too afraid to even muster up more than a whisper. You don't tell them it was the window shattering downstairs. People yelling for their loved ones.

The Sights. It almost always happens at night, so the sights come in the morning. All your possessions: toys, books, electronics, clothes, scattered and mixed with mud, water, sticks, or completely missing altogether. A look out the window, canoes and inner-tubes go by with all sorts of people, some going door-to-door, checking on the neighborhood, others going on about their desperate ways. Seeing water come to the 5th step of your stairwell, the whole downstairs destroyed and submerged.

The Feelings. The aftermath is the worst. I was still young, so my main concern was the loss of my personal possessions, but I knew change was coming. But I often remember Katrina, and I remember seeing my father cry. I believe that was the first and the last time. Now I understand what desperation really means. When all law, order, organization, etc. breaks down and is no longer effective or applicable, and survival mode sets in. Your emotions and mindset ironically will mimic the very mechanics that make a hurricane what it is. That's a real Hurricane experience.

## Rainbows End?

*DeAnn Jarman*

There is no end to this ongoing circle of filth and disgust.

Life plays its dirty little game of lies and discord.

Chaos building, growing into mistrust and abuse.

Withered am I. Growing weary of the lie that the rainbow holds a pot of gold at an end that is unsustainable.

Luck existing only to the wicked hearted.

Slithering on their bellies like snakes with forked tongues and no backbones.

Alone am I. Shackled to a rainbow obtaining no color.

Grey matter existing only in my mind's eye.

A failure at luck and love!



*Mark Davidson*

## Dead Ends

*Donna*

—Been on housing for over a year. Dead end. Section 8 no longer giving vouchers. My number was 167 when I arrived at homeless shelter then it got pushed back to 248 and has not moved from 248 in 1 year. Medicaid, appealing disability, no Medicaid. Joe, my case manager, and I appealed it all the way to a hearing in Hillsborough, NC, a year ago. Shelter attorney was to go to the hearing. When the hearing came up, she would no longer represent me, her excuse was she only does appeals. Did not get any information from attorney, who got letter of what was needed at this hearing. Just phone call to be there and date. Joe Coe went to hearing totally unprepared. Did not hear anything back. Now I'm to the point charity care is only good 1 year. Medicaid has been no help. My case worker for Medicaid, Mundy Lawrence, appeared against me at hearing for DSS, not for me or looking into possible emergency Medicaid. Dead end.

—Apply for employment. Only to appeal it to a hearing in Raleigh, NC. At this hearing you need \$275.00 to \$375.00 up front for a lawyer to take your case. Come on I live at the shelter. No funds for this. Had enough work in the quarter but could not afford lawyer. We train for job. State ran out of funds last year.

—Vocational Rehabilitation.

—Finally registered in class Sept. 27th, 2010. School starts. Putting a band-aide on problem. With my continual health problems, doctor appointments. I pray everyday not be absent or don't and can't finish. Same with returning to work force. Appointment continue. Doctor's medications mounting \$270.00 each month in cost. I have liver damage due to transfusion UNC gave me at the birth of my oldest child in Oct. 25th, 1981. And medications I had to take all my life. My immune system stays down. Germs and fatigue I constantly fight. This will hurt me when I return to work.

—Disability big joke. I am on my 3rd appeal can't file any more paper work till November 2010. Their rules. Been turned down and denied already. Will appeal again. Their doctors are for disability. To rule against anyone getting it. This what they do. I've been homeless over year now. Cause of the way this is set up. I under went manejo test. 2 just last week at my own expense. Applied for housing without job check stubs or disability. Doesn't work, must have proof of income. Dead end. No help while you're fighting Medicaid and or disability. In my own situation, there is no family to step in and take care of me, they're deceased. Shelter only helps for so long. Few months then you face being on street again. Where does this end?

—I've worked since I was 15 years old. Now that I need help I can't get it. This is a pitiful way to have the US treat their TAX paying citizens. Here in our own country. We need help from mayors, governors, Congress, White House, enough is enough!



*Mark Davidson*

## **Don't React**

*Anthony Lener*

Don't lose your cool—don't react—it's not important. When I get angry, I'm not listening or thinking. I've taught myself to refuse to react with anger. When I run into rudeness, or stupidity, or a misunderstanding, the first thing I do is I don't react. I wait through those first few soft emotional reactions. I keep my mouth shut, until I'm thinking clearly—I figure out what is happening and put a quick plan together.

## **Success**

*Anthony Lener*

In general people think “success” is when their ego is satisfied. People consider themselves “successful” when other people consider them a “success,” regardless of it. When I stopped worrying about being “successful” or being a “success,” and just focused on doing things well— doing things honestly and ethically—suddenly I was “successful.”



*Karl Marks*



*Karl Marks*



*Mark Davidson*

## **Lost Sheep**

*Michael Jenkins*

I believe life is Hell, especially when you are homeless. A lot of people don't understand what homeless people go through in a lifetime. It's hard. People have a tendency to look at you a certain way.

Say you're sitting up there at Caribou, shooting the talk around. How you doing? What you doing today? You know just sitting on the block.

And some people, sometimes call the police. I understand sometimes the next bench over, sometimes people are drinking, getting rowdy. But I don't know why people want to call the police. You can call the police 1000 times, you can send 'em to jail; it's only gonna make it worse. Instead of talking to 'em like a human being, you go and call the cops. You don't have to call the cops because they're sitting on the bench. Benches for people to sit there. They done good to wake up that morning. They're doing good to be sitting there. You don't know what people are going through. Sleeping on the hard concrete.

We all sitting on the bench, having a decent conversation about what did you do last night. Did someone take you in or did you have to sleep outside? Did you make it to your destination?

So we talking about that and here come a lady with her boyfriend and another little girl and a little baby on her arm. And she use her baby on her arm. "Scuse me, do you have 50 cents? My baby need her medicine and I just need 50 cents more."

I'm not gonna let no baby not get her medicines. So I'm ripping and running now, trying to get her 50 cents. And it's hot. 96 degrees. But we get the money.

Turns out, she used the baby for f—ing cigarettes! I wanted to say, “Why you lie on your child to get more cigarettes? You telling me your baby need medicine and you're just trying to buy stinking ass cigarettes. You just lied on your child about something that don't have no value.” That's deep. That hurt me—for her to use her child to get a pack of cigs.

I wanted to tell her, “Don't use your child for something you need.” It would've made more sense for her to come up to me and say, “I need 50 cents to get a pack of cigarettes.”

I sit on this bench everyday, I listen to people talk. I listen to people explain they problems. I'm waiting for somebody to say, “This is what I'm gonna do tomorrow to get out of this rut I'm in.” F—k what you done and what you got f—ed up by! What you gonna do to better yourself and get back to reality? Tell me something that's good and positive.

Why not talk about something good, something to better yourself?

Why not go to church? Say, “Mike, I went to church, I had a wonderful time.”

Do something Godly. God doesn't want you to be stuck in your rut. But you got to help yourself too. Sometimes you got to go through something to be something. Ain't you tired of living the way you living? I know I am.

Sometime I feel like crying for my people out here 'cause they're not trying. The Lord don't put you in the rut you're in. You're like lost sheep—need a shepherd.

Right now, a lot of lost sheep out there.

## No Explanation

*Joe*

Family, I don't really know what that is.  
Friends, I ain't had that since I was a little kid.  
And every time I think shit going good,  
It gets f—ed up again.  
Reading the Bible and getting no understanding.  
Can I be forgiven if I'm still sinning?

I remember my dad, out f—ing his whores.  
What is he waiting for?  
His c—k to fall off?  
Too busy out smoking crack rocks to raise me.  
Went from a baby to a man,  
But sometimes I still act like a child  
Because I was raised by my own hands.  
Easily influenced 'cause I was always trying to fit in.

I remember when my mom died.  
It was a f—ed up surprise,  
But no tears came down my eyes.  
'Cause I guess I didn't realize the situation,  
Or maybe because she died so sudden,  
And without no  
explanation.



*Mark Davidson*

## My Life as a Six Year Old

*Dawn Sheppard*

Walking home from school was one of my favorite things to do because I saw it as an adventure. I would stop in some of the different stores and visit with the people that worked there because I did not want to go home. I never knew what I would have to deal with.

This one winter day it was extremely cold and it seemed like the longest walk home. I stopped at a couple of places, the glass shop and one of the bars or IGA to get warm. When I finally made it home, there was no one at home. It was so cold that I started crying. It seemed like the tears were going to freeze on my face. My hands were so cold I thought that I would hit them and they would break.

I looked over at the library thinking that maybe I could go over and get warm. But then I would think, if I went over there my family might return and leave because they did not see me. I knew that it was nice and warm over there.

