

GOOD SAMARITAN

St. Vincent de Paul | Louisville, KY

www.svdplou.org

April | 2012

At Peace at Last, Robert Keeps it Real When Sharing the Story of His Troubled Past

Tall and imposing, with a deep, hoarse voice, Robert might seem intimidating at first.

But when the tough-talking Brooklyn native shares his life story with high school students visiting St. Vincent de Paul, he draws unexpected laughter with this statement: "I used to have a long tail, two horns on my head, and a pitchfork in one hand."

The devil imagery is Robert's way of keeping it real for the youths, a bit of light-hearted comic relief in an otherwise horrific narrative. Standing in a room of bunk beds inside our Ozanam Inn men's shelter, Robert pours his heart out. The expressions on the 16-year-old students' faces as they listen to this client explain how he ended up in a homeless shelter suggest an array of emotions: shock, sympathy, respect, and compassion.

"My father died when I was 8 years old," says Robert, who saw his drug-addicted dad, with a needle in his arm, shot and killed by police during a standoff.

"When I was little I had to go see doctors because I didn't talk for about a year after that. My mother had told me my father was in heaven, so I just kept looking up in the sky," Robert explains.

As a child, he showed odd behaviors that led to darker compulsions. "I started picking up leaves off the ground and rolling up the leaves and smoking them. Then I started drinking low-alcohol beer, and then I graduated to real beer.

"As I got older, I started doing bad things. I was fighting in public schools, so I had to go to a special school. Then I started doing crimes," he says. "I was always strung out on crack cocaine, and I ended up getting sent to prison when I was 17."

After Robert was released, he got married and had kids, but he relapsed and was sent back to prison. His life did not improve after he had served his time.

"I kept trying to do the right thing but couldn't let go of doing bad things because the drugs had control of me," he says. "My wife had caught HIV while I was in prison.

"On April 6, 2010, my wife passed away from

heart failure at the age of 43. I didn't want to live anymore. I gave up working, got back on drugs, and started stealing. I tried to shoot myself in the head but I couldn't get the nerve to pull the trigger."

Robert's life changed when he moved here to Louisville. After staying in several homeless shelters and mental health facilities, he was referred to St. Vincent de Paul. The resources and kindness he found here, along with his own deeply spiritual transformation, helped turn his life around.



"Now I've got almost 21 months of sobriety," he says proudly, referencing Biblical principles that continue to guide him. "I don't hate anybody anymore. I do unto others as I would like them to do unto me. I do not lean on my own understanding, but on the word of the Lord."

Robert recalls that life-changing point. "I got on my knees and prayed. I only slept five or 10 minutes a night. I woke up and prayed and prayed. I said to God, 'I can't do it no more. Any time I try to do it on my own, I fall down. I need your help.'"

Robert quit using drugs, sought treatment and medication for his mental health problems, and was referred to our Ozanam Inn men's homeless shelter.

Learning a New Way of Life

"I'd always been a loner, but when I came to St. Vincent de Paul, I met a whole bunch of people, and they were like friends. People here treated me like a normal person—not like I was a piece of trash.

"They gave me food to eat, let me take a shower, gave me a place to wash my clothes, a toothbrush to brush my teeth, deodorant to put under my arms... I feel like a real person today. I go to church at Mt. Olive [Missionary Baptist Church], and I go to Mass here [in the Open Hand Kitchen]. And it has really helped me."

During the past Christmas holiday, Robert took a 24-hour Greyhound bus ride to Richmond, Va., to surprise his mother and grown children. It was a joyous reunion. "My mother started crying because I was my old self. I thank God that while she's still alive she got to see me not on drugs, not sleeping outside with the rats and the possums. I really love St. Vincent de Paul. It has worked for me, and I wouldn't want to be any other place right now. My mom speaks highly of it too. She says, 'Thank God for St. Vincent de Paul, and thank all those people for saving my child.'"

Sharing his experiences with others is therapeutic for Robert, he says.

"It really helps me. When they let me share my story with students from Trinity High School, I gave it to them real. I shook their hands. I hugged them. All I want to do is plant the seed that I have been given. And the only way to keep it alive is to give it away."

Robert, who now receives disability benefits for his mental illness, is trying to find a part-time job. Eventually, he hopes to move out of his room at St. Vincent de Paul's shelter and into a place of his own.

"When I do leave, I will always come back here to St. Vincent de Paul, because I want to give back to people. If telling people about my life helps someone, then I am glad to do it.

