

HOSPITALITY

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Providing hospitality to the homeless and to those in prison, through Christ's love.
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Atlanta Prospers at the Expense of the Poor

by CM Sherman

Most people, on their first visit to Atlanta, are totally absorbed by what seems to be an ideal city. Indeed, Atlanta offers a showcase of beauty, prosperity, and pride. But behind the glamour, glitter, and pride of the booming town are thousands of underprivileged people who are consigned to work like hell for low salaries to support the development of the city without the benefit of housing and other necessities of life. Everyone gains from the growth of Atlanta, except for the poor, who are forced to slave for meager wages, while the upperclass delight in the progress and live high on the hog.

There is hardly a conversation around the town without someone bragging about Atlanta being selected as host for the 1994 Super Bowl, the 1996 Olympics and for being one of the fastest growing metropolitan areas in the world. Sure, hooray for Atlanta, for its ability to attract the world through the building of a magnetic business center and luring entertainment facilities which keep drawing thousands into the region to either

live, work or be entertained. The business people take pride in the construction of such an attraction. But the same folk must take credit for systematically holding poor workers at low wages--deliberately keeping them economically crippled and unable to advance or relocate. Through this brutal exploitation, thousands of underclass folk are compelled for the sake of survival to work hard for low salaries to support the growth and prosperity of the city while their own conditions keep getting worse.

Yes, Atlanta keeps progressing while its poor keep regressing. The lords of the town are too insensitive to be concerned about the welfare of its underclass inhabitants, many of whom are homeless people who have to work hard by day and sleep in the streets and shelters at night. Yet, without those thousands of low-wage and homeless workers, the progress of the city would subside, the booming town would boom no more, and the economy would experience a crisis.

(continued on page 2)

HOSPITALITY



KARIN HEREZER

910 Ponce de Leon

HOSPITALITY is published 10 times a year by The Open Door Community (PCUS), Inc., an Atlanta community of Christians called to ministry with the homeless poor and with prisoners, particularly those on death row. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard. For more information about the life and work of The Open Door and about others involved in ministry to Atlanta's homeless, please contact any of the following:

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Cover Artist

We wish to thank Bruce Bishop for the illustration for our cover. Bruce is a former resident volunteer at the Open Door. Some of you may recognize him as the cover artist for the December issue of Sojourners magazine.

(continued from page 1)

Just who are these important but
 unrespected low-income workers?

They are the thousands (many homeless) who maintain the hotels and office buildings and install shows at the World Congress Center and other facilities. They are the countless number of street and sanitation personnel, warehouse workers, dishwashers, retail helpers, and the multitudes who are sent out daily from the labor pools. They perform all conceivable tasks, ranging from difficult construction labor to supporting

the efforts of every kind of business and industrial venture around metro Atlanta. A supervisor at a firm in Gwinnett County once said, "If it weren't for the cheap and readily available workers we get through the labor pools down in Atlanta, we would have to shut down."

The same story is silently echoing throughout the business world across the area. Business people call the labor pools and get any number of homeless workers at their job sites within minutes from the time of call. Most business leaders will admit that these workers are vital to the operation of their businesses. Since these low-wage workers are so significant to the growth and maintenance of the area, why is there no more respect and justice given them? Why are they not paid enough to afford housing? Why does the establishment deliberately ignore the way the businesses fight to keep the poor financially retarded?

To understand why the system fights to keep the poor economically crippled, one must understand the rationale of the nineteenth century South, which chose to fight rather than relinquish its slaves. Losing the slaves, who were essential to its industry, meant an economic disaster. So it fought hard to hang on to its vital human means of production. A similar condition exists in Atlanta today. The business community fights to keep the poor in dire need in order to keep them around and begging to work for little pay in support of the progress and prosperity of the city.

This is modern-day legal slavery. It is a camouflaged facsimile of the eighteenth century South where blacks were forced to exist only for the comfort and convenience of whites. Similarly in Atlanta today, the business community employs clever economic tactics to keep a pool of low-income workers in deep poverty in order to keep them readily available for service at little cost to the business. It is a systematic way to control the destiny of destitute folk and keep them helpless servants for the industries. Most of those destitute workers just so happen to be black, while the majority of the businesspeople are white.

In a city known as the center of the Civil Rights struggle, this brutal abuse of human beings is an insult to humanity. But the businesspeople and other oppressive groups seek to escape guilt for the hideous exploitation of the poor. They condemn the victims by declaring that the destitute workers are lazy, irresponsible, drug addicts and a public nuisance.

So these workers, systematically exploited by the establishment, scorned by the public for being homeless, and harassed by police for having no place to go, can only drift helplessly beneath the towering structures of a city which is a haven for the visiting suburban middleclass and a hell-hole for its poor. Indeed, the poor pay a tremendous price in hard labor, hardship and humiliation for the progress in Atlanta.

Another way in which the progress of Atlanta has pushed the poor into hardship is through the city's razing of low-income housing to make room for business and

(continued on page 10)

They Took Without Asking

by Houston Wheeler

There are many memorable moments in the current Academy Award nominated movie "Dances With Wolves", but this is the one I remember. Ten Bears, the Sioux chief, describes all the European and American settlers (from the Spanish conquistadors to Texans and army soldiers) this way: "They took without asking."

They took the land from Native Americans without asking. They took their communities without asking.

Some things haven't changed, yet, have they?

They took without asking with Urban Renewal. They took without asking when they built Atlanta's interstates. They took without asking when they built Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium. They took without asking when they expanded the Central Business District.

