

Friend to Friend



Stories and Photos from House of Friendship

Friend to Friend: **Stories and Photos from House of Friendship**

Dedication

This book is dedicated to all those who struggle to survive on the margins of society.

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House of Friendship

P.O. Box 1837, Station "C"

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Many people have contributed to the publication of this book. The stories were selected from the writings of House of Friendship program participants, volunteers and staff collected over many years. With the exception of the Epilogue, the writers of the stories are not identified by name. Similarly many participants, staff and volunteers have allowed their photos to be used. We sincerely thank all of them for their lasting contributions in this way.

The stories and photos have been juxtaposed to provide an attractive visual presentation but it is important for the reader to understand that **the stories are not about the individuals in the photos**. Names used in the stories are not the real names of the persons described.

The text has been edited by Melissa Miller. The photographs were taken by Carl Hiebert. The book design was done by Mary Quak of MC Designs. It was printed by Mike Litwiller of Waterloo Printing Co. Inc. They have all donated a significant portion of their time to allow the book to be produced economically. We thank them all for their assistance in this way.

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Retired Executive Director, Martin Buhr, was relentless in encouraging staff to document the stories of the participants of House of Friendship's programs. His vision has given us a rich body of written material that has made this book possible. We thank him for his commitment to those people who live on the margins of society.

Deborah Schlichter
Executive Director

In the Image of God

“So what are the outcomes?” This question is often asked of House of Friendship staff, board and volunteers in the increasingly bottom-line oriented times in which we live. Our “outcomes” are people, however, not widgets, and our answers to the question are unique, as varied as the 35,000 individuals that our agency has contact with in the course of a year.

Some core beliefs have guided House of Friendship since this Christian human service agency began its work with low-income people in 1939. A fundamental belief is that all of us are created in the image of God. Each one of us carries a spark of God’s light that can become a gift to others when it is recognized. The light is gentle and delicate and, amidst suffering, struggles to survive. Our work at House of Friendship has helped us to become more aware of this light.

We also believe that each one of us has physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs. To be whole, we need adequate

shelter, food, friendship, mental stimulation and spiritual nourishment.

We share a common journey and we are all constantly traveling on a continuum between the poles of hope and despair, friendship and loneliness, faith and doubt, generosity and greed, community and alienation. The distance between the poles is short, and an unforeseen circumstance — the death of a family member, a broken relationship, the loss of a job, an accident or illness, a natural disaster, or a change in government policy — can move us quickly and unexpectedly from one to the other.

This reality has taught us that there is no “them;” there is only “us.” We are all part of the same community and one person’s loss diminishes all of us. In the course of any given day, we share many experiences of despair and hope, sorrow and joy. The spark of God’s light glows in each of us as we journey.

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Many of the people we have known through our programs find themselves at a difficult point on the continuum because of broken relationships, loneliness, addiction, mental illness or poverty. We believe that our most helpful response is often to be a nonjudgmental, listening presence.

Sometimes when individuals find a sympathetic ear and a willing hand, they are able to journey to a better place, a “successful outcome” if you will. But sometimes for a variety of reasons, people are not able to move significantly from their points of struggle and brokenness. We have come to understand that reality and at the same time, we never fully accept it. One of our core values is that “there is always hope, even in situations of adversity.” At another time and in other circumstances, things can be different for all of us. Change is constant. Miracles still happen.

Our best response to the question “what are the outcomes” then is to tell the stories of some of the people we have befriended. Our society’s values tell us that the stories of those at the margins are not important. Often these stories are dismissed, demeaned, silenced. Not being the stories of the glamorous or the wealthy, they don’t make good headlines in the tabloids.

As we have listened to their stories, however, we have seen the light of God flickering and our common humanity has been affirmed. The stories and photos which follow come straight from the heart; they authentically cover a broad range of our human experience—struggle, loneliness, hope, faith, generosity, community. We want to share them with you—friend to friend.

A Single Tear

Would a single tear release the pain
of all the sadness I keep inside?

Would a single tear cleanse the sorrow and shame
and all the other feelings that I've tried to hide?

Would a single tear ease the burden
that I have placed on my heart?

Would a single tear wash it all away
so that I may have a brand new start?

Would a single tear jolt me and wake me
so that I am truly aware?

Would a single tear prove to me
That others are out there who really care?

Would a single tear?

