



NCAB Newsletter

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NCAB is the National Consumer Advisory Board, an organization of persons who are now or have been homeless. NCAB elects its own leadership, participates in the consensus decision-making of the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, and works to increase the consumer role at every level of health care and to improve access to health care for everyone.

NCAB Membership is free – see how to join at the end of this newsletter.

Reflections for National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

NCAB sponsors National Homeless Persons' Memorial Day together with the National Coalition for the Homeless and the National HCH Council. Each year around December 21, local communities organize commemorations of the homeless people who have died that year. More Resources for Memorial Day events are available at www.nhchc.org; this edition of NCAB News contains Memorial Day items selected by NCAB's leadership.

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Our Reasons for Gathering

by Sharon Morrison, NCAB Staff, Boston, Massachusetts

We gather together, in the midst of this season of holiday celebration, feeling out of synch with the glitter. Our friends have died. We are grief stricken and afraid. We know we need each other and we know we need to reach out. And so we come together around our need to grieve and our need to be renewed. We know that music and symbols and ritual help, and so we create a space to mourn and to honor and to praise. We come together to celebrate the return of the light - the promise of the solstice – a light to dispel the darkness.

Each of us comes for our own reasons - to do what we need to do for ourselves and for each other as well. We come together because we are still here...our lives have not ended - and in some way this gathering to remember is about us, we who are still here. There are no rules except to follow where our hearts lead.

And so we continue to live our lives. Although, we live differently than we would have, had we not known one another. Our lives have so much meaning - they continue to be transformed by love - by loving and by being loved. This is our legacy - it is ultimately what draws and binds us and sustains us. Love never ends. It endures. Love is stronger than death.

And so we come together in love, to celebrate and welcome the return of the light. We come together expecting a miracle and we find hope. Let us delight in the sweetness of memory and the rich gift of laughter and tears. It is good for us to do this together, for we serve best whose memories we honor by loving one another.

On Gathering Names for the Homeless Memorial Service

by John Petroskas, Minneapolis, Minnesota

For the last three years I've been collecting the names of Minnesotans who have died while homeless for the annual memorial service. This has been an unrelentingly depressing task.

The sheer number of people who die every year is overwhelming. I've collected 71 names so far this year, a number that is certain to climb in coming weeks. There is no real pattern that I can discern in gathering the names. Sometimes two weeks pass without a name being reported, then I'll learn about five deaths in a single week.

Sometimes it's a terrible surprise: "Hey, did you hear that Bill died? He had a heart attack at his camp on Friday. No one saw it coming." Then I think: I saw him last week, we talked about the cold weather, he said he hadn't been feeling well. Other times it's not a surprise, just confirmation of something everyone could see coming.

Some stories are particularly hard to hear. It really bothers me when someone reports that a child has died while homeless, but it happens every year. It's also especially sad for me when someone dies a violent death, but every year homeless people are murdered, commit suicide, or die in tragic accidents. Others die of chronic illnesses like cancer, AIDS, diabetes, and heart disease. Alcohol and drug addiction claim even more lives. Sometimes we don't even learn the name of the person, or how they died - occasionally all we can list is "unknown man, Minneapolis."

But as sad as collecting the names can be, there's often a fragment of a story to accompany the name: the deceased was a veteran, a college graduate, a mother of two children, a musician. These details can be starkly revealing, heartbreaking, mysterious. How did a man with a Masters degree in English literature end up dying while homeless? How can a highly decorated Vietnam vet die of cancer while living in a shelter? We can't always answer those questions at the memorial, but it does at least give us a chance to ponder them together.

Helping to share the stories of those who might otherwise be forgotten is the reason that it is such a privilege for me to collect the names and to participate in the memorial each year.

Falling Shadows

© by Roch K. Longuepée
Halifax, Nova Scotia

...in the streets of squalor

A hush lingers in the falling
shadows...