Since the Imperial Hotel occupation last summer, People for Urban Justice has focused on the causes of homelessness in Atlanta. Most of our energies have been spent on monitoring a number of forces currently at work in the City, all of which appear to be threatening to increase homelessness.

The issue of homelessness has gotten more and more complex, especially since the number of homeless in Atlanta has grown from 1,000 in 1980 to 20,000 in 1991 and is anticipated to double by the time the Olympics are here in 1996.

Those of us who are advocates know the causes of homelessness but experience a great deal of frustration because our prophetic assertions continue to fall on deaf ears. So, instead of giving you factual assertions, I will give you a list of questions in which the result is always the same--homelessness and displacement.

Why is there increasingly less and less affordable housing for low-income families and especially less and less affordable housing for single African-American men?

Why is there less and less land available for affordable housing?

Why is "affordable housing" becoming less and less affordable?

Why haven't Atlanta's banks followed through on their funding commitment to the Atlanta Equity Fund, which would provide sufficient capital for affordable housing, SRO's, and a profit for the banks?

Why is there a rumor going around that the only reason the Mayor promised 3500 SRO units was to end the occupation of the Imperial Hotel?

Why has the SRO Advisory Committee, after 6 months of meeting, had to write a letter to the Mayor to ask to meet with him?

Why did the City Council and the Mayor pass a City Zoning Ordinance requiring a special use permit for SRO housing but did not consult with the SRO Advisory Committee as called for in the Memorandum of Understanding?

Why didn't the Atlanta Olympic Committee ask Summerhill, Peoplestown, and Mechanicsville if they wanted another stadium in their neighborhood?

Why hasn't the *Journal-Constitution* reported that the Atlanta-Fulton County Recreation Authority is avidly pursuing the acquisition of up to 50 acres of land for parking in the Summerhill/Mechanicsville neighborhoods to bolster its position to save the old stadium after the Olympics? Doesn't it seem all too coincidental that the Olympic Authority says it will not displace anyone, while the Recreation Authority is looking for land?

Why isn't the Georgia Baptist Medical Center working to save affordable housing in its expansion development in the Bedford-Pine neighborhood?

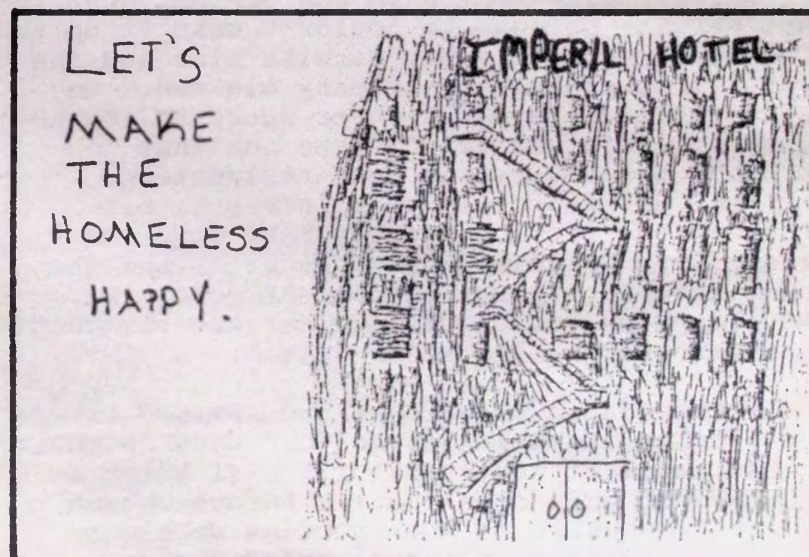
Why is the Ponce de Leon Task Force circulating a survey throughout the Midtown, Virginia-Highlands, Druid Hills, and Poncey-Highlands neighborhoods getting opinions about the presence of the homeless in the community?

Why is the Ponce de Leon Improvement Association promoting moratoriums on SRO housing and on social service/religious outreach that serve the homeless along Ponce de Leon Avenue and North Avenue and soliciting the support of City Councilmembers and the Bureau of Police Services?

I have lived in the South all my life, and I learned two important values which address the above questions and circumstances and which help to build community, rather than destroy it:

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house. . . or anything that is your neighbor's." (Exodus 20:17)

"Ask before you take."



The picture of the Imperial Hotel was drawn by Spencer Smith, a member of Morningside Presbyterian Church, who studied the biblical mandates for helping others and learned about homelessness.

"That Within Which Passeth Show"

by Elizabeth Dede

When I was in junior high school, clowning as a ministry was a popular fad. I went to a retreat with other junior high and high school kids at the Tampa State Fairgrounds called "Put On A New Face." We spent the weekend in circus tents, learning about being "Fools for Christ" and how clowning might help us to achieve that result. In Miami there was even a pastor of a deaf congregation who led a deaf clown troupe. They went to various churches on Sunday mornings, performing the Gospel stories in mime.

One Sunday they came to my church to perform the Prodigal Son. Now, you have to understand that the church I grew up in was very conservative and staid and sedate (One time several people transferred membership because the youth group went to see "Godspell." I don't know where they found a more conservative church.), so it was certainly a risky thing to bring a deaf clown troupe in to perform a Gospel story. The vast majority of the members of my church were old, retired German Lutherans. They didn't much care for change. The same old hymns and rituals suited them fine in their old age, as they had served them well throughout their lives.