-a hostel resident





One Potato

In the past year, I've lost my business, my home and my family. Because I was self-employed, I could not collect unemployment benefits, nor do I understand how to use the welfare system. In the last two days my only food has been one potato.

I turned to social assistance, and after a frustrating wait, I was told of the emergency hamper program—a temporary solution to my immediate problem. I borrowed bus fare and arrived at the door of the food hamper program at closing time. I was cold, hungry and weary and overcome by the weight of my losses.

I received plenty of food, but knew it would only serve to fill my stomach. Bundling up for the long walk home, I briefly smiled my thanks, turned and left.

-a food hamper recipient

Grade One

I am not yet 18 years old. I have finished grade 10, but I'm no longer living with my parents and need welfare assistance to live. I have been kicked out of all the local high schools for numerous reasons. The staff at the teen shelter where I'm living suggest a "self-directed" school.

"I will," I say, but after several days with prompts from the staff, I have made no efforts.

When they question me, I finally tell them, "I read like a first grader." Returning to school now would be just too hard.

-a Kiwanis House resident





Pay Bills...Or Eat?

I took the call from a woman requesting food assistance. She said that her husband was working for minimum wage. They were living in Ontario Housing, paying low rent, but his wages were not enough to provide adequately for their two children and to pay back seven outstanding accounts. She said, "Our choices are to pay off a little bit on our bills, or to eat."

The family had received financial counseling some months back. At the time, she was receiving Unemployment Insurance, and a little was taken from it each month to put towards the bills. Now her U.I. has run out, she is not well and is unable to work. They have a repair bill on their car which is not operable. If they sold it, they still wouldn't be able to pay the bill, so it sits idle.

Bills for the fridge and stove have not been paid for three months and steps are being taken for them to be repossessed. I offered food assistance. Perhaps they will receive further financial counseling; perhaps they will declare bankruptcy. The present looks bleak, the future discouraging.

-a food hamper worker

"Say a Prayer for Me"

Andy is probably manic-depressive. There are times when he is bouncing off the walls, and there are times when he is quiet and withdrawn, almost apologetic for taking up space with his body. He also suffers from some fairly acute paranoia; last summer he apparently almost starved to death because he was too afraid to leave his room and prepare a meal. He likely has other problems too. Sadly I sense that problems seem to be the bricks and mortar of his existence.

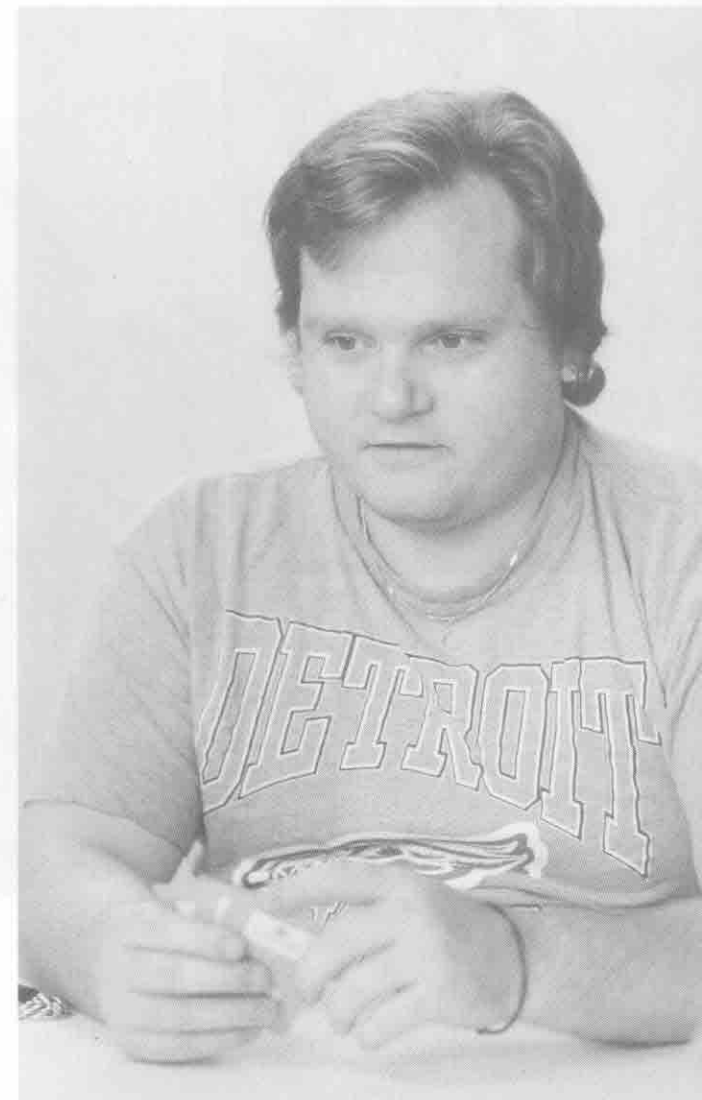
Tonight he approached me and informed me that he has a court date this week. He was caught shoplifting and it wasn't his first offence. He expects that he will get some time for this. But he says he would rather die than go to jail, so what he wanted to know from me was whether it was an unpardonable sin to commit suicide.

