

THE OPEN DOOR

FROM THE CORE COMMUNITY OF ANDRE HOUSE

SUMMER 2018



Colette Miller *The Global Angel Wings Project*

ANGELS ON EARTH

"The wings represent our inner angel. They represent, that even though we all come from scarred lives, we all are human, we all have trauma and drama and we are all guilty of doing the wrong thing so many times, I think that we even for a moment can really be the good on this earth and be the angels. If it isn't going to be us, who else is there?"

These are the words of street artist Colette Miller, founder of the Global Angel Wings Project. Living and driving in LA, she began to imagine how much better the buildings would be with angel wings on them. Her thought was to create something uplifting for humanity as a whole. Something healing. Wings cross all cultures, class, religions, race and nationalities. Those with or without a home. *"The wings bring the sky and the heavens down to the streets. We are reminded of our similarities, then our differences. The wings bring together the divine in all of us."* Colette's wings can be viewed across the world, bringing light to the darkest of places as earthly angels come forth to interact with them.

As earthlings view these wings, hopefully we are reminded that we are *"called upon to do the hard work and walk the gritty walk,"* helping those whose life has become difficult. This allows us to see the angels in all. To become the angels on this earth. We are all angels on this earth. We at Andre House bear witness to that every day. It is for you to discover the angels in each other.

In Fall 2018 Andre House will be honored to become part of the Global Angel Wings Project. After reading the request from Fr. Tom Doyle, Colette will be coming out to Andre House to grace our Jackson St. wall with beautiful wings! *"So many times I have seen the people who are experiencing homelessness serve as angels to one another. Your Angel Wing Project has touched me, and I have wondered out loud what it would be like if our guests saw themselves as angels. Would you lend us a pair of your wings for our facility?"*

Andre House is a place where there are so many invisible angels waiting to become accepted and visible. Many who thought they lost their wings, or do not recognize them, will soon be able to step inside a beautiful pair as they let theirs grow again.

Angels appear in Sacred Scripture from the first book of the Hebrew Bible (Genesis) through the last book in the Christian Canon (Revelation). The word angel comes from the Greek word *angelos*, which translates “messenger”. Angels make manifest the Word and the Love of God to creation. While angels are technically, benevolent celestial beings, that act as intermediaries between heaven and earth, we often associate angelic behavior to particular human beings.

Each day at Andre House, I witness the manifestation of heavenly grace in the tender exchanges between our guests, our volunteers and our staff. My front row seat to such extraordinary goodness may be the most enviable chair in the Church. I would like to share with you an email I received this morning.

“Sir I just want you to know that you have an incredible young lady working there. I'm terribly uncomfortable around new people new places Anna somehow saw and understood that I don't know how but she did and she was incredibly patient and helpful and Im wearing the pants she gave me for a job interview right now to church. If I didn't get these from her I had nothing to wear. Sir thank you from the bottom of my heart cause she took her time and patiently slowly worked w me and I was incredible touched and will never forget. You have an awesome ministry that was a huge help to me w hygiene socks and these pants that came thru Anna and she is a very precious valuable asset to your house. Also on the way out I have no idea how he knew but a long gray haired gentleman handed me 2 donuts and a banana and I was starved and that was my only meal that day sir because CASS decided I didn't need an l'd. For some reason. Sir you have an awesome house and staff and I'm almost crying typing this to you cause I'm so overwhelmed with emotions that there are people like you have there that genuinely want to just help. From the bottom of my heart thank you...”

In fact, we have six wonderful ladies working at Andre House just like Ana. And any of you could have been the gray haired gentleman. While none of us yet have our wings, their buds are bursting from your strong shoulders and generous hands.