The longer I stood out there, the colder I was and the more my hands hurt from the freezing cold. It must have been about two hours that I stood out there waiting for my family. It was funny that my brother that went to the same school was not standing outside with me. Wondering where he could be and thinking was he as cold as me. At the last moment when I decide to go over to the library the car pulls in the driveway and everyone gets out of the car including my brother. So that is where he was at.



*DeAnn Jarman*



*Karl Marks*

## **Foosball**

*Mark Davidson*

The competitive force and excitement of defending my two-time championship trophy for foosball becomes so intense, that my various tactics, blocked shots, bank shots, and fast paced shots come at ease. Far beyond just spinning the rods with precision and control, dribbling the ball between the men for a rifling shot sound of a shot gun blast as the ball disappears to score. Eyes focus upon an opponent's shot, only to block and return the same shot as a score.

Whether I play back men only or entire game, my only objective is to humiliate my opponent. Partners, however, relies on team effort, the pass to the front, the face back to the back with the wide open shot right up the middle. The bank shot at forty-five degree angle almost always surprises the opponent with the ball ricocheting between the defending men.

Foosball was a favorite pastime in my earlier youth, later to be traded for billiards, but that's another, but not quite as good, favorite pastime of mine.

## **Life with Parkinson's Disease**

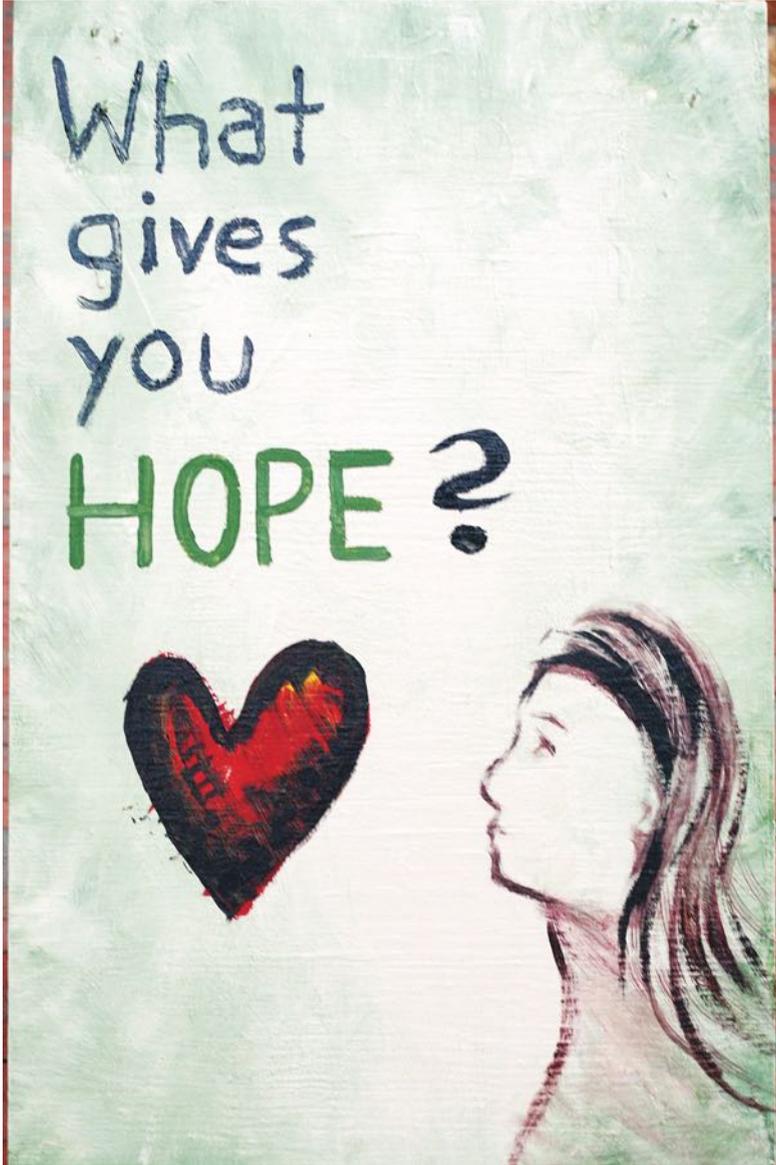
*Cadillac Cowboy*

I've had Parkinson's for 18 years and just now found out that it's caused by Agent Orange, which I was exposed to in Vietnam. Although it might be presumptuous to say it was caused by Agent Orange. The doctors told me it might have been Agent Orange, based on the birth defects my children had. Typically, the first three have problems and the fourth one's fine. I lost three children. I saw them die. One of my sons would have been 41 years old. One of my sons would have been 40. And the third one was aborted because there was a 75% to 90% chance of him being the same way as the other two—it was a medical reason. Losing a child is a very difficult thing to go through. But the fourth child was fine, just fine. The one who's living just turned 32, and he's 6'5", about 275 pounds—he's a big man. He played football his first year of high school, and he could have gone to college as well, but he turned it down. Some guy hit him in the back with his helmet real hard, and he said to me, "Dad, I know how you feel now." (I was having back trouble at the time. I had two back surgeries and three brain surgeries and infection after that, as well as a staph infection.) I'm proud of him. Very proud. He's not too proud of me. He has good reason. He's doin' alright, he's doin' fine.

To add to what Parkinson's disease can do to the body, it is a trouble of the body. It's hard to explain but your body freezes up, you can't move, so it's like being in a trance. And you lose control of your voluntary muscles because your body stops making dopamine and you lose control of your body, not your mind. Your mind is fine. And from outside appearances you appear to be okay. Dopamine is a transmitter that transmits from the brain to the involuntary muscles. You have to concentrate real hard. There's no cure for it. It affects the nervous system and artificial dopamine can be added artificially by pills. It enhances the gland and makes more dopamine. It's like a nightmare that never ends. The suspected cause is exposure to dangerous chemicals. That's about it.



*Marian*



*Allen Dubey*



*Tanetra*

## **A Letter to the Editor**

*Mark Davidson*

As a homeless person, not hopeless, I fail to see the reasoning by the people opposed to the new shelter being built. Not all homeless people are thugs, drug addicts, murderers or rapists, but ones that have become that way with the fallen economy. And those with such addictions, whether drugs or alcohol, have the resources to overcome them. As for me, I'm a recovering alcoholic trying my best to change my ways and habits. The Community House is providing strength and courage so I can face each day. Chapel Hill is a beautiful town with its college and hospital. The people seem very friendly until homelessness comes up. Being stereotyped really bothers me because I am a good, honest hard worker down on my luck. I guess that's what pushes me harder each day, that and prayer, to get back on my feet, and become functional in society.

talking sidewalks



*Tanetra*

## Saying Goodbye to my Best Friend

*Mark Davidson*

Dear Beer,

Around the surprisingly young age of fourteen, we were introduced and became inseparable for nearly forty years. Throughout puberty we trusted in each other, all the good and the bad times yet to come. When serious relationships came into the picture, you were right there for me. I trusted you'd get me through anything. When I got married and had children, I held on to our friendship, in spite of the distance you brought between me and my family. I promised my wife that things would change, but you were becoming the only family I had left. How in the hell could I desert you now? I needed you, so I held on to our relationship even more. Why, you were there for me when my father passed, throughout my divorce, and all the bad times I needed your support or comfort, you were there. People thought I was insane, and I was, with this obsession that you became upon me. At times, I thought I could moderate the times we spent together, only to find your existence became more apparent. You put me through legal difficulties and I became imprisoned for the times and crimes you bestowed upon me. You've cost me my very existence of rational thought and the comprehension of dealing with life on life's terms. I can't go anywhere; there you are, squeezing my life out and fermenting my every thought. You used me up and spit me out like there's no tomorrow. But I got news for you, we're through. I've got a new friend now, one that's true. One that I thank each morning when I wake, and one that I praise for blessing me with the courage to rid myself from your sorry ass. So in closing, if our paths never cross, it'll be too soon and Lord help you if you even try to pull me back into your grasp. With my new found friend, and the meetings I attend, you'll surely not hold onto me in your clutches ever again. One day at a time, and the Lord's help, I'm free and sober to live once again.

Never Yours,

Mark

PS. Oh yeah, tell brother Whiskey the same!

Good-Bye, Need Not Reply.



*Karl Marks*

## **“Ode to a Suicide Bomber”**

*Karl Marks*

Buildings will fall,  
With a flash of light,  
Unleashing god's fury,  
In all its might.  
I was a boy  
I'm now a man,  
My ultimate protest,  
Give us our land.  
Jew, Christian, Muslim,  
All of the book,  
This you have forgotten,  
I'll make you look.  
And I like Yahweh  
With all his wrath,

Destroying all,  
Within his path.  
Then perhaps  
I'll make you see,  
Eye for eye,  
If it must be.  
I walk amongst you,  
But you fail to see,  
This imminent sacrifice,  
Taking you with me.  
The vest I wear  
Across my chest.  
Will send out fire,  
Then I will rest.

