

UBUNTU

I am Human through Your Humanity



The Patients Journal at Barbara McInnis House
Spring 2008

FOREWORD

Growing up in a humble family in Third-World Haiti, I quickly learned that life was not a free ride. Abandoned by my father before birth, I was single-handedly raised by my mother. Although she left her peasant lifestyle at the age of seventeen to look for better life opportunities in Haitian capital, my mother made sure that I benefited from her experiential knowledge of Haitian social class system. Fortunately our shared hardships did not break us but made us stronger, unlike other poor Haitian women and their children who are often driven to the streets to sleep, beg for food, and find petty jobs to survive. In other words, my mother and I were among the lucky ones for not only having a roof over our heads but also for having each other.

Since I started working with the homeless back in 2002, I soon realized that homeless in America and those in Haiti not only come from broken families, but they also share similar history filled with pain, abuse, loneliness, isolation and desperation. After joining BHCHP last year, I was inspired by the late Sabrina Jennings (former patient) and guided by Paula Mathieu (from Boston College) to create a safe and supportive venue for the patients at Barbara McInnis House (BMH) to tell their stories in their own words, empower themselves, inspire others, and let their voices be heard beyond the BMH facility. I am very thankful to everyone, especially staff and volunteers, who have shared my vision and also contributed to make this idea a reality. Most of all, I am forever grateful to McInnis House patients for trusting me with their stories, teaching me about their struggles and fears day after day, and inspiring me with their courage and hope.

*Yves Augustin
Respite Case Manager*

Pilot Project for Ubuntu¹ Journal

“I am human by interacting with your humanity.”

Barbara McInnis House □
Boston Healthcare for the Homeless
461 Walnut Avenue □
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
Contact: Yves Augustin

Purpose:

Homeless individuals staying at the Barbara McInnis House (BMH) receive "medical respite care," short-term medical and recuperative services for those far too ill for life in shelters but not sick enough to warrant a hospital stay. The 90-bed inpatient facility provides a safety net for homeless adults with complex health issues. While recuperating at McInnis House, patients have temporary housing stability and time for recuperation, which offers them a unique opportunity to reflect on their lives and dialogue with others. Some of these patients, as part of this reflection, might want to share their stories, either through writing or talking with an empathetic listener.

The purpose of the *Ubuntu Journal* project is to gather and share the diverse and inspiring experiences of patients at BMH in narrative form through an internal newsletter and possibly for external publication and distribution. Sharing one's experiences can be empowering and therapeutic for the participating patient, but can also inspire and empower readers/fellow patients, while facilitating a sense of shared experience and solidarity. Recent published articles show that writing or sharing one's experiences can help combat depression in patients,² and is becoming an increasingly important component of the health-care environment worldwide.³

¹ a Zulu word, literally meaning “humanness.” Ubuntu is a social and spiritual philosophy serving as a framework for African society. Its essential meaning can be conveyed using the Zulu maxim “umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu”—meaning, in essence, “a person is a person through other persons.” The practice of ubuntu is fundamentally inclusive, involving respect and concern for one's family and one's neighbors. It also implies respect for one's ancestors, in a deeper spiritual sense. Ubuntu defines the individual as a component of a greater (inclusive) collective whole, and it stresses social consciousness and unity.... □ www.allaboutjazz.com/php/article.php

² Lacey, Hester. “Real Bodies: Write It All Down. You’ll Feel Better. Research Shows that Putting Pen to Paper Can Help Patients Overcome Depression.” *The Independent* (London) August 29, 1999, p. 9.

³ Chew, Julianne. “Artful Healing of Body and Soul.” *New Straits Times* (Malaysia) May 20, 2001, p. 10.

Proposal

To test whether and how the telling, writing and sharing of stories would play a positive role for patients at BMH, we plan a small pilot project for February-April of 2008, to work with interested patients, engaging them in conversation and discussion about their lives, and assembling stories. Stories will be gathered by interested staff member who volunteer to take part in the project and other McInnis House volunteers, both groups who already spend a good deal of time with patients and are skilled at empathetic ways of engaging in dialogue. Patients will be offered the opportunity to participate but not persuaded to do so. Anyone interested in participating will have a consent form read to them and must sign in order to indicate their willingness.