One old man I remember in particular was Mr. Merwitz. He was quite deaf and sat in the very front of the church so that he could at least hear a little bit of what was going on. Mr. Merwitz was also becoming crippled in his old age. He hobbled along slowly and painfully with his cane and sat through the whole service, never rising, even for the prayers (The Lutheran church has a lot of sitting up and standing up and kneeling and standing and sitting down and standing in its ritual.). Even communion was brought down to Mr. Merwitz because he couldn't make it up to the altar anymore. Mr. Merwitz also had the reputation of being a grouchy old man. He never smiled and hardly ever spoke to anyone. Usually, he would get off the bus that brought the retirement home residents to church, hobble to his seat in front, sit through the service, hobble back down the aisle, slowly climb the steps back into the bus, and ride to the retirement home. Mr. Merwitz didn't seem to care for the pleasant chatting before and after church.

The deaf clown troupe had invited us junior high school kids to join them in their performance of the Prodigal Son (I think I played the part of a pig.). Before church started, we were in back putting on clown make-up and silly clothes, and I remember wondering how the old folks would take to this.

Now, I have always been shy and inhibited, and public performance has been painful for me. But this Sunday was easy. With all my make-up on, nobody knew who I was, so I could do all sorts of ridiculous things. And the clowning seemed to have the same effect on the members of the congregation. Even Mr. Merwitz forgot himself. He laughed and smiled and clapped. At the end, he danced down the aisle with me, forgetting his crippledness and his cane. It wasn't until he was back on the bus that he remembered that he was an old man who needed a cane in order to get around.

Since that Sunday back when I was in junior high school I have always been intrigued by the power of outward show. In costume it is often easier to achieve certain results--loudness, silliness, a free spirit. Dressed in my normal church clothes I could never have danced down the aisle with Mr. Merwitz. And costumes have a certain effect on those who see the dressed up person. If there had been no clowns in church that Sunday, Mr. Merwitz would not have danced down the aisle with me, either.

This phenomenon of make-up and costume is always apparent at the Open Door on Halloween and Mardi Gras when we get dressed up and have a party. People who are quiet and withdrawn suddenly begin to do very silly things. One year, I remember, we took pots and pans and other kitchen equipment and paraded down to the corner to the now-closed liquor store to dance and make noise in the parking lot there.

This year I missed the Open Door's Mardi Gras celebration because I spent the month of February at Dayspring, but I have spent some time thinking about costumes and outward show for several reasons. One is that I went to see the movie "Hamlet," which is itself a play, in part, about the incongruities of the inward and outward in human nature, and I went to the movie strangely attired and in the company of an even more strangely attired person, so we experienced the effects of costume. Second, since seeing the movie, I have found myself wondering what effect clown costumes would have on the war in the Persian Gulf. What if the soldiers had worn orange wigs, big red ball noses, and wildly colored baggy jumpsuits, instead of desert camouflage? Or what if police officers in downtown Atlanta wore clown costumes instead of their blue uniforms? And third, Lent is a time to reflect on our inward nature and to go through the process of repentance, which is so much more painful and difficult than the simple outward transformation we go through as we change costumes and put on make-up.

In "Hamlet" we find a society that is so sick inside that it has even forgotten what the proper exterior signs are for a healthy society. The king has died, and in a mere two months, the queen is remarried to the king's murderer, and they both berate Hamlet for lingering too long in his mourning for his father. Two months is not too long to mourn for your father, and Hamlet knows that something is rotten because his mother has so quickly forgotten the love she had for her first husband. She says to Hamlet:

"Do not for ever with thy vailed lids
Seek for thy noble father in the dust.
Thou know'st 'tis common.
All that lives must die,
Passing through nature to eternity."

Hamlet answers that he knows death is common to all. So the queen asks him why his father's death seems so particular. Hamlet replies:

"Seems, madam? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems.'
'Tis not alone my inky cloak, good mother,
Nor customary suits of solemn black,
Nor windy suspiration of forc'd breath,
No, nor the fruitful river in the eye,
Nor the dejected havior of the visage,
Together with all forms, moods, shapes of grief,
That can denote me truly. These indeed seem
For they are actions that a man might play;
But I have that within which passeth show--
These but the trappings and the suits of woe."

Hamlet's struggle throughout the rest of the play to peel off the trappings and the suits of woe and expose his true grief, which is his innermost self and not an act, is a struggle that we all have in common with Hamlet.

Sadly, Hamlet, like many of us, in the end finds himself trapped in anger and revenge and dies on a stage already littered with bodies. We, too, are players on that stage. It is a stage littered with the bodies of Iraqis; it is a stage littered with the bodies of homeless people like J.W. Jacobs who no longer have the strength to stand and endlessly walk the streets; it is a stage littered with the bodies of the victims of our violent society. Like Hamlet, we hear the cries of anger and revenge--cries that do not come from the ghosts of our dead fathers, but from ourselves and from those around us.

The season of Lent brings us to a time of action because it is a penitential season, a time of repentance, meaning that we must turn around and change. We must stop heeding the voices that call for anger and revenge. Those are only for show. They cover our true feelings and must be torn away and thrown off. Oh, but we have wrapped ourselves tightly in anger and revenge. They have become our skin, and it is a tough skin, which is imperivous to the grief of Iraqis, or the despair of those who for so many years now have wandered homeless, or the anguish of the ones whose life is slow death in prison, or the sorrow of the victims of violence.

So our penitential rites will be excruciatingly painful. They will be a flailing. We will skin ourselves alive. But we will expose our very beautiful selves--full of love and compassion and forgiveness. We know that those selves exist because they have been given to us by a very loving and gracious God, who is full of love and compassion and forgiveness. Our God has already suffered the death of anger and revenge. So it is with hope that we live

through these times of pain, knowing that we soon will celebrate a glorious resurrection, when we will all dance together, forgetting about and throwing away our old sinful selves. ☐



The author dressed for Halloween. Does she really look shy?