These bits of iron,  
And ragged steel,  
Tearing flesh  
Though you can feel  
All the pain,  
It is so real.  
Like so many tears,  
That we have shed,  
With flash of light  
Now bloody red.  
You take our lands,  
It has to end.  
All the killing,  
Women, children, men.  
Eye for eye  
And tooth for tooth.  
Perhaps this sacrifice  
Will make you see the truth.  
Your police come  
They were too late.  
I pull this cord  
Accepting fate.

With loud bang  
And brilliant light,  
Killing all,  
Within my sight.  
If only you  
Had not forced my hand  
And had given us  
Our own homeland.  
There might have been peace,  
It's not to be.  
For now I'm gone  
And martyr be.  
Spinning consciousness,  
Toward the light,  
I fleetingly see all I love  
Flash before my sight.  
At speed of sound,  
My existence ends,  
A statement made,  
It just begins!



*Joe*

## One x One

*Joe*

This is the story of 2 brothers, one evil one good, we'll call them John and Johnny—

John grew up in the church, Johnny grew up on the block not giving a f—k.

While John learned to praise, Johnny walked through life in a maze not knowing what was next, but earned everyones respect.

John was a straight A student, Johnny was a drop out.

Johnny was gunnin' and runnin' from the law, while John was trying to learn God's law.

John had a good job in a saw mill, while Johnny was selling crack, making big-faced bills.

John got married and had 2 kids, Johnny was trickin girls and got HIV.

John became a priest, Johnny got life in prison.

John and Johnny look in the mirror and see one another. They look just the same because they are one and the same. Ya'll probably confused right now but let me explain. You see, John and Johnny are the same person and these are the 2 roads that they can travel in life. Only who is John? He is my unborn child and his life all depends on me if I stay or if I leave.  $1 \times 1 = 1$  so I have one shot to do things right or Johnny will end up in prison for the rest of his life.

## **Be4 I Die**

*Joe*

Earth was god's creation but man's wickedness gave it to the devil,  
You're right when you say hell on earth cuz we cursed it.

Like a rogue villain he whispers in ya ear, god forbid you listen—  
but I did.

When I went through that Red Door with the red sun  
the heat should have been a warning

I knew what I was getting into but I didn't think—  
one more mistake to add to the list.

I proceed in, then I saw her  
The devil in the red dress.

I let my temptation get the best of me  
I listen to the voice in my ear, that fierce savage  
Barbarious Beelzebub.

Jesus please manifest yourself in me  
cuz right now I'm blind.

What's his motive  
his order  
his instruction.

I'm so gone I'm frustrated  
motivated but by the wrong side.

The devil got me by the balls  
All I can is fall,  
god pick me up carry me  
be4 I bury me.



*Joe*

## Questions from Franklin

*In a random survey of people on Franklin St. on August 22, 2010, Talking Sidewalks contributors asked the community, "If you could ask a homeless person one question, what would you ask him or her?" These are some of the questions people asked:*

Where were you ten years ago?

Where are you going to sleep tonight?

What would you change about your life if you could go back?

What's preventing you from getting a job now?

What would it take to turn your life around?

Where did you get your shopping cart?

How do you manage to get by day by day?

How did you become homeless?

*Upon reviewing these questions compiled from the community, the Talking Sidewalks contributors responded with some questions of their own:*

What does it feel like to eat in your own kitchen?

—Trevor

How does it feel to have the comfort of choices?

How does it feel to decide what's for supper?

How does it feel not having a time limit when you go out?

—David

How does it feel to be able to hold your child?

—Anonymous

How does it feel to sleep next to a women at night?

—Joe

What are you going to do when most of the country is homeless?

—Anthony



*Anthony*

## Untitled

*Jeff Davis*

Always aware and ever isolated, in the recesses of consciousness singularity prevails.

Togetherness, a cruel illusion which leads the mind astray from actuality. Stricken, as with disease, a split reality. One of informed self awareness and attached like a dreaded but necessary parasite. A seemingly necessary evil which contaminates inner truth. A cursed block to introspect, ever interfering with discovery.

Oh to be alone.

Free from interference with my truth.

I don't want to be alone. Is THE truth unattainable? Is it allotted to only do battle for its discovery?



*Robin*



*Mark Davidson*

## Silent Tears

*Allen Dubey*

I look out the window as people pass by from the IFC Shelter. I hope they can't see me and find out that I am homeless. I haven't always been homeless. I once had a job, but things can change, life is real hard. I walk around town, I really have nowhere to go so you have probably seen me going to and fro. Does my appearance make you leery of me? Do my frustrated actions make you question my sanity? What do you know of the sidewalks I've walked? My experiences I share are so far fetched, is it only talk?

So if you see me with my face in the glass of the IFC shelter as you walk past, think to yourself and ask deep within, if you can make a positive difference for those faces you see walking the streets. If your answer is yes, then stop in the shelter and give it your best. If you do happen to see my face in the glass, smile and wave as you walk past and help dry up my silent tears.



*David Zachary Bridges*



*David Zachary Bridges*

## **One Hundred Thirty Days Ago**

*Mark Davidson*

One hundred thirty days ago, I decided to take a step towards a better way of life. A Life I could not have imagined without becoming sober through the grace of God. Now, every step I take, He takes two, and I'm truly blessed. Seems I'm stuck on this issue, but by God I'm glad it's always on my mind. Better days and better ways; as long as I'm sober, everything's possible and positive. Thank God for being homeless but sober in Chapel Hill.

## Inside

*Richard Lambert*

I feel so lost inside like I am taking a long lonely ride have so many feelings locked deep in my mind. I want so bad to let them out but know it would be enough to get straight tossed out. So they just get balled up and tossed aside. So now you will all know how I feel inside. I just know all my life I have tried and tried but even my own family has lied and my trust in them has all but died. Trying so hard to hold my pride. So there you go those are my feelings trapped so deep inside.

## Life

*Richard Lambert*

Life can be fun or very shitty but also it can make you feel almost giddy. Everyday that slips on by might even make you sigh. Life is always there even when it leaves you feeling bare. Picking up the pieces may even be rare. Just don't let life bring you down and just sit there with a frown. Life can be happy all the while even if you have your own style. All you have to do is smile. Good times come and they go. Sometimes fast sometimes slow. But rest assured you can go with the flow.



*Michael E. Wood*



*DeAnn Jarman*

## **Across the Street**

*R. Michaels*

I am one of the fortunate ones who has been released from the perpetual misery and hopelessness that was endured during the time I was homeless and dependent upon the Shelter for food and a bed. Through the mercy of family and friends I escaped the daily anxieties and doldrums of waiting for bed space on any given night, wondering if I would be sleeping on the streets or not. I was truly blessed to survive that ordeal and to come out of it with reasonable sanity is something I will never take for granted. The stares of people, avoidance of friends were just some of the things I won't miss. Yet it would be unfair to the others who have made that journey to not address the myriad of circumstances we encountered on the sidewalks of Franklin.

Perhaps the greatest problem is the loneliness one encounters both on and off the street. You find yourself constantly musing that you feel prepared for a new life, but fate's bullets hit you in such an overwhelming way, causing you to worry about what is and what is yet to be. At the end of the barrage, you stand (hopefully) alone, confused and literally dazed. After this resurrection I was diagnosed with throat cancer. If it wasn't one thing it was another! Sitting atop the pity pot you can get

a despairing look at the situation. As a recovering alcoholic (one of the main reasons I found myself mired in misery and destitution) thinking to myself, “Lord I have to put down the bottle, I’m trying so hard to fly right and do your bidding but now you saddle me with this?” “Oh gloom, despair and agony on me, deep dark depression excessive misery” (Thanks Hee Haw) I was lucky enough to have great family support—taking me to my daily radiation treatments and the chemotherapy stints.

So there I was, divorced (my wife had the good sense to get out), lonely, cancer ridden. During these trials and tribulations I found a stronger faith to see me through and a good friend who became my caretaker and invaluable ally. I was afraid of my reliance on my higher power, scared and wondering if I was asking too much from him and everyone else. They say good things come to all who wait.

