

OUR VOICE

REDEEMER'S DROP-IN MEAL PROGRAM NEWSLETTER—SPRING & SUMMER 2015

The Sweetness of Homelessness

By Grace Fraser

I have indulged too much. Cupcakes with icing piled high; apple and cherry pies with ice cream; and most of all chocolate, chocolate, chocolate!

Who would have thought homelessness could be so sweet?

Every night where we homeless sleep in the Out-of-the-Cold (OTC) Program, we are treated to some great desserts. Blythwood Church tops them all as they don't just make you choose one thing. They give us at least four items each plus ice cream.

Then there's the Church of the Redeemer's Drop-in! Again a smorgasbord of desserts to choose from. This devout chocoholic is well satisfied. No 12-step program for me! My arteries though are another thing. Sometimes I can actually hear them screaming, "Are you crazy woman?! Not one more thing made with butter and sugar! Don't let it be a heart attack that stops you!"

Before I became homeless and would dine out, my friends and I always looked at the dessert menu first before choosing the entrée. I once told my doctor that the day she tells me I have to give up sweets is the day I give up the ghost. As the saying goes, "Life is stressful. Eat dessert first!"

*"Home in a
notion that only
nations of the
homeless truly
appreciate, and
the uprooted
comprehend"
Wallace Stegner,
Angle of Repose*

Art Program.....

David Townsend, Professor of Medieval Studies and English, University of Toronto explains the history behind the art program which runs every Tuesday at the Redeemer.

On the opposite page are images of work that was done by members of the Lenten group "Restoring the Wellsprings," which ran for five weeks several years back in 2011 and became the springboard for the creation of what is now the Tuesday studio. The first week of the Lenten group, we signed each other with ashes, all of us in the congregation have had the experience of being signed with ashes, but few of us had done it mutually before. Then we used ashes as an art medium to paint and draw: rubbing them onto paper, mixing them with glue to paint, painting paper with glue and then pouring ashes over them. The second week, we talked about baptism and about the unpredictability of a life of faith, and then explored wet-on-wet watercolour, a notoriously loose medium in which you have to embrace the surprise of unexpected and uncontrollable results.

The Restoring the Wellsprings group was a covenant of about twelve of us to get in touch with and honor our God-given birthright to creativity as a Lenten discipline. We created the lunch program studio, initially only as a six-week pilot, during the Easter season. From there, it's become a place of celebration, self-discovery, and calm, both for those of us who commit to running it and those who join us to make art together. It's very important that we're all participants together. We don't instruct. We just hand people materials and let them do what calls them.



Why Pray Before a Meal?

By Evan

Even if one is decidedly agnostic, I submit it is good custom. It makes us aware that everything we are, and have, is from somewhere else.

This phrase is a reference to the Hebrew text of the Book of Esther in which God is not mentioned. It makes us aware that we are part of a web of relationships and points to the interconnectedness of all things. It may put us in touch with our innermost selves and sooth the inner beast. Finally, it is a meaningful way of giving thanks to all our volunteers **“on behalf of all, from **all**”**.



The Drop-in Program

The drop-in program runs five days a week, Monday to Friday, from 8AM until Noon. Participants are served a hearty breakfast of porridge, eggs, yoghurt and pastries. Lunch is served from 10.30 and depending on donations, includes fresh salad, a choice of entrée (with a vegetarian option), and a dessert. The kitchen is manned by volunteers.

Finding my Voice: Anger Management

by Shaaro Gabriel

In my house, only my father was allowed to **'get mad'**. And my mother? She expressed her anger by **'cleanaholism'** and **yelling at us kids**. Bless them. My parents did not know how to express feelings appropriately. Thank God for these times, when so much help is available and so many tools for living can be acquired; new standards can be set for behaviour in families.

For me, as a recovering alcoholic and drug addict, growing up in my 40s, 50s and 60s has been challenging and, oh so liberating! Now, instead of stuffing myself with booze, or **food, or sugar or sex, or dumping my anger on someone who doesn't deserve it**, I can pause, take a moment and use a new tool. For example, I can ask the God of my Understanding to help by:

- sending up a prayer to gain clarity on the issue;
- writing a letter to get the energy out, and then destroying it (not mailing it);
- talking to someone I trust; or
- going to a 12-step meeting where my peers really understand me.

No more dumping anger on others, kicking the cat or turning to food, booze, or sex.

At 17 years old, the use and abuse of alcohol, drugs and sex began to take over my life unbeknownst to me. Living for the weekend, partying and fantasy thinking was a fun way for me to suppress the resentments, self-pity, guilt and regret. It became difficult for **me to tell the difference between fantasy and fact**. I believed that **if you didn't drink** like me, or think like me, you were boring!

My ambition dissipated and my plans to go to university went south. My one desire was to earn some money so that I could buy clothes, alcohol and make up. That way I could continue to live the legend I had created in my own mind. I was totally self-absorbed and self-centered in the extreme.

Finally, sick and tired of being sick and tired, in a psych ward, I hit emotional bottom.

Depression and demoralization drove me to ask for help, and I got it.

In the hospital, I had an awesome treatment team. One day at a time, I began to build a real life. I discovered that the pain I was always trying to avoid kept me from finding my authentic self. Today, I thank God for the pain. It is the substance He has used to cleanse my character and set me free. Free to be who I really am. No more fantasies in my mind. Some days, I even like me too. Lo and behold, under all the suppressed anger, pain and fear, I found my voice. Not the loud and proud one, the authentic voice of Shaaro. A real woman now; I serve a useful purpose, helping others overcome their past, break free and become useful.