How she usually looks.

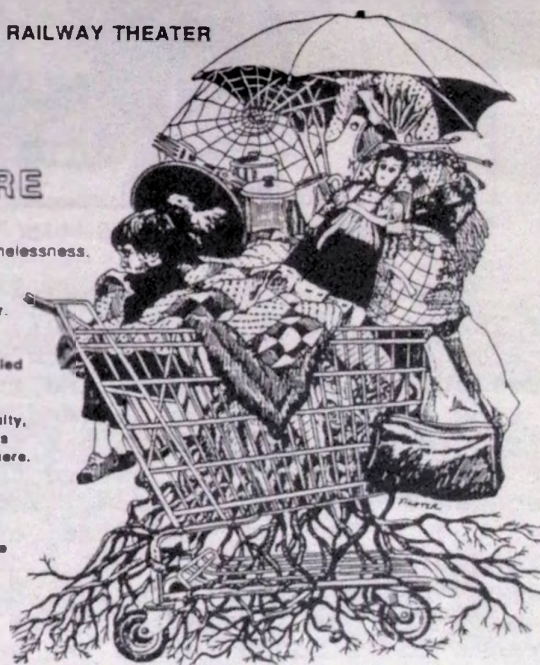
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Sabbath Rest

by Nibs Stroupe

Editor's note: Nibs Stroupe is pastor of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church and a long-time friend of the Open Door Community. The following piece is excerpted from the meditation he gave at the Open Door on Sunday, March 3, when we commissioned Murphy, Ed, and Hannah to their Sabbath Rest. Nibs' texts were Deuteronomy 5:12-15 and Hebrews 12: 1,2.

We are preparing to send Murphy, Ed and Hannah off on a Sabbatical--a rest. But we just heard a song that says you can't rest if you believe in freedom. "We Who Believe In Freedom Cannot Rest" is one of my favorite songs, and it poses the dilemma that we all face. Many of us are driven by a sense of being defined by what we produce and consume. And those of us who are not driven by these things, are driven by a sense that if we do rest, somehow justice won't be done, somehow the world of tyranny will overcome us and overcome others. We have the tension that is in this song of needing to rest and wanting to rest, but fearing what will happen to the world and to those who are hurting, having the sense that the world can't go on without us if we do rest.



Murphy and Ed getting ready for Sabbath Rest.

The idea of the Sabbath in the history of Israel is deep and powerful. It's seen as a time of rest, a time to turn away from production, from agendas, and from meetings. A time to turn towards God and to enjoy God's gifts to us. The Sabbath has two traditions in Israel: You are to observe the Sabbath because I gave you freedom. You were slaves; you had to work all the time; and I gave you freedom. So you are to set a day aside to remember your liberation and who is the source of your liberation. The other tradition is found in the Ten Commandments: "Remember the Sabbath Day to keep it holy for in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them and rested on the seventh day. And therefore the Lord blessed the seventh day and hallowed it." This tradition roots the Sabbath not in liberation but in creation. God rested on the seventh day, and we are to remember who we are and how we create--not working all the

time, but resting so that the juices can begin to flow again.

The Israelites took the Sabbath seriously. In Exodus 31, the prescription is that whoever works on the Sabbath shall be executed. From there until the time of Jesus it became rigid and rule-filled and as oppressive as any work routine. But Jesus came along and messed things up. Jesus healed folk on the Sabbath. But the messiest thing Jesus did was to rise on the day after the Sabbath, and that's had folk in turmoil ever since. Eventually the Sabbath and the Lord's Day got merged to form the first day of the week--Sunday. The power of the Sabbath has been off and on. The Puritans established it as strong as any Pharisee ever did. But the power of the modern world eroded that, so now we really don't have a Sabbath. We can't stand to have a Sabbath. We live in a culture that defines the self by what it does. We're defined by producing something.

But we know everybody can't have a job. If everybody had a job we wouldn't have all these rich folk and all these poor folk. So we expanded the definition from producing to consuming. We're defined by either producing something. And if we can't work all the time, we've got to be consuming something. Our leisure time is bombarded with things to do--ways to spend our money. We're all driven by a sense that our identity depends upon what we accomplish, produce, or what we consume.

It's no news to any of us that that kind of definition leads to chaos. We're frustrated; we're hostile; we're violent with one another; we kill one another. We just spent billions of dollars killing folks in the Middle East. We kill one another on the street of this city because we cannot rest and because we cannot have a sense of the self rooted in who God is in our lives.

The Sabbath tradition offers hope for us. It affirms that our identity comes not from what we do, what we produce, what we consume, but from the God who created us and who freed us. God created us and God has given us freedom. The Sabbath tradition reminds us that the center of our lives is God, who wants us to enjoy creation and to enjoy freedom.

In his Larger Catechism, Calvin asks, "What is the chief purpose of human beings?" The answer is to glorify God and to enjoy God forever. The Sabbath tradition reminds us that our agendas and our meetings and work for healing and justice are fruits of centered lives, but they are not the center of our lives. The center of our lives is the creative and freeing God who tells us to take some time off from defying ourselves.

A Hassidic Rabbi named Zalmon Schacter put it this way:

"There is a disease rampant: a chronic, low-grade depression that never knows how to smack its lips and say, 'It's good to be alive!' All the nostalgia we experience is a yearning for the Sabbath, to come home to the good Mother, one's being--a homecoming with the body to the body--to eating and resting and singing and loving, resting in the bosom of Abraham. The Sabbath is long and full when one knows how to be beyond doing."

