

Seeing Tommy Home

By Megan Lappas

It was in September of 2009 when I first noticed Tommy Eldridge. I routinely drove from the new VMC building to our old building on the corner of Jackson and Gay to meet with the residents who still lived in the apartments there. I was their case manager. Tommy was always standing on the corner of Fifth Avenue and Gay Street, an older man who was always by himself, hiding behind his long white beard. I started waving to him and there was no response. Sometimes he turned around to avoid looking at me. But one day, he waved back.

I stopped to chat with Tommy. I introduced myself and told him where I worked. I invited him to the Resource Center at VMC but he declined. I asked about things he enjoyed, hoping to bring him coffee as a way to build a relationship. After several months, Tommy agreed to go with me to Pete's Coffee Shop, a downtown eatery where I knew he would be well treated. It was the first of many trips. Pete, the owner, grew to call Tommy by name.

In November, our conversation began to change and Tommy shared more of himself with me; he seemed less reticent. I learned he was from Kentucky although he could not remember where in that state. He remembered his mother had loved opera and that his father had died. We ordered his birth certificate and when it arrived, we went to get him a state identification. In February of 2010, Tommy agreed to go with me to the Social Security Office to order a social security card. He was becoming a person with credentials!

Tommy and I were building a real relationship. Still, I noticed him responding to internal stimuli and sometimes answering questions with bizarre answers. I decided to begin the process of applying for benefits for disability. In the beginning of this process, we had several appointments with medical professionals. Tommy would be at the appointed meeting place about half the time. He made excuses the other half of the time, probably intimidated, saying we "could do it later." However, the longer we worked together the more reliable he became.

Tommy did get approved for disability payments based on his mental health condition. In the meantime, I learned that he was a military veteran and he was eligible



Megan Lappas with Tommy Eldridge

for veteran's benefits as a result of his honorable discharge following three years of active service. With an income, Tommy began to think about getting off the streets for good. We made an application for Minvilla Manor.

On January 18, 2011, Tommy signed a lease and moved into an apartment. He keeps his new home spotless (and I mean spotless)! We bought him a new comforter and a television – that was a great day for Tommy. He loves to watch the news and he follows sports. He is still reclusive and does not attend the social events unless I specifically ask him. He never misses his regular Friday appointment with me. Tommy has a new checking account and his rent is paid automatically. And he delights in bringing chocolate to the staff.

I asked Tommy recently how he liked his new apartment. With a faraway look in his eyes, and with typical understatement, he said, "Well, it's so much better than standing on the corner. I am quite pleased."

No one is more pleased than I am. Tommy is the most gentlemanly and gracious person with whom I have ever worked. What joy there is, what absolute joy, in seeing Tommy "home."



From the Director's Desk

By Ginny Weatherstone
Compassion Knoxville recently presented its recommendations to the city and the county. You may recall that this group was created to gather input from the community as to how the issue of homelessness can best be handled. This was to happen

while the Ten Year Plan was on hiatus, awaiting this report.

The VMC staff participated in the Compassion Knoxville process, just as we were participatory in the development of the Ten Year Plan (TYP). We think our experience means that we truly have something to offer to the conversation. Ultimately, the TYP strategies are all included in the new report. They are reframed and restated. But they are there.

There is a reason for this. Over the course of the first

five years of the TYP, we learned just what works and what doesn't. We know that helping homeless people into housing means that they are no longer homeless; it means that they have a real shot at addressing their problems and building a productive life. We know we must prevent homelessness in the first place. We also learned that we must be diligent about finding ways to avoid discharge to the streets from jails, hospitals and foster care. And we know that churches are the most wonderful resources when they work in harmony with established agencies.

The new report calls for a greater accountability of clients and agencies as well as a greater coordination of efforts. Those were also values of the TYP.

So this issue has been studied twice now; we have two sets of recommendations. My point is simply this: we know what to do. Twice we've heard it. It's time to, as a city and a county, recommit our efforts and further the work that began five years ago. We're already doing most of it. We know what works. Let's do it!

Did you know...

- ... that 81 formerly homeless people have achieved housing through VMC programming this year to date?
- ... that the Bush Family Refuge receives an average of 340 calls for assistance with utility bills per month? Of those calls, over four hundred individuals have actually received financial assistance with these bills year to date?
- ... that over 668 dental procedures have been performed in the VMC Dental Clinic year to date?

