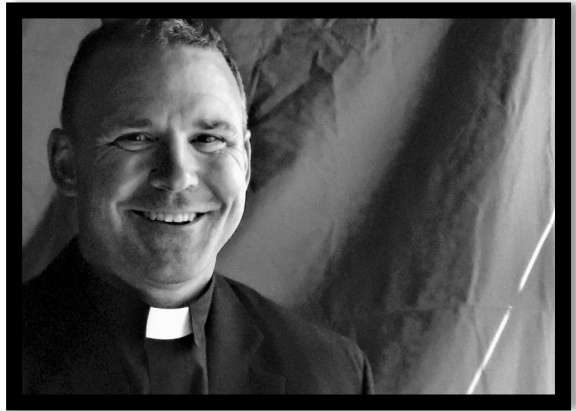


THE OPEN DOOR

FROM THE CORE COMMUNITY OF ANDRE HOUSE



FALL EDITION 2017



The Black and White of Things

Fr. Thomas Doyle, CSC

The days are getting shorter and darkness is flexing its muscle. By the time that the dishes are done, the floors have been mopped and the parking lot swept, nighttime has swallowed our block of Phoenix. Nighttime around Andre House is scary. But even during the light of day, darkness creeps in around and sometimes inside Andre House. Racial slurs are slung among our guests. Exposed muscle on the right shoulder of a woman can be seen through the dripping blood where a man threw a bike and hit her. A man who I called the paramedics to our gate for at 7 pm is lying still, deceased, across our street when we return to work the next morning. A blind man came to a member of our staff, humiliated and ashamed of having been raped on the street. He

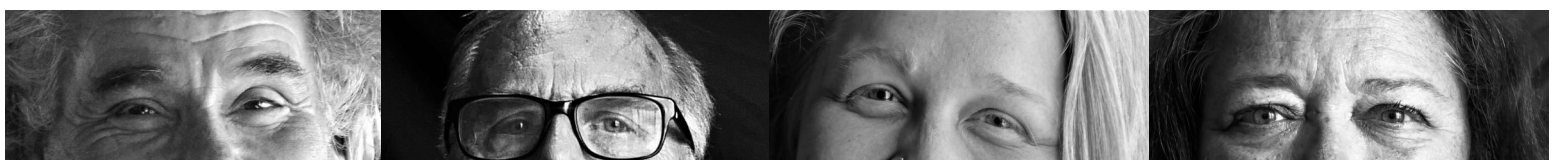
doesn't know exactly where it occurred, and he can't identify his assaulter by sight. As we watch our national news, we see the devastating impacts of both natural and man-made disasters.

I'm often asked, if I get discouraged or despair from all the darkness I witness around Andre House. Honestly, I get bone-tired and cranky and short, but not desperate. I am reminded of the words of the priest at the Easter Vigil, which begins in a pitch-black church. One candle enters the church and the priest cries out "*Jesus Christ is the light of the world! The light no darkness can overcome!*" As the light is shared to the candle of each person in the congregation, the voices join in celebration welcoming the light.

Albert Schweitzer wrote, "Sometimes our light goes out, but is blown again into flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light." The seven beautiful, courageous, strong members of our Core team are so often the ones who rekindle the light. It may seem corny and childish, but some mornings we sing "This Little Light of Mine." Each one of our thousands of volunteers who comes to serve a meal and extend their hands and heart bring a flame of love. Those who keep our guests in prayer are the ones that place a shield of protection around them. The ten dollar check that comes in an envelope with a word of encouragement feeds five hungry bodies and lightens all of our souls.

Andre House believes in the central mystery that we who have been touched by God's light can transform the whole world. Within the month, we will have solar panels covering our roof and parking lot. A thoughtful and generous friend has given Andre House a way to transform the brutal power of the sun into electricity that will cool and light our building and its blessed volunteers and guests.

Is there darkness in the world? Yes! There is a lot of darkness. Do I believe that darkness will reign over the light? No! There is too much evidence, and too many good people who carry the flame of life and light. And to each of you who have brought that light, you have Andre House's deepest thanks.