Perhaps we can be guided by these words from Wendell Berry's poem:

"Manifesto:

The Mad Farmer Liberation Fund"

by Wendell Berry

Love the quick profit
the annual raise
vacation with pay
Want more of everything ready made
Be afraid to know your neighbors
and to die
And you will have a window in your head
Not even your future will be a mystery
anymore
Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer
And when they want you to buy something
they will call you
And when they want you to die for profit
they will let you know
So friends, everyday do something that won't
compute
Love the Lord
Love the world
Work for nothing
Take all that you have and be poor
Love someone who does not deserve it
And as soon as the generals and politicians can
predict the motions of your mind
Lose it
Leave it as a sign to mark the false trail
the way you didn't go
Be like the fox who makes more tracks than
necessary
some in the wrong direction
Practice resurrection.

**On Easter Sunday morning we
will serve a ham and eggs
breakfast to 500 people. Please
help us by donating hams for the
breakfast.**

Phillip

Williams



New Resident Volunteer

Hi! I am Phillip, I hail from Washington, D.C. I grew up in a family of six, with three sisters, mother and father. After finishing high school I went to work for Safeway food stores and attended Howard University for two years. I eventually met a person from Georgia. After marrying and living in D.C. for a while, we moved to the Atlanta area where I had great difficulty in finding employment. When I finally found a job, it was too late for me. I was divorced.

So I turned to alcohol and faced losing my job, which led me to seek treatment for my illness. Upon completing the treatment and working for several years, I was terminated, lost my apartment, and eventually I started staying at the Rising Star shelter.

After going down to the Butler St. breakfast (also known as the "grit line") for several weeks, I met C.M. Sherman, whom I had known years before, serving breakfast to the homeless. After talking and telling him my situation, he asked me if I would like to come to the Open Door Community. I agreed to, even though I did not know what to expect.

After being here for eight months, my life is beautiful once again--whether I am giving someone their mail, answering the phone or door, answering questions, giving 25 folks showers, or working in our soup kitchen. But life is not always easy as I help press the issues of the homeless such as housing. There has been a spiritual uplift in my life again for I know that the Lord is smiling down on me as I stand alone passing out tickets on a dark, cold morning to the people in the very line I used to stand in, hearing the "Good mornings" and the "How are you?"

Director of Publications/Fellowship Magazine Editor

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Homelessness: A Paradigm in Life and in Literature

by Phoebe Smith

Editor's note: Phoebe Smith has been leading our Friday Soup Kitchen for many years now. She is also a scholar of English Literature at Emory University, where she is working on her Ph.D. The following piece is a small portion of the essay Phoebe wrote for her Qualifying Exam. We are grateful that Phoebe shares her life with us in so many deep and meaningful ways.

For three years I have been a volunteer at the Open Door soup kitchen on Fridays. This work has provided balance to the graduate study in English literature which consumes much of the rest of my week. I have learned many things at the Open Door and have formed cherished friendships. Much of my learning has come through contact and conversations with homeless and formerly homeless people. Their views are important for middle-class people like myself because they stand at a different point, in a position that provides insights into our culture that are crucial for us to grasp. This view from the margin, although one that few of us would willingly choose, has been a valuable standpoint down through the centuries, and I have discovered that sometimes our most life-enhancing literature involves the viewpoint of the person who, for one reason or another, is separated, or cast out, or unmoored from the comfortable positions of the majority of any given society. The homeless people we serve at the Open Door teach us, if we are teachable, some foundational truths about the human condition.

In one theory of the function of literature, Amos Wilder has argued that we create stories in order to comfort ourselves in our essential condition of homelessness. As human beings we are constantly seeking belongingness, a sense of home that has perhaps always already existed in a forever-vanishing Eden. Ironically and problematically, the need to be part of a place and a people, either through birth or through affiliation, also creates the need for the one who does **not** belong, the stranger or the "other," who by being outside the boundaries of our "place" defines that place for us. The theme of the traveling stranger, the outsider, the solitary wanderer pervades Western literature because it corresponds to an archetypal experience of human nature.

This theme appears in the earliest extant written English works. The Anglo-Saxon Laws of Wihtraed, dated 695 A.D., include laws dealing with the traveling stranger. And in a poem written probably one hundred years later, *The Wanderer*, the unknown author elegizes the elements of his former home in an Anglo-Saxon society whose communal characteristics he has lost. He wanders alone across the gray, stormy seas that mirror his inner desolation. In his former place as thane to a lord, the speaker, the "Earth-stepper," had companions with whom he worked and lived, work that was valued and respected, an authority figure who commanded and rewarded him, times of celebration. Now all this is gone: the fellowship and camaraderie, the fighting for his lord, the golden rings and horses, the poetry-reciting and drinking of the mead-hall, all that gave the Wanderer's life purpose and meaning, gone. His belongingness has disappeared.

We recognize this picture of loss as a powerful evocation of the life of the homeless men and women we encounter at the Open Door. The Earth-stepper does have faith in God and the afterlife, which provides some consolation, but the Christian frame of the poem is not as forceful and compelling as the universal sense of loneliness and isolation which the Wanderer communicates even to a twentieth-century reader. Without the support and fellowship of the community, faith in God is difficult to maintain. True for the Wanderer who inhabits eighth-century poetry. True for the wanderer who inhabits the streets of twentieth-century Atlanta.