What does one say?

He turned to his brothers for support. One of them laughed at him; the other said he hopes Andy gets what he deserves.

So then he comes to others, like me, for support. He ends most of his little chats with me with the same request, "Say a prayer for me when you go to church."

-a hostel worker





No Stigma, Thanks

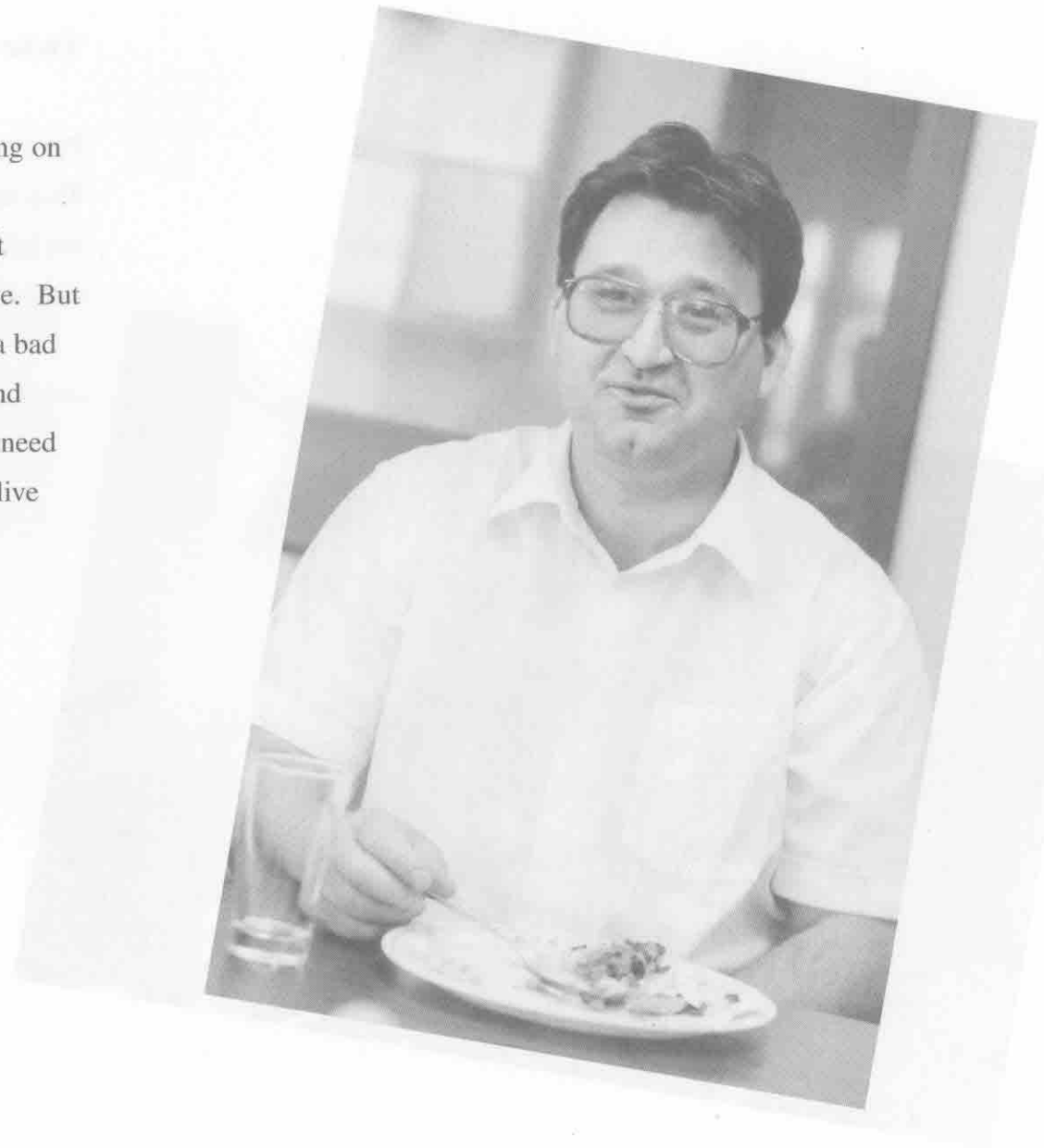
It is difficult for me to tell my story because it involves illness, weakness and failure. My difficulties stem from manic-depressive illness. This form of illness responds well to lithium carbonate. People having this illness need medication for the rest of our lives just as others may need insulin or blood pressure medication. We don't need the stigma too often attached.