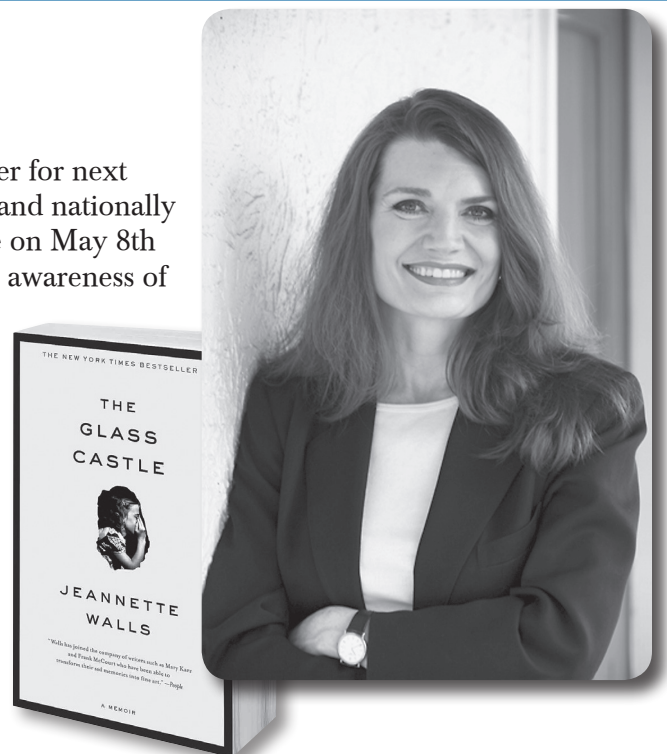


CARRY THE TORCH KNOXVILLE 2012

It is with great excitement that we announce our featured speaker for next year's *Carry the Torch Knoxville* event. Jeannette Walls, best-selling and nationally known author of *The Glass Castle* and *Half Broke Horses*, will be here on May 8th for a benefit luncheon at the Knoxville Convention Center to raise awareness of the many issues surrounding homelessness.

In *The Glass Castle*, Ms. Walls shares her personal story of growing up in extreme poverty with a mentally ill mother and an alcoholic father. She recalls wandering with her family from one town to the next, sharing a dysfunctional childhood with her siblings. Ultimately, Ms. Walls became an award winning journalist. Her parents became homeless in New York City, refusing their daughter's offers of help. Jeanette's story is inspirational and reveals her determination to overcome hardship and to turn adversity into advantage.

It is our hope that you will consider being a part of this annual event. For additional information, please visit our website at www.vmcinc.org or call Mary Beth Ramey at 524-3926.



VMC Summer Interns

For ten weeks over the summer months, VMC was very fortunate to have four interns serving in the Bush Family Refuge. Sponsored by Grace Baptist Church in Karns, Andrew Maples, Adrian Wannamaker, Kennedy Wade, and Leeanna Palmer answered phones, set up appointments, interviewed clients and assisted with other administrative tasks in VMC's Bush Family Refuge. "My experience at VMC has given me a total new outlook on serving. I have learned that it takes so much to



Adrian, Andrew, Kennedy, and Leeanna (L to R).

make this ministry happen." said Kennedy. Andrew summed up his experience as, "This work is contagious. Once you help meet one need, you want to meet more needs. The smile you receive in return simply makes you want to serve." Leeanna described her time at VMC as "more than a wonderful experience." She goes on to say that "It has been more than a blessing to be a part of the way VMC serves the people of Knoxville." And Adrian expressed: "My idea of homeless people was very ignorant, but after being at VMC I have learned that everyone has a story, and until you have walked a mile in his or her shoes, outsiders have no right to judge. This experience has not only changed my opinion of others, it has changed the way I live my life. Now when I see individuals less fortunate than me, I have compassion and want to help them through their suffering."

Needless to say, Andrew, Kennedy, Adrian, and Leeanna were all impacted by their experiences at VMC. And the feelings were mutual on behalf of the staff and volunteers who worked alongside them. They were insightful, a big help, and a huge blessing to all of us. We are grateful to Grace Baptist Church for sharing these incredible young adults with VMC!

2011 Holiday Store

Jingle Bells! Jingle Bells! Jingle all the way ...

Yes, Christmas is just around the corner and you can help us help others have a Merry Christmas. The Holiday Store is a unique program that enables those who are less fortunate to "purchase" gifts for their loved ones. Participants "earn" points by engaging in community service projects. Points earned are then redeemed to "purchase" the items they have selected at the Holiday Store. The Holiday Store provides a source of pride and accomplishment for everyone involved.

You can help by providing the new toys and gift items to go in the Holiday Store. We ask that all gift items be new, in the original packaging (please do not gift wrap) and in the \$5 - \$30 price range. Suggested items are clothing for all ages, toys for children, small electronics for teenagers, housewares, and wrist watches. For a detailed wish list or questions about community service, please contact Bruce Spangler at 524-3926.



VMC's Current Needs

We welcome all gifts, however we have a critical need for the following items. We thank you sincerely for your help!

- Feminine hygiene products
- Diapers—all sizes
- Depends—all sizes
- 1/3 cut file folders
- Stamps
- Copy paper
- Pens/Pencils

A Simple Planned Gift

All donors, regardless of their giving capacity, are treasures to The Volunteer Ministry Center. It is that faithful support that enables VMC to serve the homeless and those in crisis. In today's economic climate, most of us are living on a tight budget and doing without, but there are still opportunities to give to VMC that are easily accomplished and do not involve an immediate cash outlay.

Here are a few options to consider:

Bequest (A gift from your Will or Trust)—Drafting a will is a simple process. It outlines how you want your assets distributed upon your death. You can set aside a certain percentage of your estate to go to VMC. This is generally a percentage of the remainder after the amount designated for family. If you already have a will, but would like to add VMC to receive a portion of your estate, a simple codicil to your will can be prepared.