Being homeless did afford me the gift of patience. Today, my cancer is in remission, the weight is gradually returning and things are looking better. Obviously I didn’t do all of this alone—after a special caretaker and much love, I find the problem I suffered through has returned—loneliness rears its ugly head again. I and others like me, who are starting over, desperately want a companion, a confidante, someone to share my new life. My past does haunt me sometimes, lowering my self esteem and confidence. The optimist in me says that I will find that certain someone, such is the attitude of most of the people you see on the sidewalks. We somehow have the innate ability to see the glass as half full. It’s not easy, but we all dig deep down to try to overcome and be productive.

So on the other side of the walk, problems come and go, you try to forget your mistakes of the past, which is very therapeutic, but only if you remember what they taught you. You realize that hope is more than just a concept and although your faith is tested—sometimes daily—it all resolves itself in the end. I still grimace at times when I reflect back on what I went through to get where I am today. As I look across the street, my heart and mind scream for my brothers and sisters who are in the similar situations that I have lived. Don’t give up, pray, find the way to overcome, you are extremely important and above all, you can do it!

So, my fellow travelers in this amusement park of life—my prayers are for all of us. My reflections of past and present are tied directly to all of you. Soon I’m sure I’ll see you across the street. Always be thankful for what you have and work hard for what you want. See ya across the street!



*Mark Davidson*

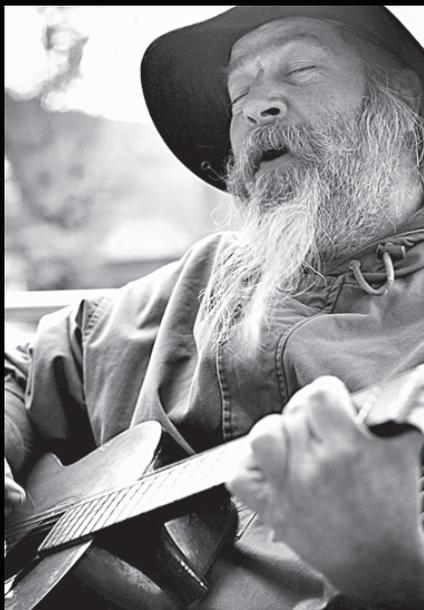
## **Move On**

*Cranston Hunter*

Born too early into the world, my pain as infant through my eyes out-poured. Will I live, will I die, or will my life simply be ignored? As a phoenix, I rise from the ashes of death and try to achieve greatness with every breath. A mother who loves and cares minus the wealth. Although everything else in my life is in perfect health, I go through my teen years wondering if I should be here. As I break through walls of loneliness now at twenty-two, still not knowing what I should do. Except to know, to keep moving on until I'm done or until my life is gone, and after that even I will keep moving on.

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

*Read it online at [www.talkingsidewalks.com](http://www.talkingsidewalks.com)*



## In Memory

No one ever knows what  
tomorrow may bring.  
The rhythm of your song may fade,  
but your sidewalks on Franklin  
will always truly sing.

Ron Moore  
1952— 2010

*This issue of Talking Sidewalks is in honor and memory of Ron Moore, who entertained, loved, and inspired the place and the people of Chapel Hill, NC*

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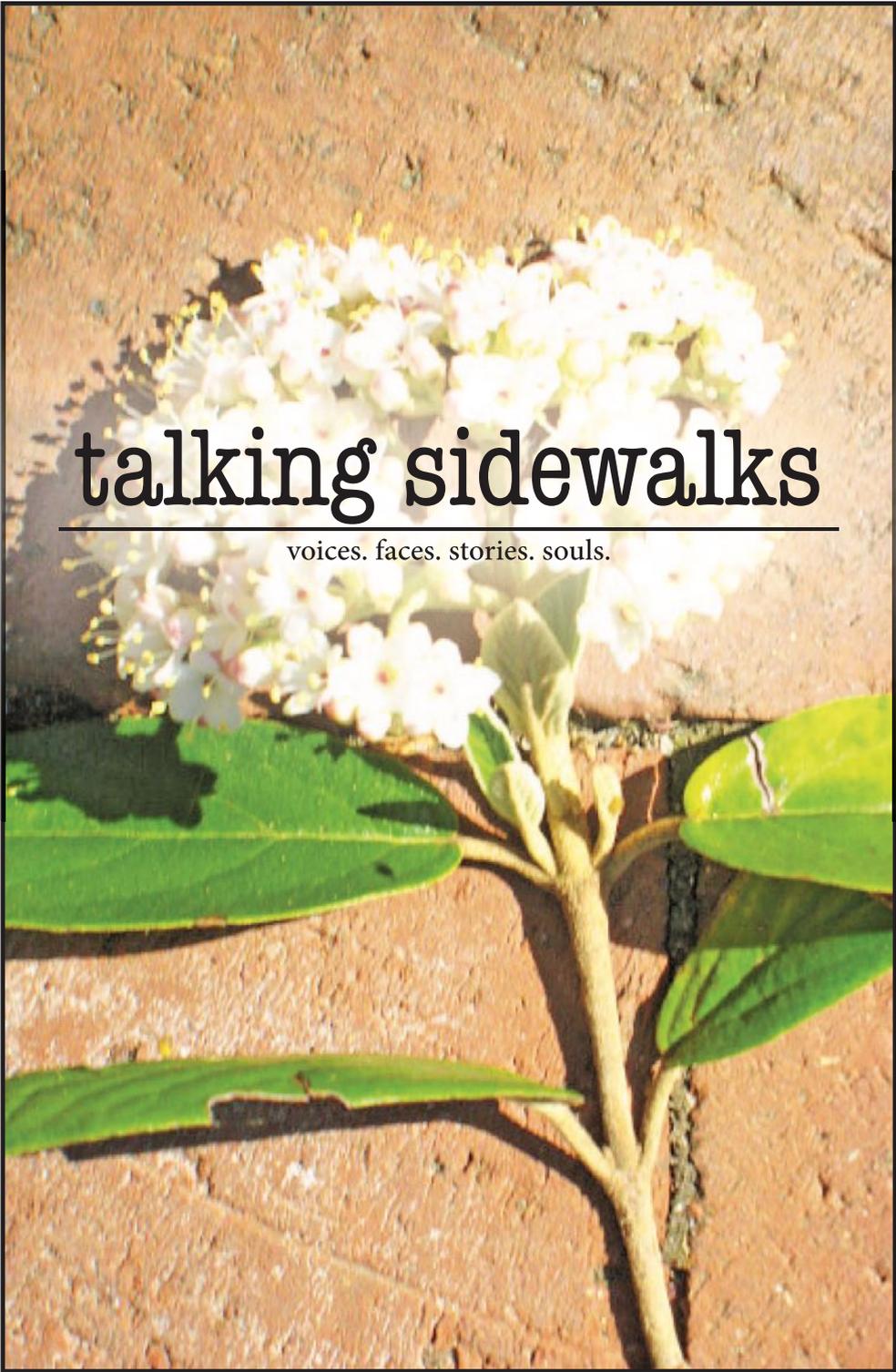
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Cover photo taken by DeAnn Jarman



talking sidewalks



# talking sidewalks

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voices. faces. stories. souls.

Hope is trust in the unseen but somehow knowing,  
that eternal warmth that you feel and sense to be growing,  
the desire for change from within and freedom of all your needs,  
but hope for me is freedom from the desire for greed.

*Mark Davidson*



*Hunter*

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*Read it online at [www.talkingsidewalks.com](http://www.talkingsidewalks.com)*

*This issue of Talking Sidewalks is in honor and memory of Barney Ray Cobb. Ray passed away during the production of this issue, and will long be remembered by the Talking Sidewalks family as someone who cared for his neighbors and friends and always made us laugh.*

## **Vision/Creation**

*Barney Ray*

We see flowers—We think beauty—We feel good

We see one person help another in need

We think caring

We feel good

We see muscles—We think strength

We feel good

We see mountains—We think creation

We feel good

We see a child smile—We think love

We feel good

We help others feel good, beautiful, helpful, strong

We feel, think and see love

We help others feel, think, and see love.

We see a better and more loving universe created.

## **To be Perfect**

*From the Soul of a Virtuous Man*

To be perfect is to have something to correct. Hence the word perfectionist, a person who can always find something to correct in order to be excellent. So if one says they have only met one perfect person, if any at all; then one's vision has been damaged and impaired. Be careful in living (as true) the phrase "nobody's perfect." Challenge this household phrase, if no one is perfect then no one has anything to correct. Understand the difference between perfect and flawless. We always encounter perfect people that create perfect moments that are beyond priceless. The perfect moment is beyond one particular person, or place, or time. Situation does not dictate a perfect moment, therefore a perfect moment can be in good or in bad, in chaos or in order. One's experience they live as life is a perfect moment, and although a good situation can be corrected, the work of a perfectionist is the pursuit of discipline in knowing when to stop correcting before they destroy the piece of art. Live in the perfect moment and allow the perfectionist one encounters to do their work.