Today, my behaviour is a reflection of my having finally grown up. My support system of people, agencies and institutions help to keep me on track. God works through people. Today, I know it is worth going to any length to embrace this spiritual journey, which really does go somewhere. My voice is my trumpet.

It is my hope that something in this article, or some of my experiences will help you find yours!

F.T.W!!!

By Ramsey

The Redeemer and the Sanctuary, two big troubles in my entity. Helping the homeless with washed hands while the hopeless live in a sacred wasteland. Each and every prayer **is rejoiced, but without a street voice. Politicians, cops and the system don't give a F###.**

We are the only ones who are left to help ourselves. Society is the riches dream, while the poor scream. All dance and prance upon native bones, whenever drunk or sober or somehow stoned. Existential ruin is what we are in, societal scars is our biggest sin. F.T.W!! Is all I have to say. Mother Earth come and save.

FREEDOM *by Shaaro Gabriel*

Spent my life in prison
I was gagged and bound
In this woman's body
Waiting to be found

Demons kept me running
Forsook by family
Chains of fear been broken
Now I can be me

Warning voice of Michael
"Prepare yourself right now"
Rooms of love enfold me
Cleaned up the past and how!

Reach out my hands in service
To help is why I'm here
I serve a useful purpose
No longer filled with fear

Chains of bondage broken
Now I found my voice
Speaking, writing, helping
Today I have a choice

You too can find your freedom
From hell inside your mind
You're not alone, there are those to help
Connect to humankind!

Volunteer Spotlight: Donna P.

Donna has been a volunteer in the Redeemer Drop-In kitchen for eight years, and has been the Monday team lead for the last approximately five years. She has offered her time and energy, year after year, to our space and our mission. Over the last 2 years, Donna has also taken on the role of advisory board advocate, and speaks at these meetings on behalf of the drop-in meal program. She carries with her an undying positive attitude, a heart filled with compassion, and an ever-growing yearning to make this world a better place for everyone.

Donna, we thank you for your time and your heart. We couldn't do what we do without people like you. Thank you!



Let your voice be heard.....send your submission to Angie or Sanda!



Getting to know our new Drop-In Staff

We Welcome Hazel!

What is your name?

My full name is Hazel-Ann Tiffany Joy Ottley.

What is your title here at Redeemer?

I am the new (very new) Outreach and Advocacy worker.

What's your favorite food?

My favorite food is cake. So being able to have a free cupcake everyday is a dream come true.

Where did you grow up?

I grew up in Kingston Ontario, with my mom at two older sisters, in a social housing Co-op.

Do you have a favorite thing about Redeemer so far? If so, what is it?

My favorite thing about the Redeemer is talking so many different people.

In one morning, I can have conversations about someone's family, politics, art and culture, and have a hearty laugh. I am always learning or meeting someone new and I love it.

What are your hobbies?

I love painting portraits of everyday people, watching bad action films and seeing live folk music.

What are you most looking forward to in this coming year?

I am looking forward to getting to know and learn from everyone here at Redeemer.



We Welcome Sanda!

Hi, I am Sanda and I am the *not-so-new-anymore* Drop-In Resource Worker. Though Canada is home now, I was actually born overseas, in a little country called Bosnia and Herzegovina. My family had to leave the country because of the war that happened there in the 90s. I got used to moving around a lot and I ended up attending three different high schools on three different continents. (Europe, Asia and finally North America).

One of the perks of all of that shuffling around was that I got to experience different cultures and different cuisines. I love to cook and I love to try new dishes other people make just as much. My absolute favorite foods are shrimp and marzipan—definitely not together though. I tend to enjoy practically any dish that includes shrimp. And I could eat marzipan every day for the rest of my life.

Three of my great passions are books, movies and music. I do not go anywhere without having some reading material with me. I learned to read really young, I am sure in large part due to the fact that I constantly charmed everyone around me into reading to me. I consider reading a form of travel and love getting lost in literary worlds **someone's** imagination created. I love watching movies just as much and most of my free time is devoted to these two activities. If I am not reading or watching a movie, odds are I am somewhere in a corner scribbling away. Writing is my favorite creative outlet and I am hoping to share that love of writing with others here at Redeemer.



I feel immensely grateful for the warm welcome I received in the past few weeks since I **started my work at Redeemer. Though I am not a 'morning person', I can't help** feeling happy each morning as I start my day knowing that I will spend it surrounded by such an amazing and interesting group of people, sharing stories and laughter, all the while supporting each other. That is my favorite thing about Redeemer – people I have met here. I am especially excited about starting a writing circle and connecting all those who enjoy writing and would like to take a part in it.



Summer Closure Announcement and Details...

Our Drop-In Meal Program will be closed for our summer break between Friday, July 17th and Monday, September 14th. The break is slightly longer this year because of the construction that is taking place on the building. This year, we have an exciting addition to our closing time - we have created a Redeemer Drop-In Program ClosureActivity Calendar. This calendar offers some different options for connection and fun over our break, and all events will be led by one of our drop-in staff. Some of the events have a pre-registration required policy, so please ask staff for one of the calendars and register for the activities you wish you attend prior to the closure.



COMMUNITY BBQ! Thursday, July 16th

Join us for a day of fun and good food. Our annual community BBQ will take place between 10am-1pm on Thursday, July 16th, on the main floor of the church.
All are welcome to the party!

A special thank you to Sarah B for getting this issue of Our Voice published!