"I've gone from being on drugs and being locked up to being homeless. And I'm a prime example that God can change things, but it's got to start in your heart. I asked God for the redemption of my soul. And I know God will take care of me. I can lay down at night and sleep well. And in the morning, I don't open my eyes. God opens my eyes for me."

Pictured: Taking great pride in his recovery, Robert dresses up in his best suit on holidays when he serves as a volunteer in our Open Hand Kitchen.

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On the Ground

By Nancy Naughton

"Make it a practice to judge persons and things in the most favorable light at all times and under all circumstances."

– St. Vincent de Paul

Too often, the image many people hold of the homeless is someone who is too lazy to work, prefers alcohol or drugs to a family or job, and panhandles to meet their daily needs. The truth is this stereotype fits a very small percentage of the homeless. In reality, the faces of homelessness represent a wide range of individuals who have become homeless due to many different and heartbreaking circumstances.

On the St. Vincent de Paul campus, more than 200 men, women, and children who have endured the pain of homelessness now have a safe place to call home as they work toward independence. Our case management staff works with each individual and family to develop a specific action plan that will help them on their way to a new, happier, and more secure future.

Achieving independence is a complex process because the people we serve lack the very basic tools of life that we take for granted. How do you apply for a job without a home address, a home phone or appropriate clothing? How do you further your education without transportation to get to school or money to buy books?

Because of the support of the Louisville community and the kindness of our many St. Vincent de Paul donors, our case management staff is able to guide our clients through this difficult process. Through ongoing case management, LifeSkills development curriculum, and the provision of basic necessities, our clients are able to enter the mainstream of our community.

Currently:

- 89% of St. Vincent de Paul clients are employed, attending school, or in vocational training.
- 85% of our clients suffering from substance abuse issues are receiving treatment.
- 37% are building a savings account.
- 18% of our clients volunteer in the community.

These results would not be possible without your support. The impact your generosity has on so many people in need is extraordinary. And the impact does not stop there. As each of our clients goes out into the world, they will touch others in need and the chain continues.

On behalf of the clients we serve and the St. Vincent de Paul staff, we wish you a most joyous Easter season!

Nancy Naughton is associate executive director of St. Vincent de Paul | Louisville.



It's Not Too Late

Feinstein Challenge Runs Through End of April

A few weeks remain in the annual Feinstein Challenge, during which donations to St. Vincent de Paul can go farther in our efforts to fight hunger among people in need.

Alan Shawn Feinstein will divide \$1 million among hunger-fighting agencies such as ours nationwide, in an effort to boost fundraising efforts for the organizations in March and April.

Your donations of cash, checks, and food items (valued at \$1 per item or pound) or pledges made exclusively through this challenge will count toward the Feinstein challenge.



These donations or pledges must be received by St. Vincent de Paul between March 1 and April 30, 2012.

The Feinstein Foundation's past spring fundraisers have raised more than \$1.25 billion for some 2,000 agencies nationwide.

To help us receive matching funds through this effort, please contact Kathi Johnson at (502) 301-8695; kjohnson@svdplou.org.

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Two New Case Managers Join St. Vincent de Paul Staff

Doris Wiegand Hundley Case Manager, Family Housing

Age: Older and hopefully wiser

Previous Experience: Employment Counselor/ Trainer/Health Educator

Education: B.S. Sociology, University of Louisville

Hometown: Louisville, KY

Professional: Various certifications as a trainer for the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority; Cooper Clayton Smoking Cessation Program; Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality; OSHA Blood Borne Pathogens; and child care

Family: Married to Phil; have three cats—Sparky, Angel, and Panther

Hobbies: Dancing, reading, acting (movies), and performing in comedy workshops

Why did you go into social work? “I grew up in an underprivileged area where many people did not value an education. I want to assist and mentor those who are struggling with barriers to their hopes and dreams.”

What do you hope to achieve in your new role with SVDP?

“I’m excited about being here because I hope to encourage parents to achieve independence and self-sufficiency for themselves, and to be a role model for their children.”



Hannah Jackson Case Manager, Women’s SRO (Single Room Occupancy)

Age: Turning 26 on April 21st

Previous Experience: Case Manager with Follow Up Program with Volunteers of America; Family Service Worker with Jefferson County Public Schools Early Childhood/Head Start Program

Education: M.S. Social Work, University of Louisville; undergraduate, Campbellsville University in Campbellsville, KY

Hometown: Dakar, Senegal (West Africa)

Professional: Clinical Social Worker

Family: Not married, no kids of the human variety but the proud parent of two boxers—Vinny and “Gamba” (the latter meaning “heroine” in Shona, an African language)

Hobbies: Reading and gardening

Why did you go into social work? “To do something meaningful with my life.”