NOT ALL THINGS BLOOM IN COLOR

Samuel MacDonald

A common cliché exists which states a varying concept of “God uses the most unlikely of people to do incredible things.” I would be lying if I denied the truth of this saying, as the seed of this portrait project was planted in my mind and heart long before its start by the most unlikely of people.

Years ago, I had the pleasure of learning under the instruction of a photographer named Elsa. Elsa was an eccentric and passionate photographer with an interestingly bizarre and diverse past; she was full of off-the-wall tales, emotionally driven ideas, and a vigor for the arts. Her personality and quirky nature kept my attention during long college lectures; I was drawn in by her strangely captivating nature and old soul. At the beginning of my semester under Elsa’s instruction, a proposition was extended to the class – Each student had the option to take a final at the course’s conclusion or carryout a semester-long project and composition in its place. The mission of the assignment was to take our cameras into the projects and downtown areas of Manchester, New Hampshire and look for the impoverished, homeless and street-dwelling men and women. We were tasked with meeting five to seven of these people and asking if they wanted their picture taken. Should they accept, we were to snap a portrait of them in black and white film, develop it, and frame a five-by-eleven copy for them to keep. At the time, I was a student athlete and barely had the time for my studies and training



to coexist in a twenty-four hour window to begin with so, I passed on this option, a decision I deeply regret in hindsight. I do remember thinking to myself on that day, though, “*What would a homeless man do with a five-by-eleven framed portrait of himself?*” Three years later, I have found that answer in dozens of faces, sets of eyes, and conversation.

After spending a year at Andre House as a Core Staff member in 2014, I had met many of the people who, years prior, I would have decided did not need that portrait of themselves, “*Why would they need it? They’ll probably lose it and they have nowhere to put it anyway*” etc., etc. The reality of the situation is I did not see these impoverished and homeless men and women as I see them now; they are people like the rest of us. They are full of emotion, love, and yearning for the social interactions that we all heartbreakingly take for granted. Some of them are isolated from past friends and their families, some by choice and others not. Some have suffered as they gave witness to their whole lives fading from a vibrant and established place in society to the meek and harsh reality that is poverty or homelessness— some by their own hands and others by that which was not under their control. These people, I soon realized, were the most deserving to have their portrait taken and these people had the greatest need as well.

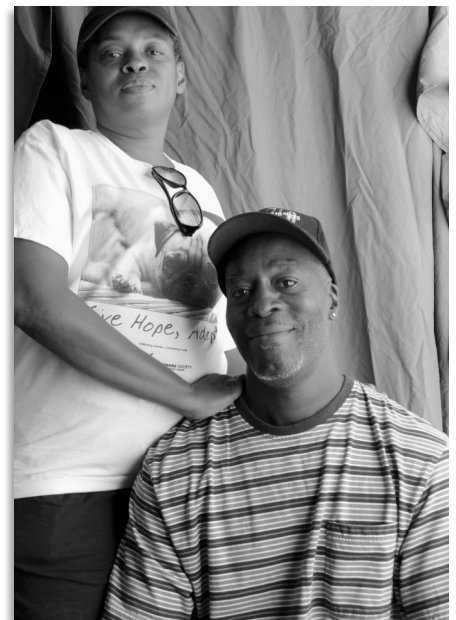
When the seed of Elsa’s assignment took root in me and I started up this portrait project, I began to see the beauty of what these portraits could do – not in my possession but rather in the hands of the subject that I was photographing. The ultimate destination for these pictures poured joy into my heart and simultaneously broke it to pieces. After a session of shooting portraits, I found myself contemplating what I myself valued most in the world after reflecting on what these humble guests wished to do with their portraits or where they would send them. “I want my children to know that I am alive and that I love them, even though I’m not there to show it”. “I want my Dad to know that I grew up strong and that he can still be proud of me”. “I want my grandpa to see that I found a woman to love like he loved his wife – I want him to know that he taught me something big”.