Miranda

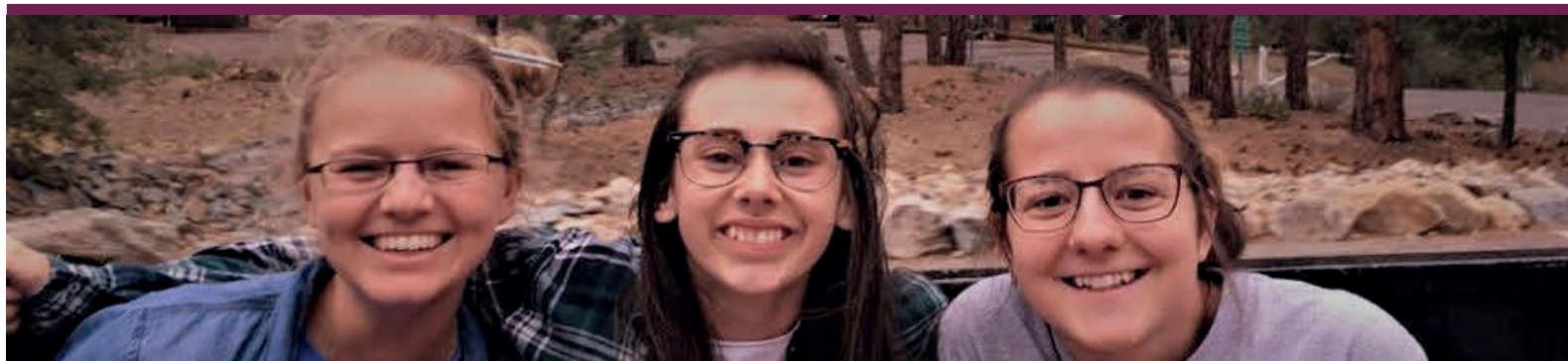
Ana

Lindsey

Ash

Casey

Erin



ANGELS WATCHING OVER ME

Erin Clapp Core Staff 2017-2019

We sat in a circle at our retreat in Prescott, Arizona in July of last year. The cool air and intermittent rain showers provided us with a comfortable space to share our stories. There were seven of us young adults, being led by Brother Richard and Father Tom, ready to jump into a year (or second year) of being present to and serving those most in need. As each individual shared the story of their call to Andre House, I was overcome with emotion as I witnessed how the Holy Spirit had guided each and everyone of us here.

As I now reflect on the time we shared in Prescott, before headed to the heat of Phoenix and intensity of Andre House, I think about these stories. I think about how this year has given us all the space to grow with each other and with God.

I think about all we have been through this year, the highs and the lows, the staffing challenges, the times when we sat home crying together because of hard days or laughing uncontrollably about a silly encounter we had that day. Not one of us could have made it through this year alone or without the support of each other.

I will be staying another year at Andre House and saying goodbye to some of the angels who held me up when I was falling or who wiped my tears as I wept. These are the angels whom I choose to write about today.

To Lindsey, our fearless leader. Thank you for sharing with me your gift of compassion and your extraordinary ability to be present with people in their suffering and in their moments of great joy. I have learned so much from you.

To Ash, my great pal. Thank you for the constant laughs and friendship. Whether you are being someone's personal shopper or advocating for our guests, you have proven to me that love knows no bounds.

To Casey and our ever blossoming friendship. Thank you for your unwavering faith in God and for sharing this with the community. And for constantly reminding us that in times of struggle or uncertainty or great joy, we can always pray.

To Ana, mi amiga bella. Thank you for using your gift of the Spanish language to help break down the language barrier and allowing our guests to feel comfortable to share their stories.

To Miranda, my closest friend. Thank you for taking the leap of faith at Andre House and for your consistent and supportive presence to the guests and to me.



Without these people and without the community of Andre House, none of the work we do would be possible. I am beyond thankful for these angels being sent to my life to love and support me and each of our guests. As my angels begin to leave in the coming months I will certainly grieve the loss but am excited for them to continue touching the lives of those who need it most.





HEAVEN CAN BE A PLACE ON EARTH (If We Work For It) *Ash Uss Core Staff 2017-2018*

When I was a senior in high school, selecting my senior quote was a daunting task. I was resolute in knowing that I wanted my senior quote to be one of my favorite Grateful Dead lyrics: "I might be goin to hell in a bucket, but at least I'm enjoyin the ride." That wasn't going to be okay at my Lutheran school. I ended up selecting a beautiful song lyric from a great Dave Matthews Song about cherishing the sweetness of life. My last words to my high school class were, "Celebrate we will, cause life is short but sweet for certain."

Even though I had to contain the "Deadhead" within me, my senior quote carried the weight of the message I was am trying to communicate. These song lyrics speak to the joy and the delight of embracing each unexpected turn of fate. They invite us, as people, to enjoy and celebrate. I've always been someone with an affinity for maximizing each breath of each day, the rays of the sun on my skin and a salty breeze blowing the hairs on the back of my neck. I tried to preserve the sweetness of life.