## **If You Wake Up**

*Michael Jenkins*

If you wake up tomorrow, and ain't got nothing, how would you feel, what would you do? I had a homeboy, blowed his brains out because he couldn't live the lifestyle, out here in the woods, in the shelter with nothing. He was used to having everything handed to him on a silver platter, and he couldn't take it and he left his wife and child. And that's a hurtin feeling when you kill yourself because you don't want to go through struggle of the pain and agony, out in the world with nothing. That's why you find a lot of bodies and a lot of people dead and in abandoned houses, and the first thing people probably look at it and say, oh, it's about drugs or something like that, but it ain't all about the drug thing. Some people just can't take the pressure and the pain. And instead of going through the agony and destruction, they'd rather take themselves out and kill themselves. And that's insanity.

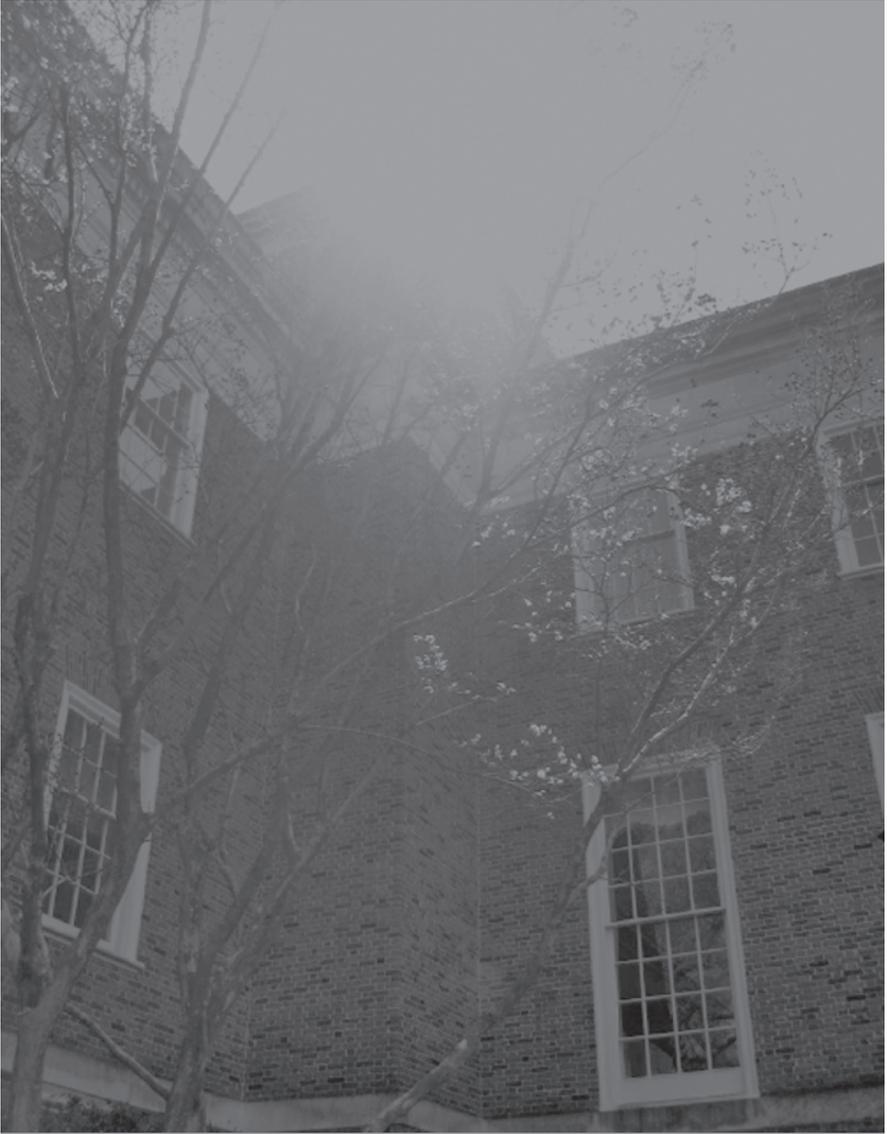
Give them a chance, open up a door for them. See what he can do, see what kinda skill he got. Give him the tools to work with and you never know what he might do. There's a lot of smart people, people with master's degrees and everything, so don't look at the book by the cover until you open it up; you don't know until you ask. I thank God every-day because he pull me through. I coulda' been like my friend, I coulda' been dead. I didn't know where I was gonna wake up in the morning or where I was getting my next meal from.

If you just stop and talk to a brother, you don't do nothing but have a cup of coffee and buy him something to eat, ask him how he feel. Because they still human, they still part of this world. Find out

what's going on in your neighborhood, find out what's going on in your backdoor, see what you can do to help the next man or the next brother or the next sister with the pain and the agony that they're going through.

One day I come up to a person and ask him for something one day and he say, you homeless? And I say yeah. He say get outta here. I say yeah I'm homeless man. He say look how you dress, not like a homeless person. I say how a homeless person supposed to dress? I say because I'm homeless I'm supposed to have holes in my pants and dirty jeans and my hair all over my head. My raggedy coat and a torn sleeve. What are they supposed to look like? You ain't gotta dress the part.

It hurts me to see the way people treat the next human being as they say, a low class breed, instead of picking that brother or sister up, it don't matter what race, black, blue, green, purple, Chinese whatever. Pick that sister up! Give them that confidence in themselves to strive for excellency. Because when you believe in yourself and God, there ain't nothing you can't do.



*Deanthony*

## **What Makes a Person Powerful?**

*Mark Davidson*

In a spiritual sense I would have to say discernment. Because I have the ability to discern right from wrong, good choice or bad. As long as it's not for personal gain and for the good of, or to help another person from the heart, now that's power. When I can look beyond the situation I'm in to help someone else in need, now that's the blessing of power. When I can feel comfortable in my own skin and not take that drink or drug, that's the power of God.

## **Although my Task is a Daily Task**

*Mark Davidson*

Although my task is a daily task and truly can only be accomplished when my time is done, sobriety is my most pride-winning task. I really am grateful to be sober today, because forty years of wasted time, loss of everything dear to my heart, and really not knowing the real me. Today I have choices in life, and today I choose to be sober. My task today is to always remember that sleeping giant that hibernates in the back of my mind. Walk lightly around its path and think things through, and when I feel that I'm on edge, take that next step. Solid ground is found through faith



*Karl Marks*



*Karl Marks*

## **The Greatest Task**

*Gary Mitchell*

The greatest task I believe I've accomplished in life is trusting something "supernatural" or a "higher power" if you will, with my entire life, body, mind and soul. With having said that, I'm speaking about God of Israel...the creator of Heaven and earth according to the Holy Bible. To begin with... it's a strenuous challenge to trust something you can't see or touch. Some may not believe in him and I respect that because of freewill. However I've learned no matter what or who you are, people believe in something regardless what it is. I choose to believe in God the father, his son Jesus and the Holy Spirit. My journey through life since I stepped out on faith in 2007 has been an interesting one. All things have worked together for good including my current living situations. There have been blessings in disguise, and as for me, I've changed and matured significantly for the better.

## **Worthy to be Praised**

*Mark Davidson*

Well I used to wonder  
about it all the women, the drugs, and the alcohol  
took forty long years of my life  
then came the fall  
Glory Alleluia,  
He's worthy to be praised.

I wanna thank you Jesus  
Jesus for blessing me  
my eyes are wide open now  
and now I truly see  
I'm loving these changes God put upon me  
Glory Alleluia, He's worthy to be praised.

He's worthy, His mercy, He's worthy to be praised  
when in times I'm troubled I just call out His name  
there were times in my life I thought I was insane  
Glory Alleluia, He's worthy to be praised.

So I humble myself to you, my Lord  
and get right down on my knees  
that Sunday worship feeling come to me daily.  
Glory Alleluia, He's worthy to be praised.

He's worthy, His mercy, worthy to be praised  
when in times I'm troubled I just call out his name  
I say Jesus, Jesus, Jesus this I pray  
Glory Alleluia, He's worthy to be praised Glory Alleluia,  
He's worthy to be praised.



*Karl Marks*

Like a seed that's planted deep in the dirt, we must push through  
the dirt in life to flower along the way, but then it rains.  
Dirt turns to mud. Next is the withering of the bud. The past matters  
not, and I tell you why, life's a joke. We're born to die.

*Mark Davidson*

## **Sadness, So Overpowering**

*Karl Marks*

The sadness, so overpowering, the truck pulled away, the woman and her child put out on the streets, you call yourself Christian, slum lord and Christian, whatever that means it seems diametrically opposed.