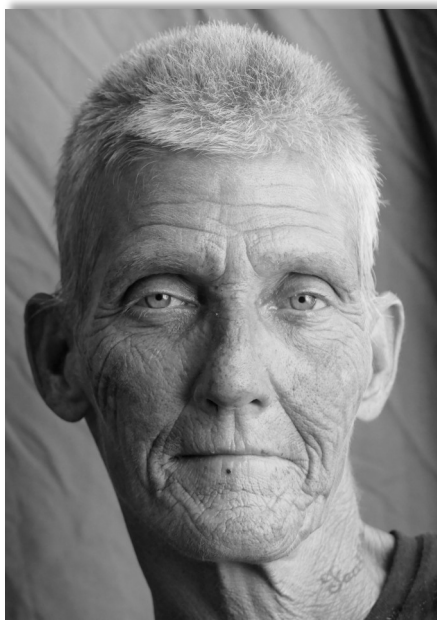
“I want to know that I still have worth - that I’m something to someone out there”.

The faces that I have photographed, even though they are so few right now, all present a window to the rest of us. These simple photographs give us eyes, expressions, sometimes smiles, sometimes frowns, and often shades of discomfort. Every black and white portrait of a guest is a history of one’s life that is written purposefully in the wrinkles of their face and beautifully across the skin of their bodies, whether it be clean or dirty, clothed or naked, torn or free of injury. The lack of color lets our own gaze focus on the importance of the photograph: the subject. We lose the distraction of color in this setting, seeing only the shapes of the human body and face – We are presented with raw emotional expression and a gateway to something special: the soul of the person we are looking at.

Elsa always taught me that the blessing of black and white was its ability to express the true color of feelings. These portraits have shown me the souls of men and women in ways I could never imagine and, for many of these people, in ways they had never imagined either. I will never tire of the gift I receive when I show a guest their portrait, especially when they are comfortable enough to let their true self come alive during a session. The smiles I am blessed to see, the rare tears that fall from their face, and the feelings of pride that radiate from them and their being are all truly something else to behold.

As I continue with these black and white portraits sessions, I see and learn more from the guests. I realize that not all things bloom in color. I see that my love and understanding for the guests blooms in black, white, and innumerable shades of gray. Though these portraits are black and white, some have been the most vibrant I’ve ever taken.





CONVERSATION *Casey Whitehead*

"Hi, how are you?"
"Good, how are you?"
"I'm well, thank you."

This is the dialogue we often hear when talking to our friends, our family, someone you've seen around but don't know personally. It is casual and a social norm – it does not inspire in our heart to say how we really feel and think. There have been many times where I have interacted in this dialogue and many more in the future. With our guests here at Andre House though, the dialogue and interactions between myself and guests are in stark contrast.

"Good morning [insert guest's name here]".

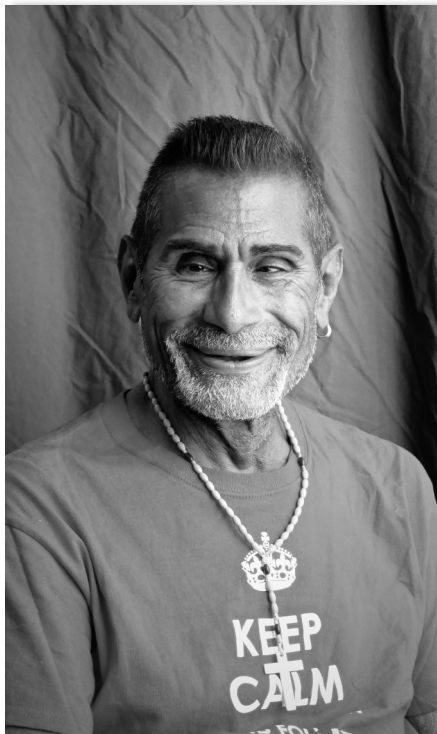
"Hi there Casey."

"How's it going? Were you able to find somewhere to sleep last night?"

Did you stay safe? How are you feeling?"