The *Ubuntu Journal* project will be led, internally, by Yves Augustin, Case Manager at BMH, and assisted by Paula Mathieu, Associate Professor of English at Boston College, who has been involved in writing groups and publishing by homeless people for the past decade. A pilot issue of *Ubuntu Journal* will be published in September 2008. Quantities will be limited as this project will run solely on the donated times and costs by project leaders and participants.

Upon publication of the *Ubuntu Journal* pilot issue, the leading facilitators of the project would be interested in meeting again with the director of BMH to discuss if and how the project should continue. At this time, the project team would be happy to explore avenues to raise funds for the project, should all agree that it should continue.

Contact Information

Yves Augustin
Case Manager
Barbara McInnis House
461 Walnut Avenue
02467
(857) 654-1734
yaugustin@bhchp.org

Paula Mathieu, Ph.D.
English Department
Boston College
Chestnut Hill, MA
(617) 552-3730
mathiepa@bc.edu

US

*How will I see
Your needs in the present
Your mistakes of the past
Your goals for the future*

*How will you hear
My cry for liberty
My right to equality
My request for fraternity*

*How will I feel
The pain of your body
The sorrow of your heart
The suffering of your soul*

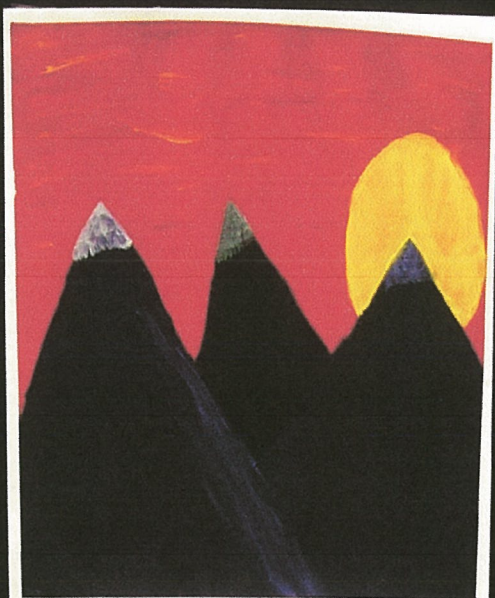
*How will you taste
My vision of love
My thirst of truth
My beliefs in justice*

*How will I touch
The lines of your wisdom
The traces of your faith
The steps of your hope*

*How will you say
We are the same
If we don't cry together
How will I say
We are the same
If we don't fight together
How will we say
We are the same
If we don't love each other*

Yves

The Devil's Playground



Linda Taylor
"US"
Acrylic on paper
2018



The Devil's Playground

Idle Hands is the Devil's Playground, my Mama used to tell
 So as a child I'd toyed n fiddled, scared to go to Hell
 I'd busied myself in the Simplest of things, determined not to become
 The playground for the Devil or yet even worse
 A place where Evil calls home

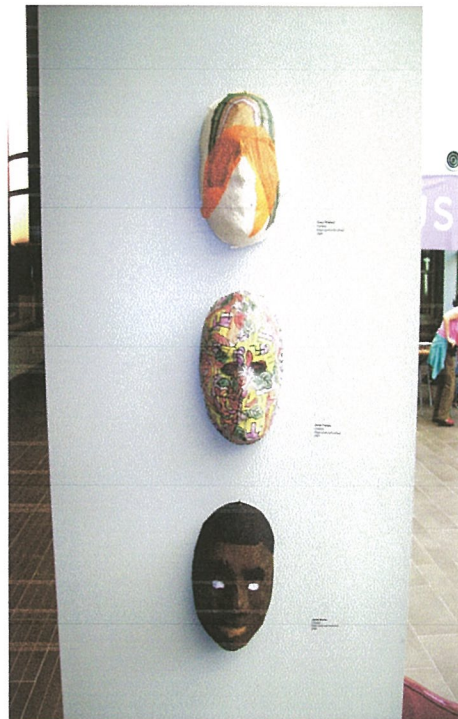
Idle hands is the Devil's work, my Mama used to tell
 So at eleven I'd lit a cigarette, coughing as I'd inhale
 I'd busied myself in the popular things, thinking I would not become
 The work of the Devil or yet even worse
 A place where Evil calls home