The dangers await me,
The elements of nature
The coldness of the night
Calls me to my only home
The only life I know

I am alone

Mental illness, addictions, disease,
depravity
Have ravaged this body for so long

No one knows me, I have no name
They would rather forget me
Never to face the poverty of their own
soul

I lay here in the long shadow
Of fallen heroes
The gap between us grows wider
The hole in the world grows deeper

That part of the human condition
We cannot face
There once was a dream called
humanity
We dare not whisper it
For if we do, it could vanish forever

Cast a light on this sin
You are our only voice for those who
cannot speak the truth
You are our last hope

Cast a light on the world
When you see the shadows
Let the world know we were here

We are your mothers, your fathers,
We are your sisters, your brothers,
We are your husbands, your wives

We lived, loved and were loved

Out of the depths we cry out
Who will hear our verse in time to
come?
Should it tread in the forgotten
passages of time?

Light the torch ...
And you will see us there
Exiled to human misery.
Forsaken, lonely, not whole,

One by one ...
The shadows fall.

Remembering Life and Death on the Streets

By Carol Hall, NCAB Executive Committee Member, Portland, Oregon

May 8th of 2000 is a day I shall never forget. I was homeless and living on the streets, staying up under a bridge here in Portland. During those days there were so many people living, if that's what you want to call it, up under the bridges, It was dark and dirty and the stench of feces was everywhere, and people were dying under those bridges quite often.

People were dying quite often all over the city at that time for various reasons, or no good reason at all. There were people dying from overdoses from various drugs, heart attacks, or from being attacked. It didn't seem like there needed to be a reason. You could be killed for your shoes, clothing, alcohol, drugs, rape, muggings, hate crimes, gang or street family beatings, drive-by shootings, or getting shot by anyone, including the authorities, for whatever reason. My point is that I was scared to death that I would be next, nobody was exempt from the threat of being killed, especially the homeless. Who would miss them?

Until recently I wasn't aware that the coroner's office had kept no record of how many of the people that have died up until now were homeless.

I came out from under the bridge on the morning of May 8th, 2000, and I couldn't shake the feeling of fear that I had. It wasn't just being afraid, it was something I can't explain other than being scared to death of death. I asked myself "What the hell am I doing here?" I have a very large family, 12 siblings, and most of us are real close. I have 4 children of my own and at that time I had 8 Grandchildren. Now I have 13!

I am an addict and I used for most of 30 years, hiding the pain of all the hurts of my past. I wouldn't let my family see me like that, so for the last few years I isolated from them and things really started to spiral downward. I didn't even know who I was anymore, and I later found out that I never really did know who I was, ever.

I went to the homeless outreach office of JOIN and asked for some help and I've been in recovery every since. Thank God! I went through treatment and continue to work my life in a program of recovery. After awhile I joined a group of people and became a charter member of the Health Services Advisory Council for Central City Concern Health Services. It was a requirement for the Health Care for the Homeless Clinics to have a Consumer Advisory Board if they wanted to receive the federal grant money they needed. The staff in my building at the time recommended that I apply to be a part of this Council because I had the desire to help people. I guess they saw something in me that I didn't know I had, because it was about 1 1/2 years later and I was on my way to Washington D.C. to a conference for the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, as a consumer, to see what it was all about. I got real fired up about it.

The next year the conference was in Portland where I was elected co-chair for the Board. I had never been in that sort of position before, but if they gave me the opportunity I would work hard and advocate for our rights to Health Care and Housing! I knew how difficult it was to get either one of those things because when I was homeless I had a very difficult time gaining access to anything more than bare minimum services, and I was on the Oregon Health Plan. Now, even that program has since been upended.

Since I've been in recovery I've had a few friends die while being homeless. Some of them died from exposure, others from the sicknesses made worse from being homeless, and some of them died from cancers, or liver/kidney disease. Some committed suicide because they couldn't live like that anymore.