Talking and getting to know guests has been a bright spot in working with our guests. Our conversations go on a deeper level than social norms conversation goes. There is real caring and compassion between myself and guests. Some guests do not have friends and family and are left to live on the streets, couch hopping with friends, or in a shelter. To speak with guests who are becoming my friends is a real gift. We talk about what is really going on in their life, their struggles, their crisis. Quite often I am unable to help them in tangible ways, though I can provide love and attention.

Real conversations we have sustain my joy among the chaos. Authentic conversation shows someone cares about them and we want the best for them. Are we in darkness or in light? Depending on the mood or the day, it could be both. Being aware of other's struggles can be seen as the darkness, but having compassion can be seen as the light. Today, I challenge you to have an authentic conversation with someone, anyone. You will be in a vulnerable position, but Jesus was vulnerable as well. He is the path of eternal life, and he is Light. Walk the path, find the Light.



I GOT A NAME *Beth Gabert*

My second week at Andre House I was outside in the parking lot helping carry in donations when a guest approached me. I couldn't understand what she was saying at first. All I heard was "dead... across the street... 911." I crossed the street to see a group of about thirty people crowded around a man lying on the side walk. He was on his back with his mouth open and eyes glazed over. He appeared to be dead. I called 911 and they had already been contacted so I began to ask if anyone knew his name. He had no ID and none of the guests around me knew who he was. There was a man with crutches next to me with sadness in his eyes. He looked at me and said "I don't know his name but he slept next to me last night in overflow. We were in the handicapped section together." EMTs arrived and they took the unnamed man in an ambulance. At first I was deeply saddened that no one, including myself, knew his name. At Andre House we try to learn everyone's name because our names are intrinsic to who we are. Being called by name carries a special connotation along with it. When someone calls you by name they are essentially saying "I see you, I know you, I care for you." Calling someone by name gives them as a human, the dignity and respect that everyone deserves. Although it saddens me that the man across the street died without anyone who knew his name by his side, there was still at least one person who cared for him. The man with the crutches. The man who slept next to him the night before. Who stood beside me grieving the loss of someone he barely knew, of someone he couldn't call by name.



Being a member of the Core Staff here at Andre House has taught me that there is light in even the darkest of days and moments. An unnamed man was loved by someone who slept next to him one time. There is love to be found everywhere. There is love in the faces of our guests, our volunteers and Core Staff Team. We are all called by name by Jesus at the end of this life when we are welcomed home to eternal life.

Later that afternoon I sat in Father Tom's office with tears in my eyes and told him about the man across the street. He gently said "Let's pray together", held my hands and together we prayed for peace and eternal life for the unnamed man. In the saddest of days there is light, there is hope and there is love. As a part of the Core Staff I have the privilege to love the sick, the dying, the impoverished, the tired and the hungry. I get to love people experiencing sadness, people experiencing joy and people transitioning from this life to the next.

I am able to actively give and receive love every minute of the days I spend at Andre House, a privilege I cherish deeply. Here we are loved and love without question, without fear and without disgust. We love when we call each other by name, but we also love those whose names we do not know yet and those whose names we will never know. Love crosses all borders and boundaries. Love can be given and shared amongst people from all walks of life. That is what Andre House represents to me, unending love. Being a Core Member allows me to live a life of spreading and receiving love and joy and witnessing Christ's love in action every day.