Time and time again, I've asked myself, where is God in all of this? Who is going to intervene? As a Catholic, I believe in God. I believe that God protects his people and that there are angels we pray to, with the hope that they will keep us safe and guided. So who protects our guests on the streets? Which angel is watching over someone and allows them to be choked out violently? Who is watching over the guest who falls asleep on the street and wakes up to find his shoes have been stolen off his blistered feet?

I came to Andre House expecting that my joy and my compassion could make life sweeter for some of our guests. And in some ways, it has. What's been remarkable to me, though, is just how sweet our guests have made my life. As I continue on my path, I'll be bringing some amazing memories with me. Memories of dancing down the food line and sipping cold sodas from the soda man on the sidewalks outside of Andre House. But the most important thing I've learned in my time here is that there's no need for there to be such a stark difference between life in the Zone, and life in Heaven.

As a Catholic, I believe in the Kingdom of Heaven. I believe that

when my time on earth concludes, I will be swept away into some version of new life (hopefully one with a lot more Grateful Dead jam bands and gourmet ice cream). But my time at Andre House has motivated me to work tirelessly so that our guests are not awaiting the reward for them in Heaven, but instead are reaping the rewards of a dignified and meaningful life, which they deserve merely by being children of God.

I have spent many nights awake in my bed, staring at the ceiling in disgust at the suffering and sorrow our guests encounter so frequently and so disproportionately. I have tossed and turned, trying to forget about the mental distress and violence our guests overcome each morning when they wake up. I've also beaten myself up for not being able to do more, for having a bed to sleep in when so many people I know and love have nowhere to sleep. Now that my time is winding down, I realize in my heart and soul that guilt doesn't create change. Actions do. Thoughtfulness and resilience create change.

In the winter, I went to the Women's March with a fellow core staff member and a regular volunteer. We joined thousands of people marching on the well-kept grass at the Arizona State Capitol, the soles of our shoes standing resolute in the notion that people should not be discriminated against because of their gender or any other part of their identity. Recently, we organized guests and volunteers to show up at city council meetings and demand that our elected officials and community members begin to care about our friends on the streets. I came to Andre House with the hope of merely being with people in their suffering. I am leaving with the determination to try and reduce that suffering.

It is therefore my goal to actively play a role in making life sweeter for our guests and for people experiencing homelessness. What does that look like? In my mind, that looks like a world where instead of criminalizing poverty, we realize our complacency and our influence in it. In my mind, making life sweeter means more than exchanging smiles and love. It means exchanging discriminatory



Ash and her Mom

housing policies with ones that allow young families of all ethnicities to raise kids in neighborhoods with good schools and parks. It means providing all people with access to housing, whether they experience mental illness or were once convicted of felony or a DUI. I see God when I close my eyes and imagine a city where people are safe and loved. I don't believe that anyone should have to wait for Heaven, to feel protected and cared for.

And so I want to leave another Dave Matthews lyric as my parting message from Andre House, because it's a powerful message and because there aren't a whole lot of "Deadheads" at Andre House. Dave Matthews so beautifully sings:

*Don't give up, I know you can see
all the world and the mess that we're making.
Can't give up and hope God will intercede.
Come on back, imagine that we could get it together
Stand up for what we need to be.*

***Ash Uss has a B.A. in Sociology from Emmanuel College.
"I am staying here in Phoenix to stand up for what we need to be,
what we need to try and create solutions for . I trust in God, more
than I did when I first got to Andre House. God does provide. But
I understand that my trust in God and my willingness to create
change are not competing forces. As a matter of fact, they go
hand in hand. It's because God placed me here in Phoenix that I
have a roaring passion in my heart for changing policies and
systems that keep our guests down. God bless Andre House. And
God bless our guests, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (on
earth– the corner of 11th Ave. and Jackson street)."***



Lindsey

GOD IS RIGHT HERE

Lindsey Myers Core Staff 2016-2018

"We're a family out here," She said as she described her first week experiencing homelessness in Arizona. Pointing to a young man in the room, "I've been taken care of. This man right here... He gave me his blankets when I was sleeping on a towel. He protects so many of us." She looked at me and said, "You don't know what it's like to be one of us. People say 'Go get a job,' well how am I supposed to do that when I feel disgusting, when I haven't showered in a week. It's not that easy. But I'm not giving up."

