

# GOOD SAMARITAN

## St. Vincent de Paul | Louisville

www.svdplou.org

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### Two Centre College Students Joined the Ranks of the Homeless Here for a Night, and Found More Than Shelter

By Wood Smith  
Centre College Senior 2014

I've never been homeless before. I've always had a place to call home—somewhere to recline after school, procrastinating on my coursework to watch another episode of "SpongeBob SquarePants." I always knew what homelessness was and that it was a pervasive and debilitating issue for millions of Americans.

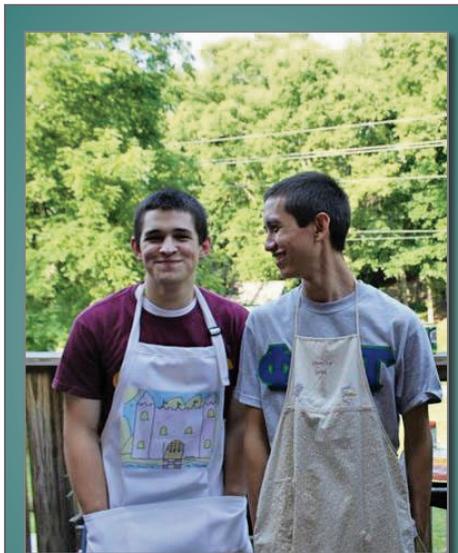
But I didn't understand what it really meant to be homeless—the nights spent without a roof, hoping for a meal, or, in most unfortunate cases, yearning for chemical enhancements or depressants as a means of escaping reality.

Interestingly, I consider myself lower class. This is a very frustrating fact with which I often wrestle, as I've always been grouped with privileged children. I attended private school through eighth grade, took Advanced Placement courses with all of the snobbier and well-to-do young men and women, and even joined a fraternity in college, which seems counterintuitive for someone seemingly watching his funds.

Of course, there's a difference between lower class and "poor." I don't think it's fair to consider myself poor, given all of the privileges I enjoy: an automobile, an education at a private college, and a loving mother who

has always sacrificed her own enjoyment and recreation for mine.

Family members, on the other



Wood Smith and Nick Do

hand, pinch pennies for alcohol and drugs, and as a result, remain in desperation. Despite all of the social support given, I've come to realize that some people simply do not want help. Any system of welfare can only work with people who want help.

I enrolled in a course entitled "Poverty and Homelessness" my senior year of college to quell my frustrations and to develop a better understanding of the condition of the poor.

I wondered about people who have had similar experiences to my own but perhaps had a little too much debt, or a parent with an addiction, or the inability to oversee a sibling with a mental disorder resulting in life on the streets. I wondered about young students whose mothers will not or cannot sacrifice money to ensure their child's enjoyable college experiences. I wondered about those who are truly in the depths of poverty or homelessness.

So, I agreed to take an overnight visit to a homeless shelter as part of the course [on a Saturday night in March]. Our professor pulled up to the sidewalk next to St. Vincent de Paul, one of the many shelters in Louisville, a city renowned for its welfare programs aimed toward the homeless. As Birdman, a dormitory resident of St. Vincent, puts it, "I came to Louisville for the same reasons everyone comes: to get clean." Nervous, Nick, my partnered classmate, and I walked up the ramp, past the cafeteria, and into the check-out room.

By the end of my stay, I came away with the strict realization that there are no fundamental social or intellectual differences between a temporarily homeless person and a privileged one. At the same time, the first

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## Volunteers Help Prepare for the Opening of SVDP's New Food Pantry

Employees from Humana and all Louisville Target stores were among the many work teams helping transform a garage and storage space on the St. Vincent de Paul campus into our first on-site Food Pantry.

Crews from businesses as well as Catholic schools and parishes all pitched in over the past few months to prime and paint the space that will soon be filled with shelves of food for families and individuals in need.

The Food Bank, which is being set up with the help of Dare to Care, will receive food donations from a variety of sources. The exact opening date has not yet been determined, but the facility will probably be open two days a week to start and be staffed by trained volunteers. To become a volunteer, please contact Donna Young, director of volunteers and conferences, at 502-301-8688; [dyoung@svdplou.org](mailto:dyoung@svdplou.org).



Humana employees who helped with painting include (left to right): Nik Kahl, Sarah Pinson, Leslie Smith, Chris Scott and Susan Sezen.





## Beat the Rush! Get Your \$25 Raffle Tickets Now

St. Vincent de Paul's 11th Annual Charity Golf Scramble & Auction Event is set for Sunday and Monday, Sept. 7 and 8, 2014, at Porcini and Big Spring Country Club. Raffle tickets are now available. Cost is just \$25 per ticket for a chance to win \$5,000.

You may pick up your tickets here in our offices at 1015-C S. Preston St., Louisville, KY 40203, or have them mailed to your home or office. To order tickets, call Bonnie Lyvers at 502-301-8695; [blyvers@svdplou.org](mailto:blyvers@svdplou.org).



### RAFFLE

Prize: \$5,000 CASH!  
Only 750 tickets will be sold  
Ticket Price: \$25 Each



*All proceeds go directly to St. Vincent de Paul programs*

Drawing will be held at Big Spring Country Club after the Golf Scramble on September 8, 2014  
**YOU DO NOT HAVE TO BE PRESENT TO WIN**

Commonwealth of KY, Charitable Gaming License #ORG 0001873

Only 750 raffle tickets will be sold. You need not be present at the Golf Scramble to win. Watch the newsletter and our Facebook page for more details about this year's fundraiser.