I go in to clean what little is left of their past happiness. A birthday card, a ragged doll, crayons, and coloring books. Tears well up as I shovel the fossils of this family's lives into a trash bag.

The phone rings, we need it cleaned up and fixed quickly, I have twenty houses that are unrented. My pockets are hurting. I will send the deacon to help you. That's one of my better houses.

Did she say deacon or demon? The anger building up like bile chokes me. And I think of this fine Christian lady worried only about her 20 pieces of silver.

All of a sudden I have a plan, there is a gallon of paint thinner that I conveniently spill next to the heater. Quietly I go outside and the house begins to burn. What righteous fire. The sirens come as the fire consumes the edifice. Heart pounding, I think, "put this in your f—ing collection, Plata."

## **The Face of a Stranger**

*DeAnn Jarman*

Who is this woman I see before me?  
Will she grow old like the crone?  
Is she what she intended to be?  
Or is her destiny still unknown?  
Is she a sister or mother?  
A friend like no other?  
Or is she deceptive and mean?  
Introverted, secretly falling apart at the seam.  
Her brow lowers as she ponders,  
Searching for the meaning of life.  
Is it destined to be brutal, filled with strife?  
Or is there a higher power that intervenes in her darkest hour?  
Will she once again know love's immortal kiss,  
Or is she damned to be alone?  
Will it come to her by winged dove,  
Or will her heart inevitably turn to stone?  
Has she lost her chance at happiness,  
Or is this a brand new start?  
Will she accept love's endless grasp?  
Or build a brick wall inside her heart?  
Mirror, mirror on the wall,  
Can't you tell when she's about to fall?  
Save her from her heart's dead dark embrace.  
For can't you see...the woman in the mirror...is me.



*Karl Marks*

## **He Comes to Me Nightly**

*DeAnn Jarman*

He comes to me nightly, a vision of life's true intention. Will he be there forever loving me, or will I awake only to have it shatter like broken window panes in a glass house of hopes and dreams. Taking my heart and soul with him. The soul giving way to love's true meaning. Oneness. One heart beating in its own strange synchronicity. For what is love but a blindless emotion. A sense of longing, desire, willingness to scatter thoughts and fears to the wind for that momentary divinity with hopes of everlasting bliss. A sense of falling into nothingness. Butterflies becoming bats. The heart skipping beats surely will explode in your chest. Winded, breathless before that first kiss. Time stands still and the world disappears.

## **Sales Tax**

*Donna*

Our state has more tax than any other:

I think we need to cut back on tax on fuel and gas.

We are not hurting the corporate when we buy 50 gallons in this state or just enough to get some out this state to a cheaper fuel stop. But we are hurting those who work here. Especially those who work in 7.25 to 9.00 an hour brackets. This could help those pay on electric, food, or even start a saving? Trucking industries do what they call, boycott NC. Fuel taxes are so high. It cost us lots of jobs instead of create more. If sales are not up then they don't hire. It's no need. I think lower taxes here. Let lottery make it up. We have the higher and most taxes in US. The only one higher is Arkansas with 7.5 sales tax rate. I feel this way cause there is recession on job market is very hard to get jobs. More than ever more or on employment or even lost their employment. Gas is one of the first things if we can't afford. How can you be up and out looking. Especially those in other towns with no transportation. Maybe this would also boost our economy.

## **Untitled**

*Anonymous*

I saw a bus burn

I saw someone crash into a parked car

I saw an old man cuss me out

I saw someone bark at a squirrel

I saw a bus flashing to call 911

I saw a hawk land right in front of me and eat road kill

Chapel Hill is a model of the world

There is diversity and there is good and there is bad

There are people to help you and to hurt you

There are places to sleep where you're not supposed to

There is shelter but there is a price for it,

free food that costs a lot

There is humility and patience to be found in a life

that needs hope to survive.

## **A Turmoil of Conspicuous Theory**

*Robert P. Keairnes III*

A turmoil of conspicuous theory  
Which qualities are indecisive and weary  
A sense of tyranny and energies  
Flowing together subliminally  
Throwing answers  
Remarkably witnessing what can be  
My memories, my brain drenched in the past  
Insane all you do is play games  
The two in full moon light's view  
Not pain but a might's new  
To prove  
The lane is open  
But walked past hoping  
To unmask the masked for copying youths  
Not understanding what's banding the sane youths  
Like a chain of questions but with no proof  
So what to do I ask myself  
Questions felt and the answer dealt  
With the help of hearing  
Steering well.

In the direction which the few chose dwell  
A non-fearing spell  
Can't upon myself  
It's spelled of exquisite taste and nothing else  
Knowledge of haste along with something felt  
An energy dwells within  
Only to begin  
Forgiving sins  
When you acquired to give in  
But wait  
Nothing else left by a simple debate  
Which spins the wheel of fate, a simple act to relate  
With no hate  
So what's fake and what isn't?  
What's plain and what's vicious?  
What's it mean to witness  
the unknown superstitious?  
Attain visions made to listen  
Poetry made a way to release the tension  
It's like a mission.  
The instant the pen meets paper

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To tell my life in letters

A simple thought to ease and make things better.

For whatever

Purpose it's to see

Elapsed in unspoken dreams

What seems to create the question

Of who what where when why

And how can we gain perfection?

Gain the right direction; neglections

Worth fixing by attaining comprehension

Just take away the tension.

Because the vision I have

is worth the listen.



*Karl Marks*

## **Once**

*From the Soul of a Virtuous Man*

Helping people smile is the best way that I express myself without being about myself. Being better than the best servant, I can be continuously diligent and consistent. If you think about it, when you get great service anywhere, it stays with you every time you visit that place, when the service is from the heart. Being able to be part of a difference in even just one life is difficult, unless done through service from the heart, a genuine servant's heart.

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*Joe*

## **The Fight**

*Gwen Miller*

The heart wants to love  
yet we hate  
The heart wants to understand  
yet we are confused  
The heart wants equality  
yet we try to dominate one another

The heart wants peace yet we fight  
The heart wants to give but we are greedy  
The heart wants to help yet we destroy  
The heart wants to care but yet we are insensitive

We must OVERCOME HATE  
We must OVERCOME violence  
We must OVERCOME greed  
We must OVERCOME fighting  
We must OVERCOME cruelty

We must overcome all that tears people apart  
And concentrate on all that brings people together  
We are in trouble  
From the needy to the greedy  
It begins with you  
Homeless and not homeless

## **The Biggest Prize**

*DeAnn Jarman*

Somehow, along the way, I found me.  
Found a reason to fight for that which I believe.  
Found a reason to be...now I love being me.

Fighting the repression in a world caught up in a recession.  
Fighting to stay alive.  
Fighting for those with silenced voices doesn't make me weak  
if it helps us all strive.

We must not go silent into the night  
for our own country we must fight.  
Change starts within us all.

Will you heed the call to freedom's plight?  
If given the choice, I will be the one voice to speak for us all.  
Out of the ashes we all will arise to claim the biggest prize...

FREEDOM FOR US ALL.

*In dedication to all my friends at Talking Sidewalks for helping me find  
my voice and my children Nic, Matt and Jesse for believing in me*



*Hunter*

## **To be Perfect**

*From the Soul of a Virtuous Man*

What once was there is now gone

What once was felt is cut out

What once was did is now stopped

What once was held is laid down

What once was a flame is now snuffed

What once was words to live by is now forgotten

What once was love is now endured love

What once was confidence is now dead

What once was walking in company is now walking alone

Thanks for nothing!

## **The Sound of an Empty Stomach**

*Karl Marks*

The sound of an empty stomach, the growl, the cry.  
What the F—, richest country in the world.  
1 in 5 children live in poverty.  
Where is the shame, bloated, bulbous, beelzebub,  
ranting and raving about the deficit.  
Balance the budget on the back of the poor.  
The elderly, the disenfranchised  
They have no voice, they have no lobbyists!!!!  
America, it's soul sold long ago to the highest bidder.  
A child looks up at the flag, this is his country too,  
Where is it for him, no high rise office, educational budget's cut,  
his future, part of a third world reality.  
My country tis of thee,  
Now land of poverty,  
The answer to policy,  
Will it change.  
Robber barons return,  
Working for both parties,  
Enriching their lives,  
On the back of the poor.

## Still Homeless

*Michael Jenkins*

A lot of people think when you got your own place, you got it made, it's all peaches and cream. You know, you got your own key you can open up the door, you at home, you can relax, do whatever— no. It's not like that. It's nice to have your own, but I still feel homeless out here because I'm still struggling. I'm still trying to make ends meet. I am homeless, even though I got my own. I always got to keep that in the back of my head because I know what I've been through out in the world. Because I never thought it'd happen to me. And it did.