When I think angel, I think divine amidst human. Sorrow and joy somehow united. Life mysteriously emerging when suffering overwhelms. Subtle beauty when our brokenness feels overbearing.

The question I've asked over and over again during my years here is "God, where are you in your people's suffering?" It's one thing to read a book of theology that says God is in the outcast, it's another to see human beings abandoned. It's one thing to hear the churches say "God loves you," it's another to be confronted with our raw selves. I'm learning that perhaps the answer to this question is not found in looking at our own wounds and those on 11th Ave and Jackson Street, and even those of the whole world. Maybe the answer lies somewhere in remembering that there is more to the story than abandonment, brokenness, suffering.

Andre House guests, you have taught me this. It is you who suffer much that have taught me about joy, resilience; that suffering doesn't have the last word. When sharing is embraced among you who have so little, hope arises. It comes in your tired smiles. It is heard in your singing along to Abba. It is held in your hugs that welcome me. It abides in your stories of perseverance. Hope endures in your humble remark-- "I'm blessed."

It is not us who open the door to you that are angels; it is you who come through our doors. For it is you who look out for one another when you have nothing; giving of your blankets and giving of yourselves. It is you who know adversity, who have experienced violence, homelessness, marginalization and yet say "I will not give up."

So where is God? Well, it may just be that God is right here, in you. God is in your broken spirit, that cries out. And God is in your spirit which musters, again and again, amidst every and all suffering: HOPE.

Lindsey Myers has her BA in Theology and Philosophy from Azusa Pacific University. She feels the time she's spent at Andre House for the last two years has been a complete gift. She hopes to continue to learn about accompanying folks experiencing suffering and poverty and resolving systemic injustices as she pursues a Masters in Social Justice at Loyola Chicago in August.



A BROKEN LOVE SONG

Miranda Groux Core Staff 2017-2018

FEAR and FINDING ANGELS

Jay Minich Director of Finance and Administration

After each day at Andre House, our community sits down together to share a meal at the men's transitional home. Our community is eclectic. The guests in the home come from all different walks of life. Our Core Staff is diverse in personality. The volunteers are energetic high school students, faithful regulars, and strangers looking for some company. I often laugh at our dinner dynamic.

I most recently found myself laughing at dinner as someone began to sing Belinda Carlisle's "Heaven on Earth" softly under their breath.

Everyone at the dinner table sang quietly, but we only knew one verse:

***Oh baby, do you know what that's worth?
Oh, Heaven is a place on Earth.
They say in Heaven loves comes first.
We'll make Heaven a place on Earth.***

Intentionally off-key and getting progressively worse, people shared both smiles and grimaces as we finished our chili. It was another imperfect ending to an imperfect day on an imperfect Earth.

At Andre House, we are all far from perfect. We are far from making Heaven a place on Earth. We have no end to suffering, no castle in the clouds, and no golden gates. We have an old building, a messy parking lot, and an open door. Our door is open to all the joys and all the sorrows that come with being human. This year, I have learned from hundreds of people— each singing a broken tune and wearing broken angel wings. I am grateful to sing this song of humanity with each person I encounter.

I am singing with the mother who cries on the phone everyday to her daughter. I am singing with the maintenance man as he repairs our building. I am singing with the guy who talks to himself as he eats his spaghetti. I am singing with the person who always asks for the third shower room. I am singing with the man in a white jumpsuit who got released from jail. I am singing with the man in the condiment line wearing a hospital gown. I am singing with the Wednesday volunteers as they cook the beans. I am singing with the resilient young girl battling addiction. I am singing with the migrant who has nowhere to call home. I am singing with my core staff as we clean the bathrooms. I am singing with the man yelling at the top of his lungs that he loves everyone. I singing with the woman who ignores people's smiles as she gets herself through the day. I sing with you.

We sing with each other everyday, through laughter and tears. Andre House is an imperfect, messy, and broken love song. We have a chorus of human beings trying to love like angels. We always fail. In our common failure, we are imperfectly in tune with one another. I think it's the best we can do here on Earth. Thank you for letting me sing with you, Andre House. I love you!