This page, top: Katie Durham, from the Springhurst Target, paints the outside door of what will be the new food pantry. Opposite page, top: Chelsea, Rachel and Jordan, representing Bashford Manor and St. Matthews Target stores. Above and left: Target crews work on landscaping outside the new food pantry.

*THANKS to these generous donors for helping supply fish to our Open Hand Kitchen during Lent:*



- St. Rita
- St. Margaret Mary
- St. Michaels
- St. Raphael
- Tri Parish of the Knobs
- St. Williams Church
- St. Edward Parish
- St. Athanasius Church
- St. Stephen Martyr
- St. James - Elizabethtown #2
- Our Lady of Mt. Carmel
- St. Lawrence Church
- St. Louis Bertrand Church
- St. Elizabeth
- St. Dominic Church
- St. Martha Catholic Church
- St. Agnes Catholic Church
- Ellen M. Elble/  
Mary Queen of Peace
- Guardian Angels Church
- St. Frances of Rome Church
- St. Leonard Church

# Thrift Store Truck Weekends

## MAY 31-JUNE 1

Holy Family  
129 W. Daisy Lane  
New Albany, IN

## JUNE 14-15

Our Lady of  
Perpetual Help  
1752 Scheller Lane  
New Albany, IN  
Sat 9:30am to  
6:30pm  
Sun 10am to 2pm

## JUNE 21-22

St. Edwards  
9608 Sue Helen Dr.  
Louisville, KY  
Sat 10am to 6pm  
Sun 8am to 2pm

## JUNE 28-29

St. Michael  
3705 Stone Lakes Dr.  
Louisville, KY  
Hours TBD

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conversation we had with a resident was evidence of such. "Excuse me, sir. Could I sit here?"

"Are you all college students?"

To add to my mounting anxiety, the gentleman informed the entire room of our status as students. Having been outed in the first minute, I initially felt uncomfortable and out of place. Even the staff admitted that we didn't seem homeless during the check-in process.



### SVDP's Men's Shelter

Regardless, I knew I would only have one chance to make this experience meaningful, so I turned to the gentleman in a University of Kentucky hat and commented on the game.

### "Big Joe" Takes Charge

Big Joe became one of the biggest inspirations in my life. The system hadn't been fair to him. He volunteered his medical records to me—his life was an "open book"—in order to prove his disabilities. Despite chronic back malfunctions, Big Joe was applying for SSDI for the third time. Yet, life hadn't quite gotten him down. Quite the opposite.

Big Joe had been at St. Vincent de Paul for several months, yet his optimism and fun-loving attitude commanded attention so that people really listened when he suggested

it was time to clean up. "No more TV until the place is clean. If you're not helping, get out of here for 10 minutes!"

Big Joe's optimism, enthusiasm, and pure embracing of his past life and choices provided a surprising contrast to the denial that seems to accompany many individuals in temporary poverty.

I noticed a clear disconnect between several homeless people's current and former lives.

One man claimed he only stayed in his dormitory residence about twice a week. He had a pleasant life with his aunt down the street. As such, he had really already transcended his "homelessness."

### A Surprising Conversation

During dinner, a conversation with Lee demonstrated this same principle. Lee, however, may have surprised me the most. He was incredibly well-informed about current events and asked us several intellectually stimulating questions:

"So, Wood, you say you studied in Japan. Given the current economic and political trends in Japan, would you say they're moving toward a more socialist state?"

No one expects a college student to be bested intellectually by a homeless person, yet I was dumbfounded and had no real answer. It is not that I ever believed homeless people were inherently unintelligent; such a notion is pure ridiculousness. Rather, there is a certain understanding and clarity that arises from firsthand experiences.

Here was a man who stayed just as informed about world issues as I did; hated working at Wal-Mart just as much as any young, white, middle-

class male would; and had clearly defined goals. Just like me.

Lee's goals consisted of getting back on his feet, making some money, and recovering his old profession. When pressed, Lee preferred not to reveal what he used to do for a living. Lee did not want to acknowledge his current position any more than he had to, by virtue of the fact that he was an obvious resident of SVDP.

And I don't necessarily blame him. I can only imagine the personal frustration, embarrassment, and pain that comes along with not having a basic human right, a home. But therein lies the problem: I really can only imagine. I've never been homeless before. But I have spent one of the most educational and rejuvenating nights of my life in a homeless shelter.

### Seeing a Familiar Brotherhood

These gentlemen pushed each other around, teased each other, and gave good-natured pats on the back the same way I do with my friends in the fraternity house back home.

There's nothing "otherly" about homeless people. Sure, there are people who do not want help and opt instead to continue down the path of addiction. But most have the same goals, attitudes, desires, feelings, and problems as any man, woman, or child of any social status.

So often society attributes an unjust stereotype to all homeless people... And it's simply not true.

*Let us know what you think of this article. Send comments to Linda Romine, director of communications, at [lromine@svdplou.org](mailto:lromine@svdplou.org).*

*To read Centre College senior Nick Do's blog on his overnight at SVDP, visit us online at [svdplou.org](http://svdplou.org).*