Idle hands is the Devils best friend, my Mama used to tell
 So at 12 years old I'd rolled up some weed, perfecting every Detail
 I'd busied myself in the funniest of things, convinced I could not become
 The best friend of the Devil or yet even worse
 A place where Evil calls home

Idle hands is the Devils Joy, my Mama used to tell
 So at 16 While on the streets deep into a bottle I fell
 I'd busied myself in the coolest of things, certain I had not become
 The Joy of the Devil or yet even Worse
 A place where Evil calls home

Idle hands and the Devil, was my mamas worst Nightmare
 And years after she'd gone I'd cried when I realized
 The Devil lives comfortably here
 For all her warnings of Idle Hands, Mama left out one detail...
 Be mindful of *How* you avoid Idle Hands or you still end up Living in Hell!

By Keisha Taylor



[Untitled]

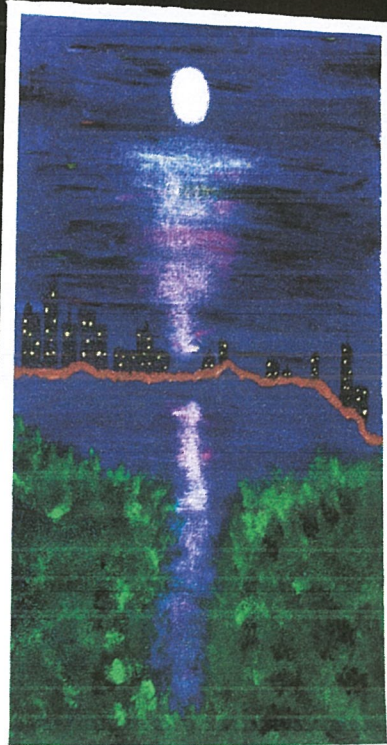
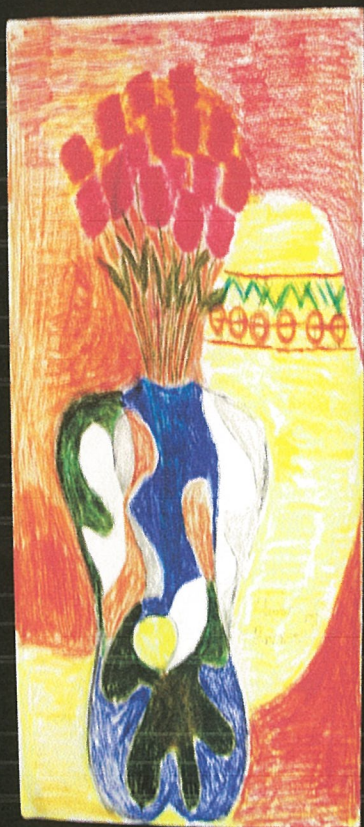
*A single Rose grows alone along a city block,
A single Rose, All Alone, grows and breaks through Rock,
A single Rose, so beautiful, shines brightly through Concrete.
A single Rose, strong and Bold, Mindless of Defeat.*

*This Single Rose, So Full of Life, Nobody understands.
This Single Rose, so saddened, by Life's heavy demands.
This Single Rose, against all odds, survives Time and again.
This single Rose, still so young, Life had hardly began.*

*A single Rose, so independent, Thrives with Love & care.
A single Rose, so Lonely, knows well hurt, pain, despair.
A single Rose, seems meager, up against this city block,
A single Rose, not failing to keep breaking through this Rock,*

*This single Rose, day by day, stepped over many times.
This single Rose, so soft and sweet, hardened by the grime.
This single Rose, meant to be Loved, when started out, you see...
This single Rose, unfortunately, well I guess this Rose is me.*

Keisha Taylor



March, 2008

To All Staff and Nurses,

**This is a letter of great importance. I sincerely
Appreciate the help and care and the
quality of it that you All have given.
I came in here hopeless, sick, Broken
Down both emotionally and spiritually
And had no desire for life as we know it.**

**And Also the deepest apology
For my Attitude the first week and a
Half I was here. I was Afraid of what
Was happening to met, I thought I was
Going to a nursing home. And so I became
Carefree and reckless.**