What images come to mind when you envision a homeless individual?? I know when I first began homeless ministry in Chicago in 2009, I typically thought of a 30 to 50 something grungy, dirty, single man, with an angry disposition, little to no work ethic, an addiction to drugs/alcohol, and several abandoned family members. Ten years later, if you ask me the same question, I would answer much differently. I see the faces of courageous, humble, caring, persevering, faithful, generous and hopeful souls, who each somehow reflect back at me my own greed, my own selfish desires, my own neglect, my own lack of compassion, and who choose to forgive me and spend time with me anyways. In short, I see the angelic in each of our beautiful brothers and sisters, who only differ from me in that they simply struggle to have the basic resources they need to survive.

I sometimes think that if I can just pinpoint exactly what issue(s) caused one of our guest's homelessness, I can fix his/her issue, point it out to him/her in an "Ah Ha" moment, and then not have to "deal with" or "worry about" him/her anymore.

But in 5 years working at Andre House and living in Central Phoenix among our guests, what I've come to realize is that it is my own fear of our guests' homelessness that allows their condition to perpetuate. It is my own fear of putting myself out there and spending quality time with our guests that keeps them isolated. It is my own fear of inviting him/her into my home and saying "come in, sit with me, eat with me, let me give you the things you need..." that leaves him/her out on the street each night, and keeps me "safe" from him/her. If I am honest about what it means to be a Christian, I know that Jesus would have responded much differently – and I think my calling as a Christian, is to try and emulate what I think Jesus would have done...for when they were hungry, He gave them food, when they were naked, He gave them clothes, and when they were strangers, He certainly welcomed them in.

Miranda graduated from Saint Anselm College in May of 2017. She has spent the last year at Andre House, and will be returning to New England to continue nonprofit work.



LOVE FROM ABOVE *Casey Whitehead Core Staff 2017-2018*

My grandma Whitehead is the reason I am Catholic. She was one who carried around rosary beads, went to church every Sunday, made the sign of the cross when emergency vehicles raced past us in traffic. Grandma prayed for the intercession of her guardian angel for everyone she has ever known ever, and those she has never met. It is through constant prayer like my grandmas that the face of Christ is seen among us. As Dr. Paul Farmer said once "Aha, you have to listen to messages from angels."

Andre House is filled with God moments. Moments of prayer in the office and everyone falls silent. Moments of teaching the rosary during dinner at the prayer table. Beautiful moments where people come together as one to share in our humanity. Andre House is not top down; we are a place of joy and suffering meeting together over simple needs – a meal, some vitamins, a cup of water, needing to charge a phone.

In the clothing closet last week I was facing a lot of discernment and the time for major decisions was upon me. I'm thinking about all of these things in my head and I guess my face is an open book, because our guests are asking me what's going on and how I am doing. Andre House being a real place, I say what is on my heart and mind. A man named Angel is shopping for clothes and comes hears me talking – he ushers me over. I pull up a chair and share with him. He shares what has brought him over to Andre House and that he is staying in CASS, how he recently was in an accident and wheel-chair bound. Angel gives me advice and we spent 20 minutes talking and praying for each other. I had never seen him before and wow my conversation with him was exactly what I needed. Two days after this a volunteer brings me prayer goodies and it is a guardian angel coin. More time after this I hear the theme of the newsletter is angels. Coincidence? Divine providence potentially. Our God is a good and gracious God, providing for us what we need when we need it spiritually. He loves us unconditionally, no matter status of guest, staff, volunteer, or donor.

When you stop pushing against the wall, and you let go and let God do what he needs to do in your life, your heart just might grow wings of happiness for how much you have to be thankful for.

In May 2017 Casey graduated for Truman State University located in Kirksville, MO with a degree in criminal justice and sociology.

Casey has accepted a position as a mobile victim advocate at a domestic violence shelter here in Phoenix.



Casey

SO MANY ANGELS AT ANDRE HOUSE...

serving and being served ... thank you for blessing us with your presence !





André House
of Arizona

ANDRE HOUSE
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Phoenix, AZ 85001
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www.andrehouse.org
www.andrehouse.volunteerhub.com

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*“Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers,
for by doing that some have entertained angels
without knowing it.”*

Hebrews 13:2