Individual Retirement Accounts (IRAs) and Retirement Plans—Naming VMC as the beneficiary of your Retirement Plan or IRA will not cost you anything while you are alive and could provide tax advantages with VMC named as the recipient.

Life Insurance—Naming VMC as the beneficiary of your Life Insurance is another simple way to make a gift.

Gifts of Stock—Giving a gift of publicly traded stock is another avenue of gifting to VMC.

All of the above are simple ways to support VMC which you may not have considered. Please keep VMC in mind when it comes time to do your estate planning. You can make a difference in VMC's long term goals of ending homelessness and homeless prevention.

For further information on how you can make a gift to VMC, please contact Mary Beth Ramey at 865-524-3926 or via email at mramey@vmcinc.org.

Why I Volunteer at VMC

By Pattie Thiele

A major theme of my family and church during my youth was that God gave each individual unique talents, abilities, and skills and that we have a responsibility to use those gifts not only for ourselves but also for others.

When my husband and I moved to Tennessee, there were many places to volunteer and I explored several of them, but there was a nagging feeling that there would be something useful I could do for the VMC because two women I admire attend the same Bible study I do, and they often mentioned their work at VMC. At that time, I was in the throes of a four year program called Education for Ministry at Church. This program involves a great deal of study and time, but its overarching intent is to help people discover where their life's ministry might lie.

Ironically, three weeks prior to completing the fourth year, there was a tiny blurb in our Church newsletter

asking for a Dental Assistant at the Dental Clinic of the Volunteer Ministry Center. I didn't even know that there was a Dental Clinic. Nonetheless, I had spent the first seventeen years of my professional life as a Dental Hygienist, and although I wasn't licensed in Tennessee, I thought maybe God was telling me that now was the time to get involved in VMC. So I called and began working with Dr. Carter Davis, one of our wonderful volunteer dentists. In the beginning, we weren't in the beautiful new VMC building that now houses us. Just as the new building at Fifth and Broadway was completed, I got my license to practice in Tennessee. And the rest, as they say, is history!

None of my volunteer work in the past has given me such joy! Seeing great big smiles when a formerly toothless person gets a set of dentures; helping teach folks about oral health and seeing positive results; hearing many "Bless you all" and "Thanks for making it stop hurting" and "What do you mean I don't have to pay anything?"; seeing folks routinely for cleanings when they may never have had their teeth cleaned before make every minute worthwhile. And knowing that but for the grace of God our roles could be reversed helps me to see each patient as a person with family, hurts, joys, problems and worth!



Pattie Thiele, Volunteer Dental Hygienist



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Ginny Weatherstone
Chief Executive Officer



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September 2011

Dear Friend of VMC,

My son has lost his job. He was working for a computer company in Chattanooga. It is a national outfit that had an office there. My son had seen the writing on the wall and knew that the local office would, in all likelihood, be closing. Still, when the day dawned, he came face-to-face with the stark reality of unemployment.

So he begins the process of job hunting, along with over 9% of our national population. It is discouraging to say the least. He is living once again under our roof and, while he is grateful to be there, he mourns his lost independence.

Times are tight for so many people, and what has happened to our son has happened to many others. The difference is that many people do not have the safety net that he has. A recent survey among homeless men in Knoxville reveals that the number one cause of their homelessness is loss of job.

Even as we try to do what we can to help our son, we realize our obligation to help those who have no family support. I look into the face of the newly homeless and know that they suffer the same discouragement, the same challenges that our son faces. But they face those things alone.

Well, not quite. Knoxville is a caring community – and it needs to be in these economic times. It is true that no matter how hard things may be for us, they are even more difficult for someone else. And there is a good chance that that person will come to VMC for help.

And that is why I write to you. VMC is a safety net for so many people, helping them find the hope and help they need to begin again. Our budget is always tight, and it is even more so now as our numbers go up. Please help us reach out to those who have fallen on hard times. We need your generous contributions now more than ever.

My heart reaches out to my son. Let your heart reach out to the others who need it too.

Thank you,

Ginny Weatherstone
Chief Executive Officer

Ending Homelessness – One Person at a Time



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READY TO RUN!

The Ready to Run Team, featuring Honorary Race Chair Lori Tucker of WATE-TV and Kim Hansard of Star 102.1, invite you to join them in the VMC 5K Race and Fun Walk on September 24th at World's Fair Park Festival Lawn. Yes, the Race is right around the corner, but there is still time for you to register. Registration is ongoing up to and including the morning of the Race; and the entry fee is \$25.00. Not a runner or a walker? You can still support VMC by registering and "sleeping in," or you can raise pledges for some great prizes. The First Place Pledge-Raising Prize is a Two-Night Stay at the InterContinental Hotel in Atlanta, Georgia; the Second Place Pledge-Raising Prize is a \$500 Pilot Oil Gift Card; and the Third Place Pledge-Raising Prize is a catered meal for ten from The Lunchbox. Raising pledges is a great way to support VMC and, who knows – you just may end up winning a great prize! For additional information on pledge-raising and/or race registration contact Karol Harper at 524-3926 or go to VMC's website at vmcinc.org.