Cause like say, I was homeless, I'm still homeless. Even though I got my own, I'm still homeless, I'm struggling, I'm fighting everyday to make ends meet. And somehow through the grace of God, I'm making it. But I still don't forget my people and where I come from cause I figure, if I can do it, so can they.

I know what they're struggling for and what they're going through, because to me, I'm still just like them. Only difference is I just got my own key to open my own door. Me, at any time, at any place, I feel like I'm gonna be back here on the streets. Because sooner or later I might not be able to pay that bill. Rent man ain't gonna give you two or three months to catch up. You know?

I don't even have my gas on, and sooner later water's gonna kick back in too. I just barely get enough money to pay my bills. Sometimes I have to go without eatin', and that's letting me know I'm still homeless and I'm still struggling. I'm still trying to get them stones and blocks out of my way.

Yes it's good to have you're own place, but always remember: that's why you left home, that's why you left those kids behind, that's why you left you're wife behind. Because you weren't strong enough to stand and fight for what you wanted. You didn't want to take them through the agony and pain that you going through, so you left. But they still suffering, because now they don't know where you at or how you're doing. If you're going through something and you lose that job, sit down at the table with your family and talk about it. Explain to them what's going on. Don't hide it. Some people get up every morning like they're going to work. That's crazy! Be straight up with it. Say, hey, I lost my job, I'm still trying to get another job. Stand up to the responsibilities, don't run from it. Accept it. Fight. Say, babe, I got you, we came through this together, we gonna make it together.

The world ain't nothing nice. The world that we—yeah, I say we—the world that we live in out here as a homeless person, ain't nothing nice about that.

You know they say, you take one step, God will take two. I'm like what're you talking about? But I understand what they're saying now. You try to help yourself, somebody else will try to pick you up. If you ain't trying to help yourself and better yourself, who is gonna wanna help you?

Always remember you could lose it all in one day and be homeless, and how would you feel? Would you blow your brains out? Would you be able to accept it? Would you give up on yourself?

No. You're a fighter. Stand strong.



*Mark Davidson*

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*Mariah Moore*

**F— It!**  
*Allen Dubey*

What is it all worth?  
Ashes to Ashes back six feet in the Earth.  
Pile up Dollars and try to make sense,  
Rows of pickets and my little white fence.  
Cable and DSL, Water, Electric,  
the days fly by, life is so hectic.  
Smile and wave,  
taking advantage as I walk past wondering,  
who's pondering of what is my worth.  
F— it.  
I think to myself, I'll just get high,  
as I walk down the sidewalk,  
and life passes me by.

## **Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness**

*Dawn*

For the longest time, I was trying to figure out what I was doing to screw up my life. Then I realized it was time to examine myself and see where this all began.

When I moved into my first apartment, I was nineteen. It was a nice setup. I was to stay in school and my rent, utilities and I would have fifty dollars in my pockets every week. This was not enough for me. I had to have the relationship too.

When you start giving in to the feelings of loneliness, you can open yourself to anything. This man was dating me when I moved into my place and we stayed together for about three years. He was not the man of my dreams, more of my nightmares. He never worked and he was doing nothing to help me get ahead. I wanted someone in my life, but I settled for him. He said he was tired of having people in our life. He told me that he would take care of me and I was dumb enough to believe that a man with no job was going to take care of me. So we moved into my third apartment, while I was thinking that he was going to take care of me but this didn't happen.

This was the first time that I was homeless. I was estranged from my family and didn't have anywhere to go. I was scared and couldn't figure out what to do. I had a friend that was getting a place and said that I could stay with her. At this time, I am homeless and when I moved in with her it was fine for a little while, but it didn't last long. At the time, the only income that I had was General Relief which was \$100 a month and I used that to pay my part of the rent. My friend was not paying rent because she was dating the landlord. I would say that was about six months of wondering about when he was going to put me out. I soon went and moved in with my aunt and her family.

Finally, a safe place to stay, but it did not last long. While I was staying with my aunt, her husband came on to me and so that meant I had to find somewhere else to live. I never told my aunt that her husband came on to me, but I just told her I needed to find somewhere else to live and she suggested that I go live with her friend. So, I went and stayed with her friend and that was a nasty situation. If I had children, I wouldn't want them in that

environment. So, I asked my aunt if I could move back in there with her and her kids. I stayed there for a while. I can remember I was out with one of my friends and I had called my aunt and asked her if she had taken care of her business. She said that her husband had not returned for her to take care of her business. I said I had just seen him riding around with another woman. So, instead of my aunt taking my side and believing me, she kicked me to the curb and told me to get out.

I had to find somewhere else to live. I told one of the ladies that used to work at the children's home what was going on. She asked her daughter if I could move in with them. So, I stayed there and then eventually she got tired of staying with her daughter and she moved out, but I continued to stay with the daughter. Considering, I still didn't have a job, I tried to go to college and I got involved with some men at college and ended up flunking out of school. At this point, I was just really tired. One of my friends, a girl I called my sister, was talking to me about going to church. So, I started going to church and I saw my self-confidence starting to grow because of the relationship that I had with my Heavenly Father. And the more my relationship grew with the father, the stronger my confidence got. Then, I went out and actually found a job. Then, more and more, I finally decided that I needed a place of my own because the people that I was staying with felt like I thought I was better than them.

So, I got my own place. I stayed there for five years by myself. At this time, my relationship was growing closer and closer with the Heavenly Father and I was getting more confident but I was having that lonely feeling again. Sometimes, when it's time for a change in my life, I don't like change. So, for one thing, it was time for me to leave the job I was at and I didn't want to leave it because it was a good paying job. Finally, the rent got financially straining so I started looking for something cheaper. But, I also forgot that God was taking care of me the whole time I took my eyes off of him as my supplier of all my needs. So, I moved into a place that was cheaper. That started a downward spiral out of control. Because I got involved with the guy next door to me. And that was the first mistake because he didn't believe in Jesus and he believed you didn't have to get married and you could just have sex whenever you want. And my head had gotten big because I was out in the ministry, doing my thing.



*DeAnn Jarman*

Well, I got rid of him. But my next mistake was there was this guy broken down on the side of the street. I pulled over to help him. He saw my Bible and he started quoting scripture and telling me how much he loves God. And that's what really made me think he was the one. It was a scam all along. That same day that I met him, I picked him up that evening and we whirled around and talked. He was explaining his situation and I told him he could move in with me. As I got to know him, we would pray, we would read the Bible together and I'm thinking this is the God-sent one. Because we wanted this so bad, I wanted to be married and I wanted a relationship so bad, I set myself up to get taken down bad. What I failed to realize, the man was a crackhead.

In less than six months, I lost my job, I lost my apartment, I lost my car and I still wasn't at rock bottom. And the reason why I say I still wasn't at rock bottom because I still allowed myself to get involved with someone else even when I was out on the streets. The worst part was, I had to go back and ask my father if I could stay with him. And I hadn't lived at home since I was 11 years old. Now, I have to go by his rules and regulations. It's like being a child again.

But that wasn't bad enough. I was starting to date another guy, the alcoholic. We're dating, he comes over and he locks me and him out of the house. So, I have to call my dad to come let me in the house. I leave the guy sitting out on the picnic table. When I thought my dad was gone, I sneak him back in the house. Then, my dad comes back in and sees the alcoholic sitting up there with

no socks and shoes on. They speak, they are cordial. My dad leaves. The next day, my dad tells me I have to find somewhere else to live because he couldn't have just anybody up in his house. While he's asking me, "do you have anywhere else to go?" I'm like, "I'm living in your house. I'm homeless and you're asking do I have anywhere else to stay?" So, I told him I would go to the homeless shelter. Now, this was the first time that I was completely homeless—without a house, without anyone to ask, "could I stay with you"—completely homeless.

So, I went and stayed in the homeless shelter. Still tugging this alcoholic around with me and his clothes. He would take a nap in the middle of the sidewalk and somebody would steal his stuff. So, I had to keep his stuff with me. The alcoholic couldn't stay at the shelter because he didn't like the fact that he had to go to church to get something to eat or even have a place to stay. He felt like the religious aspect of it was being shoved down his throat. So, we went to stay with one of his friends. I would get up at 4:30 am every day to go to work. While we were still staying with his friend, his friend told him that he couldn't take care of a grown woman, so we had to find somewhere else to stay. Mind you, I was the only one working.

I tried to go back to the homeless shelter, but they told me I wasn't allowed back. So, this is when we started staying in the hotel. Even through this process, I was still working everyday and I had to walk at least 3 miles to work while he would be laying the hotel room drunk all day. So then, after seven months of being homeless, I finally got a real job, not temporary agencies. So, I had a real job, I was determined to get a real place again.