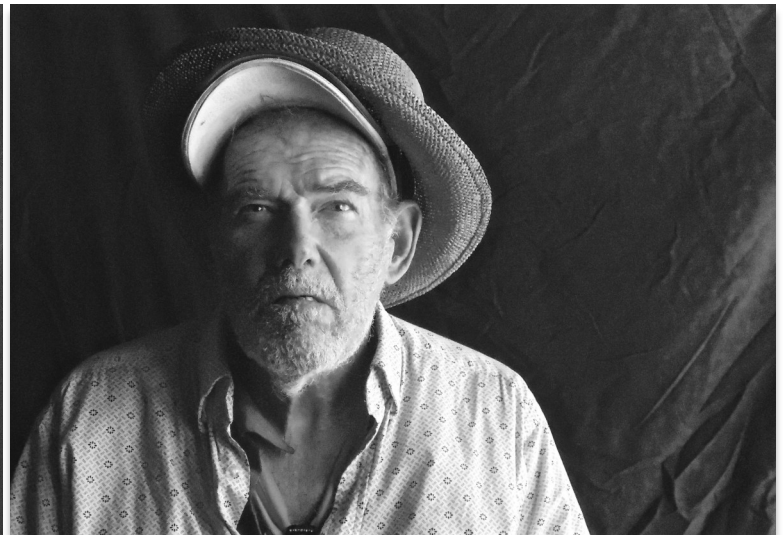
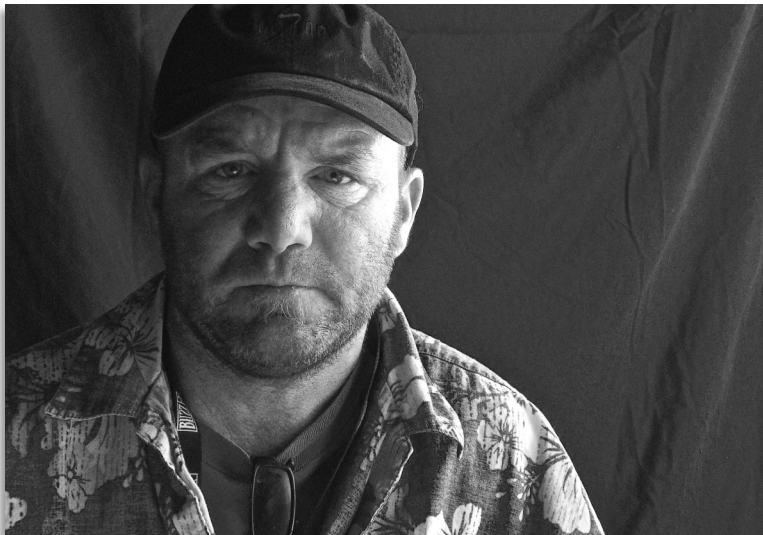
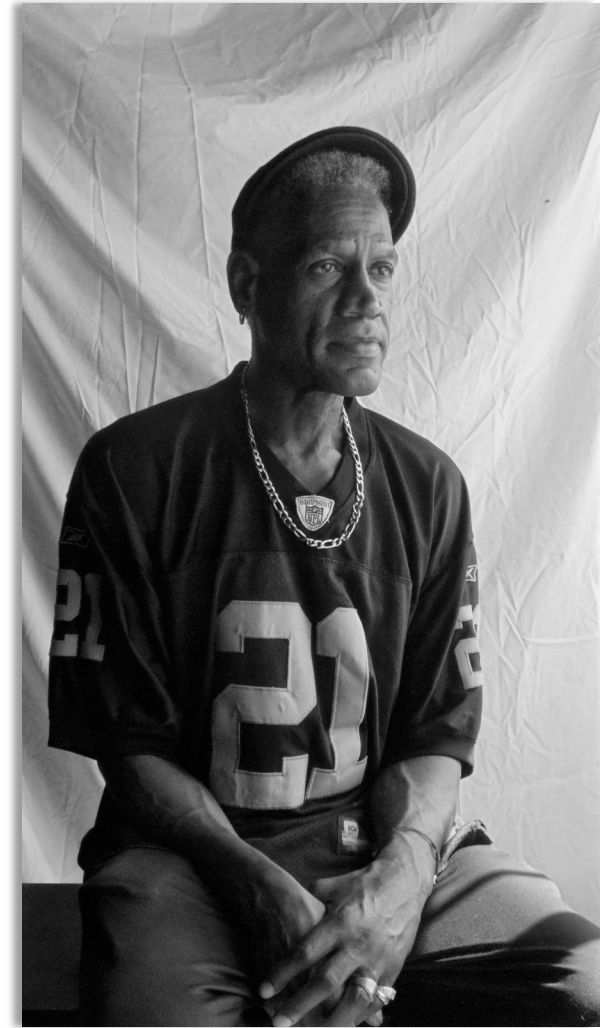
TRUE HOSPITALITY *Jay Minich*