-an Eby Village tenant

The "Good Life?"

During eleven years in the Canadian military, working on Hercules aircraft, I saw and experienced seventeen countries and their culture. On the news I heard that Canada is the best place to live and work, and I agree. But I have seen conditions in this country that have left a bad taste in my mouth. There are people in every city and walk in life who do not have that "good life." They need our help to bring them to a position where they can live and work.

-a hostel resident



Thieves of Dignity

Poverty, welfare, unemployment, homelessness are thieves. They steal not only food from our tables and roofs over our heads; they steal something far more precious. They steal our dignity and pride.

-a Live and Learn participant



A Chance to Do Something

I am 58 years old and single. I have worked all of my adult life as a truck driver. Seven years ago I was forced to quit working because of health reasons. I went back to school and obtained my Grade 12 diploma. I have been actively looking for work since then, but I'll tell you, my age works against me.

I am now on social assistance. Once I pay my rent, I have \$115 for the rest of my expenses. I'm on a waiting list for subsidized housing but the list is long. I'm not proud to say it, but I often need a food hamper to tide me over until my next cheque comes in.

I have time on my hands and I badly want to do something useful. I apply for any program that will help me retrain or increase my chance of employment. At the suggestion of the Volunteer Action Centre, I began to volunteer in the House of Friendship's food hamper program.

All I want is a chance to do something.

-a food hamper recipient and volunteer





Swallowed Up

I walked up to the door and knocked, not knowing what would face me on the other side. A slim young woman with large dark eyes opened the door and I went in. The room was dark and seemed to echo the mood I felt so intensely as I listened to her story. She is just 22 years old with two girls, ages one and two. She is pregnant and has just learned that she is carrying twins!

She and her husband live in a two-bedroom town house. Although her husband is with her presently, they have been separated a number of times and it has been a very rocky relationship.

He has had numerous criminal charges against him, one of which is in the court system currently. He stands a very good chance of being jailed for a year, to begin at the time the twins are expected. He says he has changed his ways, and she agrees the outward signs indicate that this is true. They are getting counseling but it is so very difficult to trust one more time after being hurt so many times before.

They are not from Kitchener and know few people. Going out for them means a walk with the kids. Of course they have no car. He was laid off from work one year ago after a three-month employment; his work record is not good. Now they are on welfare.

Day in and day out, she sees no one but him and the kids. She expressed a feeling of being swallowed up by just too many issues, too many worries. Yes, she has a faith, but at the moment it is far from her.

-a Live and Learn worker



May the Force Be With You

Thank you so much for the Christmas card. It's just great! I love it!

I have been having a real bad week and my boss is freaking out on me and I had a really bad day and when I got a letter and it's from the House of Friendship and I wondered what was up. But it's sure made my day! It sure did!!

I miss you and everyone else there. I don't live at my aunt's anymore. She's ready for the funny farm! HA!

I don't know anyone in Sudbury. So I don't see no one at all.

How is your family? I wish them all the best and a new year.

I hate to see all those poor, poor Christmas trees cut down. I wish people would plant a Christmas tree for the future and watch it grow with the family and for years to come. It will be a part of the family. It's not fair to kill living plants for us, which are gifts from God. By taking care of the tree, it means that someone cares! And when the family cares for it, it becomes strong just like the family. It's a gift of life and caring.

I will write some more in the near future. I'm upset with things and with myself. But I must go on. Take care and look after the House for me cause I can't get back right now.

May the force be with you and always.