I knew that I didn't want to live like that, even though taking my own life was not an option. Some of us really have a hard time dealing with things, because of depression. We have a hard time accepting the fact that we aren't the same as we use to be. Not that we aren't as smart, but being homeless really takes a toll on a person's self esteem, confidence, and ideals...those dreams just aren't there anymore.

I remember Larry, who was mugged and beaten to death for his paycheck. He, his wife and family were homeless and living under a bridge. I remember Mo Simmons, and his nephew Marcus, who were both homeless. They died a few months apart from suffocating while choking on their vomit while sleeping, staying under a bridge. I remember Allan Rice, also homeless, who died from the alcohol poisoning and was found in a doorway on an early morning in November 2005. A homeless woman that used to come visit a friend here where I live, was found beaten to death under the Burnside Bridge in 2004.

In 2000, just after I got into treatment, I was still on the streets and it was getting real cold out, I had just gotten my blue TB card so I stayed in at the Salvation Army's Harbor Lights. I had only been there a few nights when a man found his way to the crosswalk on Second Avenue at the south end of the building, and lay there bleeding to death while a police officer was standing there watching it happen...if I hadn't seen that for myself I might not have believed it. While the policeman was talking on his radio he said that the guy had lost a lot of blood, which was true, but it took 10 minutes or more for the EMT's to get there and the fire department was only 1 block away. The man was a transient and was carrying a wad of cash and was stabbed in his head and chest and then robbed. When did he lose his right to live? When he became homeless? I stood in the window right above that scene and hoped that I would never be in a position like that and need help like he did. I remember thinking that God spared me all my life from seeing death, and now I know why. That was my first time ever seeing it, and I just couldn't shake it for months. I had nightmares for quite some time.

November 21st 05, a man died outside of the rescue mission while sleeping on the sidewalk. I woke up to the radio and heard them talking about the Feed the Hungry Meal Drive, and how well that was going and I felt so thankful to God for that. And the next thing the voice said was that this man wasn't so lucky,...he died from exposure in the early morning hours. I felt like I had been hit by a huge boulder and I couldn't get out of bed. I just started sobbing for the man. I had no idea what his name was but one thing I knew was that he was my brother and it made me feel such sorrow to lose another family member that way.

There has been a lot more homeless people die since then, and forgive me if I cannot remember the names of them all, but believe me I will not forget why they died. People cannot heal their bodies or their minds when they don't have a place to be inside, protected from the elements and other harmful situations!

Life Statements
From Yakima, Washington, Memorial Day Event

IN MEMORIAM

Below are the life statements of five people who died without homes in Yakima during 2007. We remember them as we strive to end homelessness in the coming years.

FRED HARKINS, 45, was the father of five. Fred loved to help people, and he loved trucks. He worked off and on in various places, fixing cars and doing general labor. If you needed help, you could count on Fred even though he would go without. He is survived by his children, aunts, uncles, and cousins in Seattle and California.

SANDY KNIGHT, 40, was the mother of three. Although she had not seen her children for years, Sandy was always thinking of them and seemed at peace with these thoughts. Sandy had a long time partner Timmy, and they stood by each other through thick and thin. Sandy was a giver, sometimes too much so, but always had others on her mind.

JEFFRY LEE ORTEIG, 50, had three daughters and seven grandchildren. He served in the United States Army from 1978 to 1982. He loved his country and dreamed of having his own place to call home. Jeff was a simple person who didn't want much, just a home, friends, and family. His smile and thought-provoking conversation will be missed by those who knew him.

THOMAS J. SCHROEDER, 63, was born in The Bronx, NY. Tom traveled the United States throughout his life and always sent cards for the holidays to a few friends. Struggling with health and shelter issues, he remained a strong self-advocate. Tom's stories and insights about the world will be missed. He is survived by one sister who lives in Florida and one cousin.