Just two weeks ago, I was at breakfast (at the legendary “Mel’s Diner”) with a dear friend and guest of ours, who I’ll refer to as Jeffrey. Jeffrey has been struggling with homelessness for the last four years,

about the same amount of time I’ve been with Andre House. When you meet Jeffrey, he is always smiling, with a deep and welcoming gaze. His face and hands are leathery, worn from night after night sleeping outside or in the shelter, his gray, oily hair sticking to his head. By all material accounts, Jeffrey should have little to be happy about or thankful for. But each day, he comes up to me and says, “Brother Jay, it’s great to see you my friend.” And each time I leave an interaction with Jeffrey, he says, “Thank you for all that you do for us; I love you man.”

Jeffrey’s welcoming, almost grandfatherly presence warms my and all of our team’s heart each day when we see him. When I think of what it means to be hospitable, and to welcome people in through our Open Door, I cannot picture a better example than Jeffrey. When he sees one of our guests laying on the sidewalk, exhausted from wandering and sleeping outside with nowhere to go, Jeffrey is the first one to kneel down beside them, help them up, and bring them inside. When one of the younger guests becomes heated and frustrated, having nowhere to direct their ample energy, it is Jeffrey who steps in and speaks to him, and restores peace. When I try to explain to console one of our guests why he has been turned down from yet another job, or denied housing from sins of the distant past, it is Jeffrey who steps in and says, “it’ll be OK my friend.”

One of the most noteworthy traits of St. Francis of Assisi was engaging in “holy poverty.” St. Francis was known to have aspired to experience the most severe poverty, and the dependence on God that goes with it. This is what I see in Jeffrey. This has been his path the past 4 years: a healer, a listener, a consoler, and a friend to those suffering the greatest trials here in Phoenix. Thank you, Jeffrey, for being willing to do the hardest things to alleviate the suffering of so many. Thank you for your presence, your kindness, and your holy poverty.





CONCRETE FLOWERS *Miranda Groux*

I come from a suburban town in Massachusetts. I grew up in a vibrant, lush world. I spent my summers surrounded by evergreen trees. I lounged in the grass on September afternoons. I slept in the shade when the sun got too hot. There were always flowers growing. There were lilacs in my neighbor's yard, fields of golden dandelions, and wild daisies on the side of every highway. I have never known the absence of flowers.

When I arrived here in July, it became clear that Phoenix was not the green world that had been under my feet for so long. I looked at the pavement surrounding 11th and Jackson and I saw nothing green, nothing growing. People lined the street with their shopping carts, backpacks, suitcases. Laying on the ground, sleeping, sitting anywhere they can find shade. We were trapped in a valley, burning in a bowl of concrete soup. The desert seemed cruel and unforgiving. How could anything grow in this place? I wanted for there to be flowers. I wanted for there to be something beautiful. The Phoenix summer heat left me breathless and overwhelmed.

As the weeks went on, I continued in a daze. One Saturday morning, I woke up at 5am for breakfast club. We were awake before everyone and before the sun. With groggy, tired eyes, we threw on our clothes, scrambled for the car keys, and headed out the door. Driving toward 11th and Jackson, the headlights hit our guests leaving the overflow shelter. They moved slowly, holding onto their belongings as they found a place on the dark sidewalk,

soaking in the last hour before dawn. I was always waking up from my dreams to realize poverty never sleeps. I couldn't muster the energy to think about anything else as we gently prepared the building until sunrise.

At 6am, the volunteers arrived and the sun graced our ground. The palm trees yawned and people stirred, eager for breakfast. A guest walked through the gate with a small flower sticking out of his pocket.

"Why the flower in your pocket? I love it," I exclaimed to him.

"Oh, thank you. It just represents something special to me," he told me with a small smile.