-a hostel resident



Dying Alone

Alex was a “regular”, an older man, an alcoholic who had stayed in the hostel many times, sometimes for several months. House of Friendship was his main source of personal support.

Alex was a loner. He had no contact with either of his two former wives. He was a proud man who was unhappy and ashamed of his life. More than once he told staff that he just wished he could die.

One day staff got a phone call from a doctor in Halifax. He was looking for his father, a man named Alex. Did we know him? Yes, we did.

The son came to see Alex. After one visit, Alex refused to see him again. The son offered to take Alex home with him so that he could live his final days with his family. Alex refused.

Alex died alone in a Waterloo Region retirement home.

-a hostel worker

When I am Dead

When I am dead
and over me
Bright April
shakes out
her rain-drenched hair
Although you lean
above me
brokenhearted
I shall not care!
I shall have peace
as leafy trees are peaceful
when rain bends down
the bough
And I shall be more silent
and coldhearted than you are now.

-a hostel resident





One Day Away...

Josef came to our hostel in the fall, broken by lung cancer and penniless. He shared only the barest facts with us, and always insisted that he was alone in the world and that there was no next-of-kin.

He died in January at the hospital. We were told that he would be given an indigent's funeral by welfare. The date for cremation was set, and then Josef would disappear from all memory because there was no next-of-kin to claim him.

Our instincts protested. Every person born has a family, including Josef. Wouldn't a parent want to know the final end of a child? We undertook a search with the help of the police and last known contacts. In doing so, we discovered the broken heart that Josef had carried in his silent way.

We learned that Josef had fled Hungary during a time of political unrest; he left behind his parents and many relatives. In Canada, he worked extremely hard and was a "success." He married a woman who had two daughters. Two years prior to his arrival at the House of Friendship, his wife died. Shortly afterwards he was told that he had lung cancer. These two blows caused him to lose his way. Unable to express his grief, or to ask for emotional support, Josef went away to die; he did not want to be a burden on anyone.

Three next-of-kin were found in Toronto; a sister-in-law, a stepdaughter and her husband. Josef had become lost to them. They did not know of the deep suffering Josef had chosen to deal with alone. They came to a memorial service in the hostel chapel to claim his as "theirs" and to convey as much peace to Hungary as they could. Seven staff and two transients gathered with them to reflect on the mysteries of life and death.

Josef had been one day away from disappearing from the earth without a single person to claim him or remember him.

-a hostel worker



I DID NOT WANT TO GO!

I stood in the driveway, all full of tears;
I've never lost this memory over the years.
She stood in the driveway, looking so sad;
Something was happening, something real bad.

I felt I was leaving, I was packing my toys;
I always thought I was one of their boys.
I called her mom, I called him dad,
Something was happening, something real bad.

I was never told, it was never explained;
But I was so shy, I never complained.
I remember the lady trying to make me feel glad,
But something was happening, something real bad.

I was four years old and I knew nothing;
But this was no joke, this wasn't funny.
That day I lost something so pure and so whole,
I did not want to go...

I DID NOT WANT TO GO!

(Written the day I was taken from my foster home and taken to my adoptive home.)

-a 174 King St. N. resident

Help When I Needed It

Eight years ago I came to Kiwanis House because I didn't like my alternatives—no education, no job, no home and no hope. At Kiwanis House, I received the help I needed to improve my choices and my future.

Since then I completed university and obtained full-time employment. During the United Way campaign, I felt a powerful urge to express my gratitude for the help I had received. I volunteered to lead the campaign at my workplace and shared my story with my coworkers. They then decided to designate their donations to House of Friendship. I'm really glad that the help was there when I needed it.

-a Kiwanis House resident



A Chance for Change

Those of us who live at Cramer House have a variety of needs and abilities, but we share one thing in common—the opportunity to reach our potential, whatever that is for each one of us. I have grown since coming to Cramer House, from fear of going on a walk to having a part-time job, volunteering at four places and being involved with two self-help organizations and a church. The support from staff has helped make this possible. Thank God for them and Cramer House.

-a Cramer House tenant



"Help Me!"

One December day, I was captured by a front page article in the newspaper. A photo accompanied the article, a photo of toys that were being collected by residents of the Alcohol Recovery Home, and then distributed to needy children. The men in the article wanted to express their gratitude for their newly found sobriety; they shared their personal life stories which were full of grief and heartache due to alcoholism.