**To Matt Joslyn And
The providers Thank you And May God
(Jevoah) bless you Abundantly. You make
Me feel when I had no reason to, you made
me walk, talk and better off.**

**Thanks to All of you. Truly
You have given back a life as we
Know it in this system of things
And Know that given any situations,
In Any Region Around Massachusetts
I will and shall survive.**

Much Love And Thanks

Angelia Brown



Poems by RJW

Who Am I

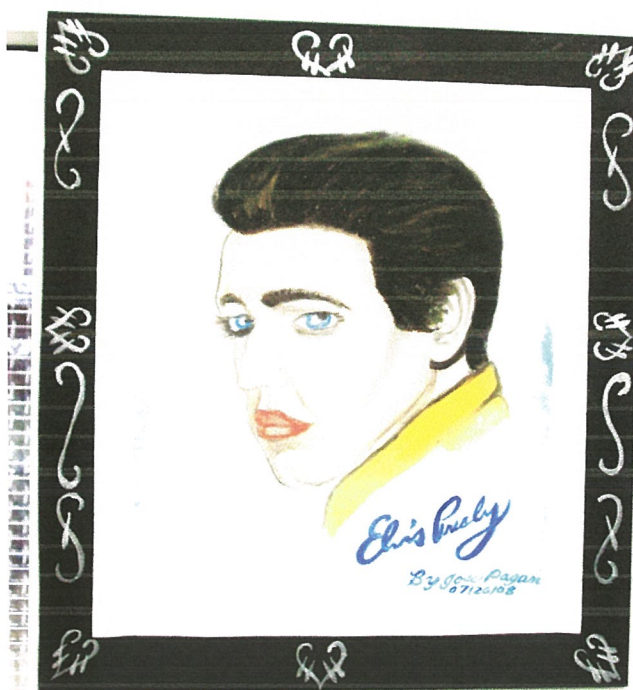
Why do I do
 These things to me
 Is it craziness
 Is it just being me
 People not trusting
 Being dishonest and lying
 Is this the way to be
 How do I overcome
 This feeling of not being me
 Why can't I be honest
 Do I want to be
 Someone else but me
 Me who am I
 Not someone else
 But just plain old me
 Who am I

Snowflake

I am like a snowflake
 Flowing on The wind
 Never knowing which way to go
 Falling, Falling, lower and lower
 Do I fall to the earth
 Melting away to a drop
 Drying up to the wind
 Becoming nothing once again