I thought to myself about flowers growing in this desert. Could something beautiful grow out of cracks on burning concrete? Is there a light beneath my feet that my mind won't let me see? I searched through my memory for all the miracles that passed me by. I moved forward with a new conviction - by the grace of God, there must be a light that allows flowers to grow in the desert.

I can only try to describe how taken aback I was when I took a moment to notice what was growing, blooming, blossoming around me. There was an afternoon where flowers littered the street. People wore them in their hair, collected them in plastic bottles, and draped them around doorknobs. There was an evening when I sat at the back door noticing every flower on every piece of clothing, on every backpack, and on every smile that I saw. Two days ago as we handed out tickets for the meal, someone left a flowered crown with us. We took turns wearing it before giving it to someone new.

These little flowers exist everywhere. The people of 11th and Jackson are constantly creating a makeshift garden that is just as beautiful as any daisy I have ever seen. It became so clear that even in this land of concrete, I could never claim to know a world without flowers. There is a certain light always given and never asked for. A light that wills flowers to grow through the concrete. Every person I meet carries this light. Every person I meet helps plant flowers, helps create our garden, and helps keep this world beautiful. I will never know the absence of flowers, especially in this place.





SUNRISE *Ash Uss*

Before arriving in Phoenix for my year of service at Andre House, I spent many afternoons on my computer screen researching all the different hikes I wanted to try. I quickly learned that regardless of a hike's "moderate" rating on the app, AllTrails, hiking amidst the intensity of the Arizona summer heat is a big undertaking. Frustrated that I wouldn't be able to hike on my off days for a bit, I began doing some early morning hikes. In my second week here, I rolled out of bed at 4 in the morning, grabbed a granola bar and headed out for my first sunrise hike with Ryan, one of our summer interns. We hiked North Mountain and sat at the top of the mountain watching the sun gently rise over the Phoenix city skyline. Since then, the 4AM alarm on my phone has been a familiar friend. I have truly grown to love the process of pulling up to the quiet parking lot of the trailheads, so encompassed by darkness that I have to use the flashlight on my phone to lock up the car and grab my backpack. As I take my steps up the mountain, I watch the charcoal sky slowly evolve into a marbled vignette of pink and orange, with the rising sun kissing the clouds and the peaks of the mountains. I am an active participant in the transformation from the darkness of the night to the brightness of the day ahead of me. I realized that at Andre House, I see darkness turn to light in a similar way. And just as I sit in silence at the top of Tom's Thumb, amazed at the beauty surrounding me - I often sit in the car at the end of a long day at Andre House, in awe at the countless encounters with hope and joy amidst the darkness of the suffering our guests endure.

It would be both disrespectful and inappropriate to deny the obvious darkness that builds within the walls of Andre House and on the streets directly outside of our building. Our guests are not just experiencing homelessness; they are stripped of the dignity that goes along with not having permanent housing. Many guests are in survival mode, battling with their inner demons to stay sober or on their medication. Other guests are so conditioned to communicate with violence that they cannot interact positively with those around them. Many of our guests experience loneliness at unbearable magnitudes; they lead lives of solitude, waiting like eager puppy dogs for our doors to open so they may engage in even one meaningful conversation with another guest or a core member that day. There is a sentiment of hopelessness that can be felt by people lined up in the burning sun for dinner, or by the four or five people who just couldn't get to the building on a Saturday afternoon in time to get a spot for our showers or our clothing closet. In these situations, it sometimes feels like there's no light. It's as if I'm running around searching for the right light switch that's going to illuminate our society and our city into noticing that we have hundreds of humans who are in need of compassion and love.