VANCE L. ZINK, 53, was born in Grangeville, ID. He worked as a cook over the years and at times held a sign asking for food or money. He was a quiet, gentle man whose loss will be felt by all. He is survived by a daughter, a brother, two sisters, and his mother.

Poetry

By Charles L. McClain, McMinnville, Tennessee

This was written by a gentleman named Charlie from McMinnville, and I asked him if I could share it with you all. It brought tears to my eyes. Charlie writes "I wrote this poem just before Christmas of 2000 & never put it up on the net anywhere because I was afraid it wouldn't measure up...it's not your usual Christmas subject matter, but I was recently convinced to put it on here to see what everyone thought of it." It's written to the rhyme of "T'was the night before Christmas." -- Carol Hall, NCAB Executive Committee Member

T'was the night before Christmas
On the streets of any town USA
In a cold dark alley
Amid old cardboard boxes he laid...

His clothes were all tattered
And he was dirty and rank
He had run away from his family
They were abusive because they drank...

Out on the streets begging people for spare
change
Was a normal routine on any given day
Then back into his alley cold, hungry and scared
Was another routine that he and others shared...

He prayed for something better
A change of some kind
Then reality would set in
And he would lay there and cry...

There would be no presents
There would be no Christmas feast
No singing of Christmas carols
Around a beautiful, decorated tree...

Just a meal at a local shelter
His first in nearly a week
A hymn sung by a local choir
Then it's back out onto the streets...

Then on that bitter cold Christmas Eve night
A figure of light did appear
He arose from the ground
And trembled with fear...

"Be not afraid" the figure did say
"For I come before you with good news today

I'm an Angel of the Lord sent to guide you back
home
Your family and your father how they miss you
so"...

He shouted in anger
Shook his fist in the air
He cried out "I hate that place
I'm never going back there"...

The Angel of the Lord spoke once again
"Wait my child you don't understand
The home I speak of has streets paved with gold
And the father I speak of died for your soul"...

"There's no hunger or sadness
There's no sickness or despair
Where I'm taking you
no one's homeless or scared"...

"For in the kingdom of heaven
You will live eternal life
In the arms of your new family
And the Lord Jesus Christ"...

He trembled no more
There was not a tear in sight
For he knew his prayer's
Had been answered that night...

His prayer's of a home
And a loving family who cares
Yes the Lord had answered
His Last Christmas Prayer.

*Please volunteer your time to some place that
helps out others or do
Something nice for someone less fortunate this
holiday season.*

Model Memorial Day Worship Service
Prepared by the Catholic Conference of Kentucky
and adapted by Welcome House of Northern Kentucky

Notes on Using the Prayer Service

The services in this collection were designed for a variety of settings, and we encourage you to adapt them to your particular needs. The role of the leader can be shared by one or more persons. Some advance preparation such as handouts or candles may be desired. Suggested hymns are widely available

GATHERING HYMN *The Strife Is O'er* (tr. Francis Pott)

Refrain: Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia!

The strife is o'er, the battle done. Now is the Victor's triumph won.

O let the song of praise be sung, alleluia! (*Refrain*)

Death's might pow'rs have done their worst But Jesus has his foes dispersed.

Let shouts of praise and joy outburst, alleluia! (*Refrain*)

He closed the yawning gates of hell. The bars from heav'n's high portals fell.

Let hymns of praise his triumph tell, alleluia! (*Refrain*)

On the third morn he rose again, Glorious in majesty to reign.

O let us swell the joyful strain, alleluia! (*Refrain*)

GATHERING PRAYER

Leader: My brothers and sisters, we have come together to remember our friends who have gone before us. We believe that the bonds of friendship and affection that united us in life do not dissolve with death. Let us heed the word of the Lord, who challenges us to love one another, to offer friendship and consolation to those we meet. He points to the needs of the poor and homeless, saying "you do this to Me."

Response: Amen.

SCRIPTURE AND REFLECTIONS

FIRST READING (*I Cor 13:1-8a*) A reading from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians.