Edward Said, an Arabic literary critic and theorist, has argued that the position of an exile, a lonely traveler, provides a perspective necessary both in literature and in life because it turns us to the serious political concerns of society, issues of power and authority. Robert McAfee Brown, a Christian theologian, has called such a perspective "creative dislocation," where, out of the comforting confines of national identity and of affiliative cosiness, one's own place can be viewed with altered eyes. Only with such altered vision will we begin to see in scripture God's special concern for marginalized people, for the hungry and homeless. Only from that place of new vision

(continued on page 10)

The Hotel for the Homeless is Closing Down

by Stephen Wing

The hotel for the homeless next door
is closing down,
the many-roomed mansion of brick and air
that stood for twenty years abandoned
by all but the
abandoned themselves is closing down
into a heap
of wet brick and memory,
the long red flank of brick and broken windows
across our side fence
is collapsing into itself at last
once and for all

In the mud front yard
a hydraulic ostrich on caterpillar tracks
dozes for the night,
the new gravemound of brick and dust
well saturated now with the rain, raw mud
on tangled pipes
stacked against the fence,
rotting planks sticking out of the rubble
like the crooked gravemarkers of a civilization
gone mean and crazy at the end. . .

The hotel for the homeless on the corner
is closing down
after years of hanging open
like a wound,
leaning inward on itself like an old drunk
ignorant of the law of gravity,
falling piecemeal and at random into a space
consecrated somehow by the imminence
of its collapse,
a sanctuary for refugees
from loftier dangers than death--
a hole in its roof the size
of sky and sun
letting through the counsels of rain and stars,
a piece of plywood leaning in the doorway
letting through the supplicants
of hunger and cold

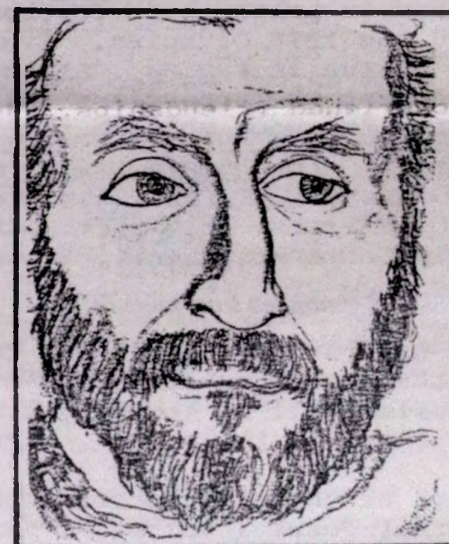
They used to sit
on its front stoop in the twilight,
smoking and talking in invisible voices,
carrying their bank accounts
in a paper sack
that passed from hand to hand till it was gone,
wearing their hand-me-downs from the dumpster,
slipping in and out
through the sagging plywood
for their nightly lack of privacy. . .

The hotel for the homeless next door
is closing down,
by week's end the machines have left the corner lot
less than vacant, a hole in the ground
strewn with raked straw,
a doctored photograph, a history
revised, a monument
to the conscience of our time
entombed in air and an unfamiliar view
of townhouse balconies:
a brick abutment embedded in one bank
is all that's left of the monument to ruin
(except a few ancient
nails poking out of the rubble
to inoculate a passing child some day
and pass along the plague)

Gradually I grow accustomed to the view,
to sun all afternoon and the troubled
respiration of traffic,
to making the turn without my landmark--
but on my way
to the mailbox I remember glancing
from the shattered sidewalk,
the faces
of the shadow-dwellers, the palpable
pause in conversation and the noncommittal glow
of cigarettes,
and as I open the gate in the fence built
just for them, I ask myself
where
my neighbor has gone
to bed tonight?



VIRGINIA TYLER



VIRGINIA TYLER

Editor's note: Stephen Wing is an Atlanta poet who feels that one of the tasks of poetry is to restore the full range of human feeling to issues which have become "political." He lives in Little Five Points with his wife Dawn and works in a warehouse full of books. *Four-Wheeler and Two-Legged*, a collection of his poems, will be coming out this spring from Southeastern Front (565 17th St., NW, Cleveland, TN 37311).

(ATLANTA continued from page 2)

entertainment facilities. When Atlanta started booming and building some years ago, there were but a few homeless people in the city. There was sufficient low-cost housing for the poor. But since that time, and through the rapid growth, the lords of the town have allowed the random destruction of thousands of low-rent units to make way for what they call "Urban Development."

Thus, the major cause of homelessness in Atlanta is a shortage of low-income housing. The discriminatory system has preyed mercilessly upon poor communities in the search for land space for development. Whenever the big boys conceive a new phase of progress, and space is needed for the project, they never seek that space in the middleclass neighborhoods. They go straight to the low-income communities and randomly condemn all properties, then call in the bulldozers. Every low-income community around downtown Atlanta has been victimized by the so-called progress of the city.