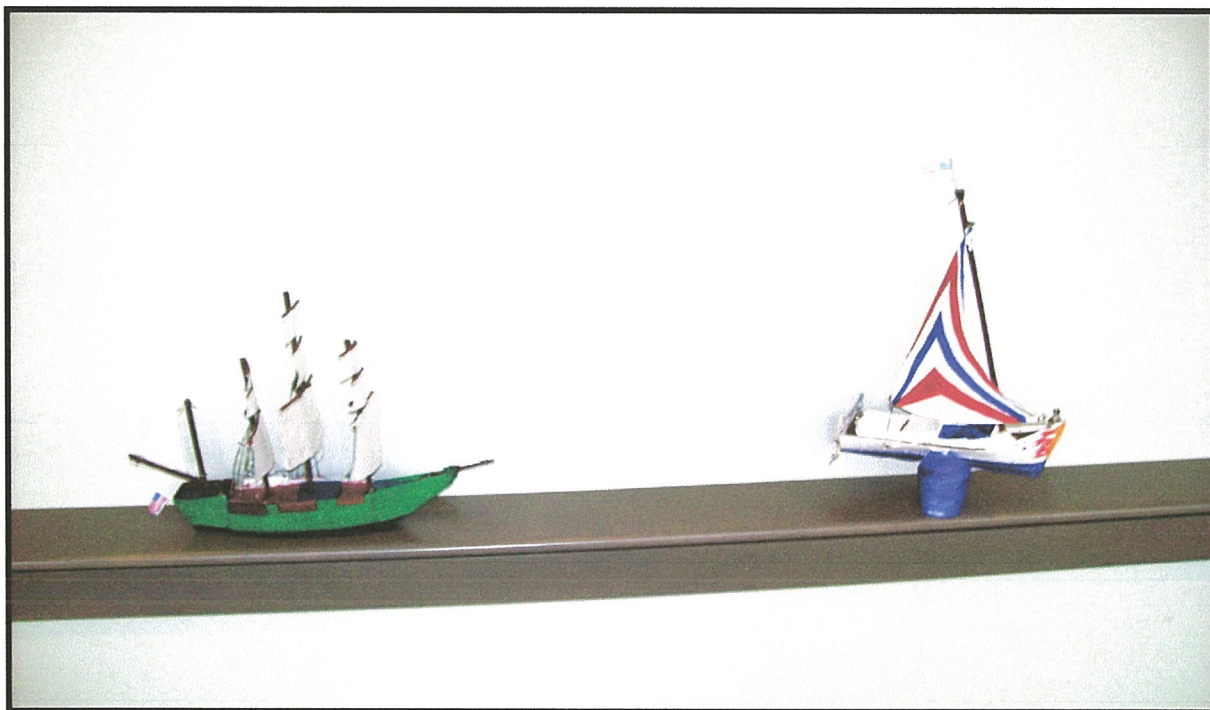
Pain

My pain I feel
 Inside and out
 Hurting through and through
 From my heart and my mind
 My mind is in loneliness
 Fear despair and regret
 I feel the pain
 Physically beaten and tormented
 I feel the pain
 When will the pain stop
 In my heart and my mind
 Do I Live in nothingness
 Where there is no pain
 Do I Live in a world
 Where there is so much pain
 Pain Pain when will it stop
 In my heart and my mind



You're like the first time that
I crave for delicious ecstasy that
Only I can get out [of] you. You became
My lover, my friend, my husband,
My everything. I depend on you
To help set my soul that's on fire
With Rage and Anger free. I
Realize I depend on you too much
Please. I ask that you respectfully
Forgive me. Stand beside me, watch me
Grow. Watch me change that hellcat
into the woman I deserve into the
Woman you deserve.
So come and Rescue
Me you who I am.
I am
For you.

Angelina B.





Letters by John Lenahan

Sorry

When [I was] young there [were] two ways to learn something. One way [was the] hard way [while] the other easy. Most [of the] times, I found the hard way. What made up way the hard way. The only thing was [an] excuse that was what I wanted. Most times, [it] was the easy way and then there was without exception my way. This went on for thirty years and after that I was to need medical help without question.

So now, I look forward to live a second more. Things are bad, life is hard. And I at the bottom of the toilet hole, with little faith about life. 5/10/08

[Untitled]

Delusional, despair- way, without family among [the] homeless, alone, medically sick, [all this] is a very hard way for a family.

The life I live is more than different- sad, undesirable way to live. Only to know if this wasn't the richest country that there is. With poverty saved from insurance the United States shares. Plus the best state in the union. What would happen? Without help and how to end up this way. Over and over again and again, life on life's terms is the closest way. I can make it out to be. Just constant despair and loneliness. A fight for life.

This is the story of my life and told not to quit or things will be unlivable than what they are. 2/08

Dear Yves,

My time with the Barbara McInnis House is over and I know how you feel about writing so I would like to write about the third world and my self. Thing's aren't easy out there and I will be told what is expected of me. Never mind to be at the meeting Tuesday but just for a phone call to you, either way, thank you for your understanding my turmoil with life and try to stay in touch either way phone or person.

Well, stay healthy and say good bye to Maia for me. I will try to call before I visit the Tuesday night meetings.

Your friend,
John Lenahan

Poems by H₂O

Living On the Streets With My Brown Leather Bag!

I wake each day in a very different way
I don't live in a nice big house with
All nice things! Because if you remember,
I'm living on the streets
With my brown leather bag!