So, "Return of the Crackhead." He comes and finds me downtown. He's telling me "I know you're my wife, I know we're meant to be together." And I am so much wanting to believe this. And I go sobbing "You just don't know how much you hurt me." He says "I'll never do this to you again." I'm contemplating while I'm sitting here with this crackhead, knowing that the alcoholic was waiting the hotel room for me to return, should I just leave the alcoholic high and dry? Or do I return to him? And, of course, I left with the crackhead.

He tells me he has a place for me to stay, but we have to find us another place because there was a stipulation in the place he was staying: the roommate was in jail and he would be out any day. So, we have to find another place to stay, and I'm thinking this is the one. First, we look in the paper to find a place

and we called this one landlord, explained our situation, told him we had to get out of this place because it wasn't a good environment. So, the landlord let us move in. He wanted \$1200, but he let us move in with \$200 and we paid down the rest. Well, I paid down the rest. My stuff was stored at my father's house, so I called my father and asked him if he could bring it over. When my father arrived, the crackhead went down and greeted my father and asked him if he could have my hand in marriage. My father, of course, said "Yes, of course, I would love to have you as my son-in-law." Occasionally, he would have his daughter over and every time he would have her over, he would be talking about how much he loves me and how much he wanted to marry me. I'm really believing that this is the one, because we've been through so much (that he's put me through). I was loving the idea, because this is something that I wanted so badly. The crackhead finally got a job and he was paying the utilities. So, after getting his first job that he really didn't like, he got a better job. I come home from work and I see a washer, a dryer, and a dining room table and I'm like, "where did all this money come from?" He went to Rent-A-Center. And now the apartment is fully furnished and he tells me it's time for me to get out. He proceeds to carry all of my stuff down and leave it sitting in the snow.

I'm trying to find somewhere warm to sleep because I couldn't call anyone in my family. So, I found the place on the children's hospital parking deck steps—it was heated. The next day, I go back downtown and I meet back up with the alcoholic. He's upset with me because I left him with no money and he was out on the streets. He didn't know where I had been for the last two or three months. He was talking about how much I hurt him and how he could never trust me again. That very night, he breaks into a friend of his' van and strips the ignition and starts the van so we could have somewhere warm to sleep. The next day, he tells me I need to find somewhere to stay so he wouldn't have to worry about me. So, I call my grandmother and ask my grandmother if I could stay with her for a few days. Grandma said yes. I would still meet up with him every day after work, though, or we would talk on the phone. While I was staying with my grandmother, I was looking in the paper, determined to find an apartment. One of my friends told me about a church that paid for hotel rooms for homeless people in another city. So, I called the church and we caught the bus and

went out to the church and they paid for a hotel room for us for two weeks. Our last day there, we had to go back to the other city because it was only paid for until the first of the year. Buses don't run on New Year's Day, so we had to walk at least 15 or 20 miles. I went to another shelter and stayed there.

I would call different apartments in the paper and they would be calling my place of employment, leaving messages for me to come look at a place. At the time, I was a home health aide and my client's house was the place where the calls were coming. The daughter of my client answered the phone one day and found out that I was looking for a place to stay. She responded to me and told me that she had a place—an apartment up the street from my client—and it had been empty for a year. She told me I could move into it and asked me how much I could afford. So, here I am, in another place. I explained to the landlord that I had an alcoholic boyfriend and that he would be moving in with me. And being in his drunken stupor, he didn't believe that we were moving into a place.

Shortly after we move into the place, he asks me for some money so he could get something to drink. Not thinking the idiot would steal something from me, I told him to go in my purse and get some money out. When I later look in my purse, I see all the money is gone—my whole paycheck—and it was time to pay rent again. When he returned, I said, “Are you stupid? Are you trying to get put back on the streets? Wasn't seven months long enough for you?” Me feeling sorry for him, knowing the whole state of his mind and everything that was going on, I let him stay. I finally talked him into rehab because he wanted to get custody of his children.

So, he goes to rehab. One of the stipulations is that he had to find a job while he was there. He finds two jobs. Now, we need a car. So, I asked my landlord if I could skip two months rent and get a car. I get the car so I would be able to take him back and forth to work. And he's like: “I need both of these jobs so we can catch up on these bills.” One of the jobs was a full-time position with benefits. The other job is working in a bar—what do you think?! Does an alcoholic need to work in a bar? NO! So, I tell him, you don't need to work in a bar, considering that you're in rehab trying to overcome your addiction to alcohol. But, he insists that this is just so we can get ahead. So, he is saying that the first paycheck we would put towards the money that we owe the landlord.

So, the first paycheck—he disappears. He disappears and I go looking for him because I usually picked him up at the bar after he would get off of work, and he is nowhere to be found. So, I go back home, next day, no call, I don't hear from him. So, finally, two days later, I go through this phone that he left at the apartment. And I find this number. I call the number and he answers. So, I'm like, "who's phone is this?" Because, the phone I bought him is sitting right there for me to find the number in it. So, I ask him if he's coming home. He says he would be there later on. I was saving for another car because the first car I bought was a piece of crap. So, he asked me where the money was for that. He told me had found somebody that he could buy a car from. So, he returns, and when he returns, the person that brings him back parks in our neighbor's driveway—he gets out of the car and she gets out of the car. First of all, he doesn't think I would see it because he was in the neighbor's driveway. But, I was standing in the kitchen window, I saw it all. I go to the door and tell him he needs to come over right away. So, he's trying to brush me off because he knows he got busted. So, he comes over and I'm wanting to be in this relationship so bad.

He's saying "she's just a friend, she's taking me to get a car." So, I let this slide. He asked me for the money again, so I go down to my client's house and get the money to go get this car, supposedly. I gave him the money—about \$900 in cash. It's getting close to his time of work, so I'm calling him on the new phone again. He answers, I asked him if he was going to work, and he said he would be home shortly. I told him he needed to go to work. He said he was too tired and needed to get some rest. He said he had a hard weekend—not with me. So, he comes home and goes to sleep. Next day, we discuss what went on that weekend. He starts acting strange and doesn't want to explain. This new friend shows up again. He's telling me to get some clothes ready because he was going over to another friend's house to get changed and go to work. So, I tell him to pack up all of his stuff and take it with him. He insisted there was nothing going on between him and the new friend, but I didn't believe him. A couple of days later, he returned and I made sure that he took all of his stuff with him. Now, that was the end of him.



*Mark Davidson*

Now, at this time, I'm lonely again. I was just going through a phase because I wanted to get over him. Sometimes, to get over someone, we use someone else to take their place—I was using several somebodies to take his place. Then, I finally got tired and settled down with one. And the one I settled down with was just a weekend fling. I only saw him on the weekends. He was a nice guy, but he still wasn't what I was looking for. So, at that time I was still praying and asking God to give me a way of escape and getting out of this situation I was in. So, I ended up moving to North Carolina.

That wasn't the end of my man problems. As soon as I moved to North Carolina, so much wanting a change, I didn't know that I would have to change within. I got involved with someone that pursued me. I knew it was wrong, but I didn't resist. Now, I have lost my best friend and her family behind this. This was my wake-up call to let me know that it was time to look at me and the choices that I have made. It was a hard vision, but I see it clearly now. If I put me first and look out for me, what I need will appear, whether it be comfort, love, or a place to stay. But, I have to keep me first, and God first of all. My answer is not in a man, it is in God above, and the more I trust him, the more he comforts me and shows me the way I need to go.

# In Memory

We feel, think and see love.

We help others

feel, think, and see love.

We see a better and more loving  
universe created.

**Barney Ray Cobb**  
1951— 2011

*This issue of Talking Sidewalks is in honor and memory of Barney Ray Cobb. Ray passed away during the production of this issue, and will long be remembered by the Talking Sidewalks family as someone who cared for his neighbors and friends and always made us laugh.*

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Cover photo taken by DeAnn Jarman



*This book is also dedicated to its contributors, to their stories, their passions, their lives, their struggles, their friendship, their openness—to the mentors they have been to each other and to this community, and to the courage they show by sharing and receiving in their words and wisdom:*



“There are times when we get a chance to reflect on our troubles, and you, dear reader, are the recipient of our labor. Brothers, sisters, friends, and family have all contributed to the following pages. It is our wish that after reading the stories, poems, and thoughts in this magazine that maybe you, too, will experience the feeling, the joy, and yes, the hurt and pain that we endure.

It is to you that these pages are dedicated with tears and laughter and hope for better days to come. Each of us has shed a little light, and where there is light there is hope, and where there is hope there is a promise, and where there is a promise there is a tomorrow, and tomorrow—who knows . . .”

Enjoy,  
R. Michaels

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