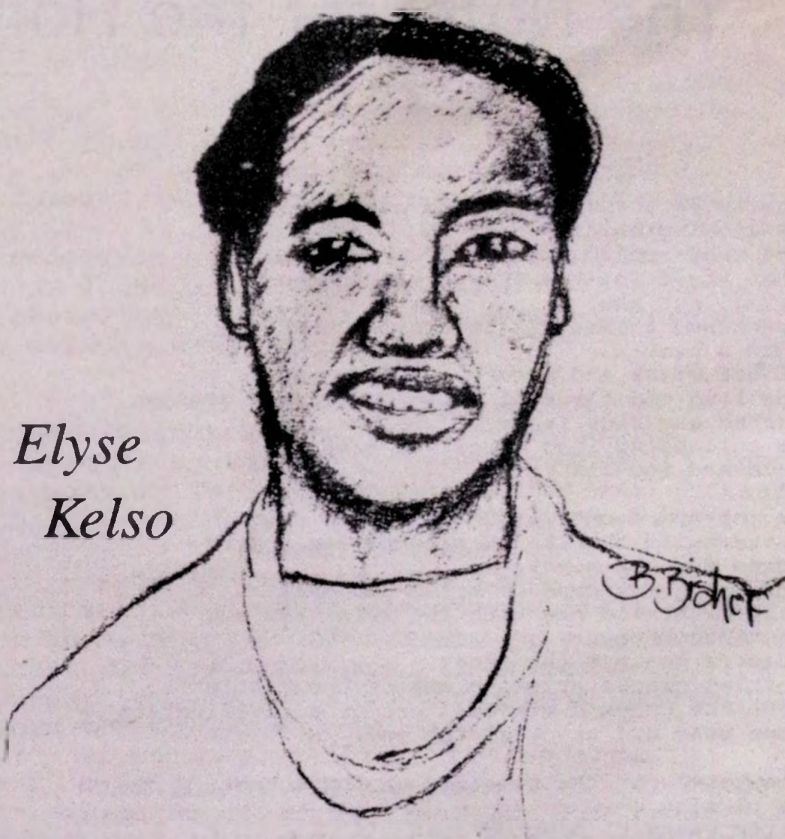
For example, the Lightning community was demolished for construction of the World Congress Center; the Auburn Avenue district was split in half by I-75/85; Buttermilk Bottom was razed for the Civic Center and much of the Summerhill Neighborhood was destroyed for the erection of the stadium. These are only a few of several underclass communities that have gotten the shaft in the wake of Atlanta's so-called progress. And now, even more are being torn down or threatened in preparation for the 1994 Super Bowl and the 1996 Olympics. Everyday someone of high status is saying, "Atlanta is a winner." For the upperclass this is true. It is only the poor who are the losers.



(HOMELESSNESS continued from page 8)

will we understand the Bible's culturally absurd theme that nations--and individuals--will be sorted out according to our treatment of the poor.

Part of the call to obedience for a follower of Jesus involves, I think, recognizing one's own limited standpoint and respecting the standpoint of another, of "the other," who, through no fault of his or her own, takes the position on the margin. The view from the margin can be creatively critical. Such a view can show us what our city's priorities should be, what the outcomes of having the Olympics in Atlanta should mean for longterm improvements to living possibilities for some of our citizens who cannot afford housing right now, even though they are working. Such a view can remind us to invest some of our time and energy in feeding the hungry and working to change structures so that the lonely, wandering stranger can come into the house and find welcome by the fire. We might forego our comfortable hominess in the enclaves we have created as a defense against our universal homelessness and open up the doors of our minds to those who stand on the margin. We then might meet travelers from afar whose shout or horn blast we would try to understand and whom we would not feel the need to either kill or ignore.



by Dick Rustay

One morning, over two years ago, Elyse Kelso looked out of her office window and again saw the ragged line of men interspersed with a woman here and there, forming across the street. These men and women were patiently waiting to enter the Open Door and enjoy a brief rest from the ever-demanding concrete and asphalt streets of Atlanta. It was soup kitchen time.

This particular morning Elyse made a decision that made a 180 degree turn from where she had begun. Her initial reaction was, "I've got to get another job, so I don't have to see that line and those people. It scares me." Then something made her look and relook at her thoughts and the ever-present line. Instead of running from the view of men and women waiting for a meal she suddenly realized that the line would not disappear even though she left. "This line is going to be everywhere I go, so maybe I'd better deal with it." And deal with it she has!

Every Thursday, during her lunch hour, Elyse crosses over Ponce de Leon Ave. and serves at the Open Door soup kitchen. She dips soup, makes sandwiches, wipes tables, and does anything else that needs to be done to make the soup kitchen a hospitable place and a haven for a brief time during the day for her friends from the streets.

"It saddens my heart to see the line and know that it's always there, but I realize that every little bit counts."

Elyse still looks out her office window and sees the line forming across the street. Instead of running and wanting to hide from a disturbing situation, she now thinks, "I'm grateful for the opportunity I have to feed the hungry."

And the Open Door Community is thankful that Elyse helps us feed the hungry!

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Friends,

I visited Atlanta last month to attend the Conference on Ministry at the Interdenominational Theological Center. I am chairman of the Department of Religion at Paul Quinn College in Waco, Texas, and brought four PQC ministerial students to the conference.

While at ITC, I picked up a copy of Hospitality and was very impressed! It appears that my major concerns and those of the Open Door Community are very similar. In 1986 when I returned to school, I spent four months spending weekdays and nights at a local shelter for the homeless. No other temporary housing was available for me. As a result, I became quite sensitive to the problems of hunger and homelessness.

For many years, I have been strongly opposed to the death penalty. It appears that today with so many people in support of capital punishment, those of us who are abolitionists make up a very small minority. It is disgusting how politicians can be like Esau and sell their principles for a mess of pottage. Prior to 1990, I had great admiration for Andrew Young and his outspoken opposition to capital punishment. I was elated when I first heard he was running for governor of Georgia. However, I felt betrayed when I learned he had reversed his position and endorsed the death penalty.

Please let me hear from you. I'd like to keep in touch with the work you are doing.

In Love and Solidarity,

Rev. Robert L. Uzzel
Waco, TX

Dear Mr. Stroupe,

I am writing to indicate my wholehearted agreement with the principles outlined in the Resolution in Support of the Gospel on Ponce de Leon. The issue of homelessness is one that I see daily since I live in the Ponce area. It is wonderful that Presbyterians throughout the city--many of whom may not have such close contact with those in need--are taking an interest in our neighbors who do not have homes.