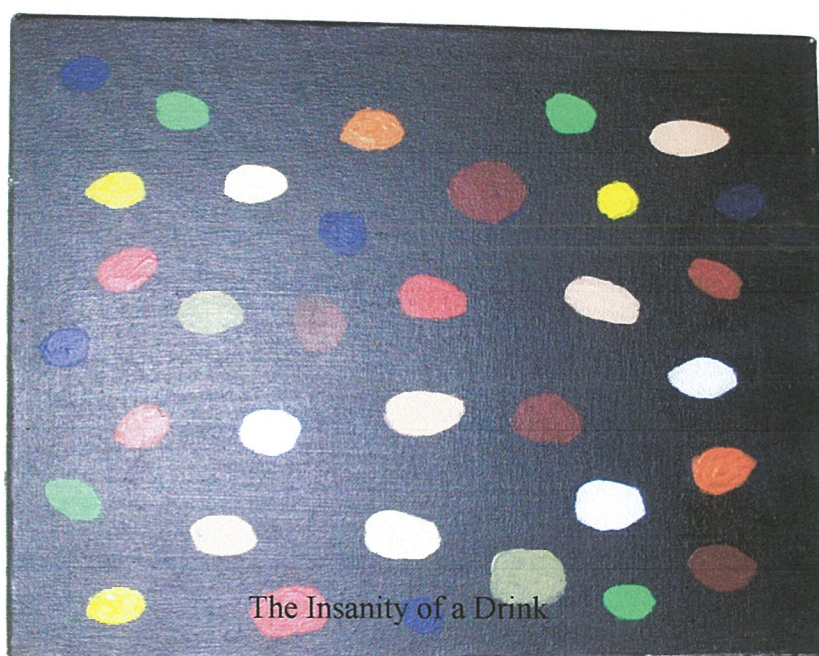
I don't wake up-n-rush around to
Shower and shave-n-get ready for
Work-n-things! Because if you remember,
I'm living on the streets
With my brown leather bag!

I don't work or shop around like
Most people do. Because if you remember,
I live on the streets with my brown leather bag!

I start my day in a different way!
I pray to god each & every day, I
Ask him how much longer will
I have to live on the street
With my brown leather bag
Or have some of the nice little things in life
Even if it just for a single day. That's what
I pray for each & every day!

Not me!

Each and every day we all
Come and go!
We see them here n there
Everywhere! We say don't
Bother me, go away! We
Don't have any spare change!
Today or any other day!
We say things like your dirty,
Or stinky or get a job or
Do something! We don't care!
About their problems
We have our own! We say that
Will never happen to me!
But today I see a difference
Things in a different way!
For now it is me who lives
On the street



Why there are problems with drinking and life- circumstances plus repercussions over 30 years.
Where will it take you?

- Back alleys and the grey rain with MD 20-20
- Getting jumped in Chinatown after drinking
- Finding myself in spaces, buildings, rooms that I had no clue as to how I got there
- Good times, bad reflections, lost brain cells
- Street life and some violence on the railroads, outdoor living losing clothes, losing respect for myself, losing friends after seeing them during good times
- Stealing when least expecting it after the booze
- Paranoid anger- projecting negative- taking my good side
- Looking into mirrors in disbelief
- Remarks from (used to be) close friends who can't believe it (along with family members)
- Showed up at Copley Mall seeing my brothers- drunk out of my mind!
- Half-way houses, lost opportunities for employment, waking off jobs, pissed off at bosses or co-workers, drinking on the job
- Delusions of grandeur, insane thinking, promiscuous behavior, other side of midnight
- Living in the darkness of another identity
- Lots of good times and animation, dangerous risks, shattered life, stupid fuzzy thinking and excessive drinking
- Lost time with friends and families, wallets, phone numbers, money with bloody marks unknown, blackout, thrown out of bars
- Getting assaulted outside of trains, lost of memory, flashbacks of something crazy months later
- Thinking racy thoughts about combination of experiences combined with dreams and nightmares, panic attacks, missed appointments, isolation from people, angry frustrations, strange projections of other people's thoughts
- Pushing family away, reading their minds
- Going to family events in a strange unlikely atmosphere of abrasive strange obscure vibes
- True things that happened but cannot prove only if God is my witness
- Reading and interpreting life in a creative psychotic bizarre, schizophrenic mind blasting dreamy blurry twisted sexual fantasies of violent extremes
- Wishing for drinks in coffee shops, finding myself drinking by a beautiful river in the deep snow, sitting on flat rocks next to a bridge and thinking the passing cold river is positive in its way
- Seeing dying people, viscous thinking, great parties, roaming the streets in the dark by city lights, hitchhiking, strangers giving rides to a great night or in to a blind alley and getting assaulted when least expecting it
- Getting robbed drunk crazy
- Riding thirtieth bicycle drunk- sway... hitting an older lady or getting hit by a bus.
- Sleeping with strangers unprotected and sharing needles and straws getting hepatitis C
- Screaming and blaming
- Frontal lobotomy
- Guilt about a daughter I haven't seen in a years
- Surrounded by a hurricane of phantoms and demons