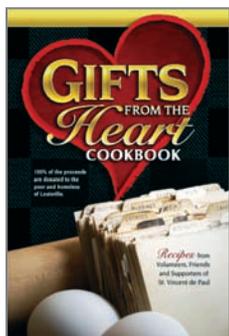
What do you hope to achieve in your new position with SVDP?

“I hope to develop professional relationships with my clients to better serve their needs and help them as they transition from homelessness to permanent housing. My goal is that clients will use the SRO program as a stepping stone to bigger, better things including housing stability and an overall better quality of life. I’m excited to be a part of SVDP and a part of the solution to homelessness!”



Looking for Derby Party Recipes?

Copies of *Gifts from the Heart*, St. Vincent de Paul’s well-received 2010 cookbook, are still available, just in time for springtime holidays and special occasions.



Whether you’re looking for inspiration for Derby party treats or special Easter or Mother’s Day desserts, the soft-cover, spiral-bound cookbooks provide an abundance of delicious recipe ideas.

St. Vincent de Paul staffers recently prepared a half dozen or so of our favorite dessert dishes to spur interest in the cookbooks and to increase sales of the remaining copies.

The Butterfingers Pie (pictured) was a hands-down favorite—a creamy, peanut-butter-flavored pie with a graham-cracker crust and crushed candy bars on top.



Marie Barrett’s Cool Strawberry Pie recipe looked the most like spring, with its pastel pink color and our (optional) added garnish of fresh-sliced strawberries.

Our taste-testers also enjoyed the Pumpkin

Crunch Cake, a not-too-sweet treat topped with whipped cream, and the decadent Banana Split Cake, an ultra-sweet pudding dessert that included crushed pineapple, bananas, and maraschino cherries.

And, finally, a tin of Cowboy Cookies was a big hit with everyone who tried them. Chocolate chips, nuts and raisins are included in this rich cookie recipe.

Cookbooks are available in our four area Thrift Stores. The cost is \$15 each, with all money going to support St. Vincent de Paul programs and services for the poor in our community.

If you would like to have cookbooks mailed to you, we will be happy to do so. A nominal fee is added to cover postage. Please contact Kathi Johnson at (502) 301-8695; kjohnson@svdplou.org.

Plan Ahead:

April 18-21
SVDP Mid-Year Meeting
Hilton at the Ball Park
St. Louis, Missouri
**For more information, contact
Donna Young at (502) 301-8688*

**Home Visit Workshop for Vincentians
May 19**
9:30a.m. to 12 Noon
SVDP Administration Building
Free; Contact Donna Young to make
reservations: 502-301-8688; dyoung@svdplou.org

May 9
SVDP Louisville Council Meeting and Mass
Location: TBA

Clients Seek Spiritual Connections, Fellowship at Sunday Mass



Above: Paul joins in the singing of a hymn. Below: Deacon Scott Haner (left) with clients in our men's homeless shelter. Bottom right: Father Gerald Timmel presides over the Eucharist, offering Communion and blessings to Mass participants.

Hearty handshakes and warm smiles greet homeless men and women who come to participate in Mass each Sunday evening in our Open Hand Kitchen.

The space, a former church sanctuary, is the perfect backdrop for the mission being spearheaded by Father Gerald Timmel and Deacon Scott Haner. They and other Catholic volunteers are here to minister to the spiritual needs of St. Vincent de Paul clients who stay in the shelter and supportive housing programs on our inner-city campus.

"We're just trying to provide food for their journey," says Haner, who also serves on SVDP's board of directors.

He likes to call it "The Church of the Beloved," and it is a fitting description for the informal yet reverent service that includes the singing of hymns and recitation of liturgy, which is unfamiliar to some of the participants.

Father Timmel gently guides them through the Mass, explaining the meaning behind each part of their service and inviting the congregants to reflect in silent meditation and prayer as a means of connecting with God.

"I come because I enjoy it," says Paul, a quiet older man who's been staying at our Ozanam Inn men's shelter. "I think it's good that they're having this for us."

Deacon Haner and Father Timmel say they hope that participation in the weekly Mass will increase as more residents become aware that it's being offered.