If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient, love is kind. It is not jealous, [love] is not pompous, it is not inflated, it is not rude, it does not seek its own interests, it is not quick-tempered, it does not brood over injury, it does not rejoice over wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails. *The word of the Lord.*

Response: Thanks be to God.

Leader: Spirit of Love, who moves among us, strengthen us, we pray.

Response: Come to our aid, Spirit of Love.

Leader: Spirit of Compassion, who transforms the face of the earth, turn our hearts to the needs of the poor, we pray.

Response: Come to our aid, Spirit of Compassion.

Leader: Spirit of the Living One, who rouses us from our sleep, impel us to act justly with sensitivity and with courage, we pray.

Response: Come to our aid, Spirit of the Living One.

SECOND READING (*Gal 6:2, 9*) A reading from the letter of Paul to the Galatians.

Bear one another's burdens, and so you will fulfill the law of Christ.... Let us not grow tired of doing good, for in due time we shall reap our harvest, if we do not give up.

The word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Leader: O God, who bears all the burdens of the world, we call on you for strength.

Response: Lord, help us carry each other's troubles.

Leader: O God, we give thanks for those who help us bear our burdens.

Response: Lord, help us carry each other's troubles.

Leader: O God, helps us reach out to carry the burdens of others.

Response: Lord, help us carry each other's troubles.

HYMN *Be Not Afraid* (*Bob Dufford, S.J.*)

READING OF THE NAMES

Leader: These are the names of homeless people who have died in the last year [or longer]. We pray that they may rest in peace. After each ten names I will say: "Let us pray." Please respond: God of mercy, hear our prayer.

Response: God of mercy, hear our prayer.

THIRD READING: (*I Pet 2:4–5*) A reading from the first letter of Peter.

Come to him, a living stone, rejected by human beings but chosen and precious in the sight of God, and, like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

The word of the Lord.

Response: Thanks be to God.

Leader: Loving God, we long for a welcoming community.

Response: Lord, build us into a spiritual house.

Leader: Great architect of creation, make us living stones through Christ.

Response: Lord, build us into a spiritual house.

Leader: Loving God, make your dwelling place secure in us.

Response: Lord, build us into a spiritual house.

SHARED REMEMBRANCE

Leader: At this time we have an open microphone for anyone here who wishes to share a story of the lives of the individuals being remembered.

CLOSING PRAYER The Lord's Prayer

Leader: Secure in the certainty that we all are children of God, let us call on our Father as Jesus taught us.

Response: Our Father, who art in heaven.... Amen.

Leader: United in the promise of salvation, let us go in peace.

Response: Thanks be to God.

CLOSING HYMN *Amazing Grace* (John Newton)

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;

How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!

The Lord has promised good to me, His word my hope secures;
He will my shield and portion be as long as life endures.

Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come;
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

When we've been there ten thousand years, bright shining as the sun.
We've no less days to sing God's praise than when we'd first begun.

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*The Catholic Conference of Kentucky (CCK) is an agency of the Catholic Bishops of Kentucky, established in 1968.
It speaks for the Church in matters of public policy, serves as liaison to government and the legislature, and
coordinates communications and activities between the church and secular agencies. There are 406,000 Catholics
in the Commonwealth. The Bishops of the four dioceses of KY constitute CCK's Board of Directors.*

Send Us Your Stories

We need you!!! Hopefully, in our upcoming issues you, the readers, will send in your personal stories, poems, and articles regarding how you started your board and how it is running today. Please send any helpful comments on what you would like to see in the newsletter that might help others to ncab@nhchc.org

Join NCAB

Free membership in the National Consumer Advisory Board is available to anyone who has experienced homelessness and has received services from an HCH project. To join NCAB, please go to http://www.nhchc.org/ncab_join.html to sign up on-line OR send to ncab@nhchc.org or to NCAB, PO Box 60427, Nashville TN 37206-0427 the following information:

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