During my six years in the neighborhood, it has been a challenge to balance my belief that we must help neighbors in need with my interests as a resident and a property owner. I have become a regular contributor to the Open Door, since I cannot morally ask others to care for those without homes if I do not welcome such facilities in my own area.

In that light, I am distressed by the February issue of Hospitality which introduces the Resolution by saying that "It came in response to a concern. . . that their ministry in response to the Gospel of

Jesus Christ was under attack by various groups including neighborhood associations and the city."

In the neighborhood meetings I have attended, I have repeatedly heard an affirmation of our intent to work with, not against, human service organizations in our area. In particular, there is support for groups offering rehabilitative services, in the hope of ending the cycle of homelessness. I have heard neighbors speak with compassion of our need to help the less fortunate. Clearly, this can be a controversial issue, but I see efforts to take constructive action.

My concern is that statements like the one in Hospitality create division and confrontation at exactly the point that we ought to be working together--for we share a common goal of helping people who have no home. Please, let us bring the Gospel and our ministry to the relationships among groups in the neighborhood, as well as to our work with the homeless.

I look forward to our continuing efforts to help those in need in the Ponce de Leon area.

Sincerely,

Ellen Cooney
Atlanta, GA

Editor's note: Ellen Cooney's letter was written to Rev. Nibs Stroupe who chairs the Task Force on the Urban Church--part of the Division of Church Growth and Ministry of the Greater Atlanta Presbytery.

Dear Friends,

Whenever Hospitality arrives, as it did two days ago, I praise the Lord for the Open Door Community.

Carry on! And may grace and peace lead and bring renewal of spirit evermore.

Sincerely,

Murray Branch
Atlanta, GA

Editor's note: Dr. Murray Branch retired once as a professor at the Interdenominational Theological Center (Atlanta University), and then he retired a second time after a pastorate at the Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. We are glad that he and Mrs. Branch are back in Atlanta.

Agape House in Hermiston, Oregon is seeking a couple as live-in "house-parents" for a small shelter, planned to open this spring. Agape House opened as a food and clothing bank four and a half years ago. It is supported by sixteen churches in the area, governed by an ecumenical board, and staffed by volunteers and a director who is paid. The shelter has a small dormitory room, three rooms for women and children, and one family room. We offer room and board (at the house), and a small stipend. Write: Kathleen Knudson, Director, 200 SW 11th, Hermiston, OR 97838 or call (503) 567-8774. Experience preferred.

WE ARE OPEN. . .

Monday through Saturday, telephones are answered from 9:00am until noon, from 1:30 until 6:00pm, and from 7:00 until 8:30pm. The building is open from 9:00am until 8:30pm those days. (Both phone & door are not answered during our lunch break from noon until 1:30.) Please call in advance if you need to arrange to come at other times. On Sunday we are open from 7:00am until noon. Sunday afternoon our door is answered until 5:00pm.

OUR MINISTRY. . .

SOUP KITCHEN--Wednesday-Saturday, 11am-12 noon

SUNDAY BREAKFAST--Sunday morning at 910, 7:15am

BUTLER ST. CME BREAKFAST--Monday-Friday, 6:15am

SHOWERS & CHANGE OF CLOTHES--Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9-11am
(Be sure to call; schedule varies)

USE OF PHONE--Monday-Saturday, 9am-noon, 1:30pm-5pm.

SHELTER REQUESTS--Monday-Saturday, 9am-noon.

BIBLE STUDY--Alternate Tuesdays, 7:30-9pm.

WEEKEND RETREATS--Four times each year (for our household & volunteers/supporters), April 5-7.

Our Hospitality Ministries include: visitation and letter-writing to prisoners, anti-death penalty advocacy, advocacy for the homeless, medical services, and daily worship and weekly Eucharist.

NEEDS

**Gas Kitchen Stove
Refrigerator
JEANS**

Men's Work Shirts
Men's Underwear
Quick Grits
Cheese
Mayonnaise
Multi-Vitamins
MARTA Tokens
Men's Large Shoes (12-14)
Coffee
Non-Aerosol Deodorant
Washcloths
**10-SPEED BICYCLES
GUITAR**

We need volunteers to answer our phone
and door on Mondays between 1 and 4pm.

*From 11am til 1:30pm, Monday through Saturday, our
attention is focused on serving the soup kitchen and household
lunch. As much as we appreciate your coming, this is a difficult
time for us to receive donations. When you can come before
11:00 or after 1:30, it would be helpful.*

Newspaper Requests--If you or a friend would
like to receive HOSPITALITY, please fill in
this form and return to Willie London at the
Open Door Community, 910 Ponce de Leon Ave.,
NE, Atlanta, GA 30306-4212.

Name _____

Street _____

City, State, Zip _____

Open Door Community Worship

*We gather for worship and Eucharist at
5:00pm on Sunday evenings
followed by Supper together.*

Join us!

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| March 24 | Palm Sunday
Worship at 910
Bob Smith, Preaching |
| March 31 | Easter Morning!
Cynthia Hale, Preaching
Ray of Hope Choir
Worship will be held at
6:30am in the Municipal
Market Parking Lot. This
replaces worship at 910. |
| April 5-7 | Spring Retreat at Dayspring
(No Sunday Worship at 910) |
| April 14 | Worship at 910
5:00 Eucharist
5:30 Music Night |
| April 21 | Worship at 910
Phoebe Smith, Preaching |
| April 28 | Worship at 910
Sandra Barnhill, Preaching |

Four times each year the Community has a weekend retreat outside
the city. This replaces our evening worship at 910 Ponce de Leon
Ave.