But despite the overwhelming darkness, I am privileged to be able to bear witness to the subtle rising of joy on a daily basis. For so many of our guests, joy is like the rising sun over North Mountain. It peers timidly over the darkness surrounding them and grows to be like the pink and yellow sky over the city. People come to Andre House and find light. They find it in a smile from our core member Lindsey. They find it when Elena helps them pick out a pair of shorts they really love. Guests find joy in sharing a meal with one another and with our super volunteers who have been at Andre House longer than I've been alive. This isn't to say that Andre House is the answer, or that Andre House is capable of shutting out the darkness that people grapple with. Even our most joyful of guests have days where the darkness is too much to bear. Andre House is not the answer; it is a place to feel peace on the upward hike through overcoming oppression. The open door of Andre House is the trailhead that our guests consciously embark on - with the knowledge that both darkness and light will continue to coexist, just as the sun rises each morning and sets each evening. As I chip away at that long list of hikes I wanted to try while living here, I look forward to my journeys through darkness and light with all of our guests. I could only hope that at the end of this year, I'll be able to sit peacefully under the Phoenix sky, grateful for the transformation of darkness to light and the gently blooming of light and hope in all who enter our doors at Andre House.

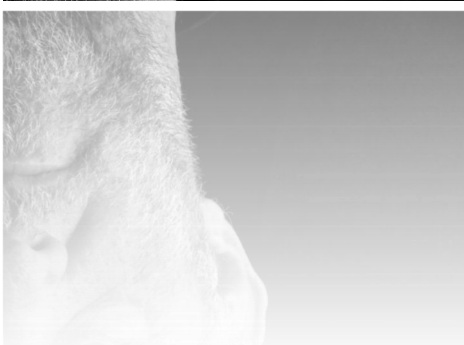
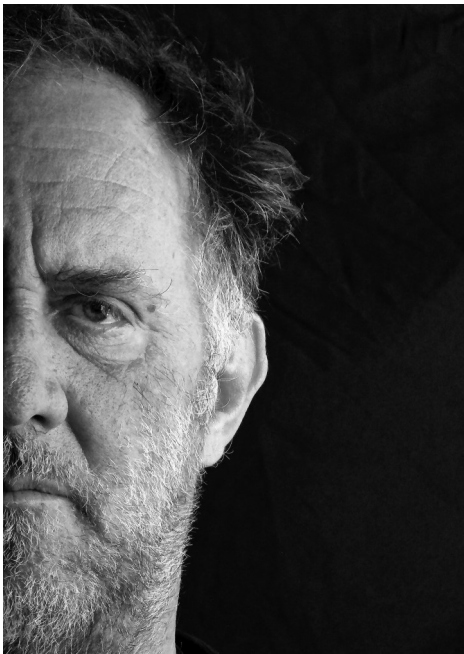
HAVE WE FORGOTTEN THE GOLDEN RULE?

Lindsey Myers

Recently I read a little note on the wall in a resource center—“You are not homeless. You experience homelessness. You are not an addict. You struggle with an addiction.” About a week later I was walking in downtown Scottsdale crashing a bachelorette party and a woman amongst the group expressed her fear for her friend’s safety because a homeless man was walking beside her. Earlier last week, I sat in the back of an ambulance while an EMT spoke with a person experiencing homelessness and possibly addiction on his “bad moral decision” to use drugs.

I once heard a story about a man who was willing to talk with a woman who had several husbands when his society suggested he not do so. I believe the same man once told us that we should love our neighbors as we love ourselves. How can we love which we do not know? When we define those experiencing addiction, or homelessness, or mental health issues, etc. into a box of “other”— we forget that they are our neighbors. And perhaps upon doing so we forget ourselves. Are we any less human than the person without a home? Than the person who uses drugs to forget about his or her pain? Than the person who speaks to themselves? No. We’ve forgotten our own humanity. Do we not yearn to be known, to be seen, to be loved? Do we not have fears? Anger? Loneliness? Maybe to love that of which we do not know, we must come to know. Maybe we need to come to know ourselves, and in doing so discover how similar we all are. Pema Chodron said it well when she said—
“Compassion is not a relationship between the healthier and the wounded. It’s a relationship between equals. Only when we know our own darkness well, can we be present with the darkness of others. Compassion becomes real when we recognize our shared humanity.”

Let us talk to the woman at the well; let us see ourselves.





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