- Fire clashing with visions of violence
- Complete motor head with dancing away into the night
- Morning drinking with no money and going stealing
- Reliving all this stuff and the losses and AA and NA meetings and the insane jargon and truths of absolute tragedy
- Torn clothes, sleeping out in the Boston Commons, Rowes Wharf, by the rivers, the bushes, behind houses, under porches during rain and storms- at two or four o'clock
- Wobbling down dark streets, no street lights with no place to go, staying in a ghost car for ten minutes
- Sleeping on a train, awoken by conductor on the D- line in the winter with my bottle of rum on a platform
- Sleeping on a platform, to a vast white parking lot
- Wanting things but I don't have the money
- Going to the job next day, looking like hell and reeking of alcohol with no sleep
- Day by day on memory lane, the blazing torch of fire alcohol, melancholy memories of burning time
- Swinging tree to tree, owing money, burning bridges and not caring one damn second the minute I pick up alcohol
- Abstaining for a month, the relapses- smooth drinking and burning pleasure, guilt, remorse
- Justifying drinking, thinking its cool looking at the dark side of the moon, not realizing settling for less, less, less in disbelief that I can do it looking feeling like a zombie

Hoping to be dry, looking good, hugging my brother, being friendly to my neighbors in safety and looking forward to optimism with hope, dignity, respect and courage.

Matthew Chartier

07/21/08



Volunteers Statements

Umar Salimi

UBUNTU Journal Project: *A Statement of Why I Volunteered*

I could not help but be intrigued and drawn to this literary effort of the Barbara McInnis House by the unique term chosen to describe the project. Ubuntu, a Zulu expression of humanity that endears people to one another and inspires them to discover and embrace the differences among us, including homelessness. What appeals to me more though is the opportunity to work with McInnis House patients themselves. A diverse array of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds, this is a truly unique, special group united by the common factor of homelessness. Through my everyday duties as an Americorps member interacting with patients in activities and clinically, I am constantly engaged in conversation with one or a number of our McInnis House residents. I find the most beneficial aspect of working with Boston Health Care for the Homeless to be far and away the opportunity to hear the personal stories of those we serve. Some will bring joy as you hear of people, places, and times you could only imagine. Others evoke sadness and empathy as you hear of struggles and adversity. Regardless, each of stories our patients choose to share is a fascinating learning experiences in itself.

The patients seen by the Barbara McInnis House and Boston Health Care for the Homeless represent the entire range of humanity, and the common denominator of homelessness, while a tragic circumstance, ensures that each has a unique and remarkable tale to tell. I have been apart of the Ubuntu project to help proliferate those tales, because everyone isn't so outspoken or eager to relate personal circumstances. I feel my role is to be there for the patients in any way they need and provide them with an avenue to share their story, whether it is one on one, as part of a small group, orally, or in writing. And when a patient does let his or her guard down to reveal a bit about who they are and where they're coming from, the benefit is mutual: catharsis for the patient and enlightenment for the listener/reader. This is what makes the Ubuntu collaborative beautiful and worthwhile in my eyes.

Maia Fedyszyn

I was interested in volunteering with the Ubuntu Project because I wanted to interact with McInnis House patients in a more relaxed and creative setting. Working as a case manager, I talk with patients every day about their social needs and discharge plans, but am often not able to learn about what their they desire to accomplish in life, what they most fear, or how they prefer to express themselves.

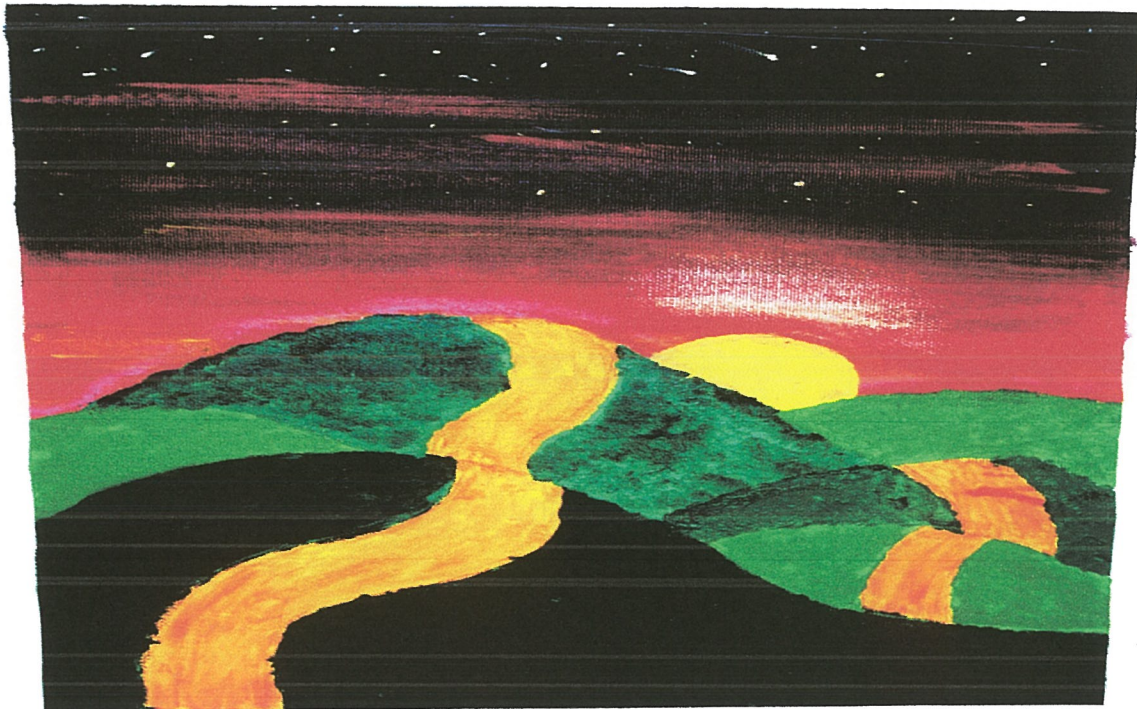
In assisting with the group meetings, listening to the patients speak, and reading their written works, I learned a lot about how different individuals view themselves and the world: one person longed for a companion, one based his worldview on lyrics from Beatles songs, and another talked about how he planned his day when living on the streets. These insights made me better appreciate what our patients go through, and allowed me to view each of them as more distinctive, unique individuals—not just names on a census sheet. While the groups undoubtedly helped me to better understand and empathize with patients, more importantly, they provided the patients a much-needed outlet to communicate their stories.

Phil Stango

I had been volunteering at McInnis House for a while, mostly in the clothing room, but more recently with the case managers when Yves—through a serendipitous overhearing of my being an English major—approached me with an idea he had. Working with one particularly challenging patient and hearing her story, he seemed to realize the inspirational, therapeutic and transformative power of personal histories and wanted to cultivate a way to capture and relay these stories, that others may benefit from them as well. Being an English major, I was naturally excited by the prospect, and, being an English major, I had heard of two classes taught by the same professor: “Literature of Homelessness” and “Writing for Social Change.” I contacted the professor and explained our situation and she was eager to meet with me. She told me of her work in Chicago, where she helped a group of homeless folks with their writing, held writing sessions and ultimately published a body of work. Drawn in by the potential to both empower and heal, to share experiences with housed populations and build solidarity among homeless populations, I was eager to participate. I trust our new building will foster the continuation of Ubuntu and will continue to serve as a resource to our patients.

Mahwish Hashmi

I got into this project by sheer chance and luck. I heard about this project from Umar Salimi at a point when the patients’ writings had been collected but there was little time remaining before the material had to be edited and presented. Umar introduced me to Yves and we clicked immediately, brimming with ideas to refine the patients’ works and to present it in the best way we could. It has been a great honor for me to read these personal accounts and to shape them to a coherent form while trying to maintain their original quality and integrity. I hope and pray that this work provides the readers with a window into our patients’ hearts that need our compassion, patience and support.



Leisha Taylor 7/1/08