At the time, I myself was depressed and suicidal because of my own alcohol problem which had caused me to lose my family and my job. I felt a "higher power" directing me to the Alcohol Recovery Home. I knocked on the door and pleaded, "Let me in! Help me!"

After ten months of sobriety, I returned to my professional career. I hope that, by telling my story, others can be changed.

-a 174 King St. N. resident





Headstart

Christy contacted House of Friendship for assistance. She was separated, pregnant and the mother of two preschoolers. She was directed to the Live and Learn program and attended for some time. Later she moved to Newfoundland to be near her family.

Years later, she telephoned the House of Friendship to let staff know how things had gone for her. After taking some courses, she became coordinator of a Headstart program in her community. "I'm doing a lot of what I learned in Live and Learn," she said. Her three children had completed grades 9, 10 and 12. Her successes had made her very proud.

-a Live and Learn participant

Making a Little Difference

Here's how I made it through the summer without a food hamper. In the spring, I went to a funeral home with a friend to pay my respects to an acquaintance who had passed on. On our way out, we noticed a lot of flowers in the garbage container. Funeral homes generally ask mourners if they have any special requests for the flowers after the funeral. If the mourners don't, the flowers are thrown into the garbage.

We decided to raid the garbage for the flowers. We made new arrangements with them and sold them to neighbors and friends to make some extra money.

We visited the garbage bin regularly over the summer. The funeral home staff caught us, and we explained what we were doing. They then saved the flowers for us inside their building so we didn't have to climb into the bin anymore.

Some people see the flowers as compost or just plain garbage. For me, they became an opportunity to make a little difference in my life.

-a food hamper recipient



A Refuge for a Refugee

I came to Canada as a refugee with my father. We survived on welfare in a city in Ontario. I had always done well in school and I had dreams of going to university. I applied and was accepted by University of Waterloo.

I arrived in Kitchener-Waterloo in January. I had no place to stay so I came to the House of Friendship. My father helped me put together the money for my tuition fees. But my student loan was delayed, so I had no money for food or lodging. Because I was a university student, I was ineligible for social assistance.

I stayed at the hostel for two months as a guest. During that time, I walked the ten kilometers to the university every day. Finally my student loan came through and I moved to my own place.

A few months later I returned to the hostel to thank the staff for helping me. I was happy to tell them that my father had moved to join me and that I was earning a 90+ average in my science program.

-a hostel resident



From Nowhere to Options

Just over a year ago, I found my life going nowhere. I was unemployed, my engagement had been broken, and I spent my days hiding out alone and drinking in my apartment. I seemed like an “android”—looking like a human but having no heart or feeling for others. I was empty and my relationships were empty. I hated my parents. My life was steered by fear, and I was using alcohol as a band-aid solution.

I went into treatment for my alcohol addiction. After six months of treatment and six further months of sobriety, I look back on the steps I needed to take. First I had to forgive myself, then I had to forgive my family for the past hurts. I feel I’m not only recovering from alcoholism, I’ve recovered myself. I feel more whole. I can feel love for and from others. Mostly I feel like a human being.

I’m attending school full-time now and I’m active in sports. After I finish college, I hope to get a job in a commercial field. Some days I feel a little scared, but I’m also very determined. Now I have options.

-a 174 King St. N. resident



A Way Out

At middle age, we found ourselves out of work because of disabilities. We're average people who had always worked and participated in service clubs. When we went to pick up our first disability cheque, we were told it wouldn't be ready for a few more days. "We have nothing to eat," I protested.

Abruptly the worker told us to go to the House of Friendship, further demeaning us by giving us the wrong address.

We made it the House with many questions and a great deal of frustration. How had life gotten so bad so quickly? We paused at the door, fearful and lonely. Did we really have to go in? We didn't have any food at home, so in we went.

Almost immediately at the counter, we broke down weeping. A very kind staff person led us into a private room and tried to comfort us. As we told our story, she offered, "You can come and help out at the hamper program anytime you want whenever you have the time and energy."

Wonderful words to us! We still had something we could offer to others. We brightened up and soon left with our food hamper.

We've been back regularly ever since then as much as we can, usually two or three times a week for several hours. We tell everyone we can what a wonderful program this is, and even were filmed for a video about local hunger and poverty. We are so grateful. We were at our lowest and someone offered us a way out. Thank you.

-two food hamper recipients and volunteers





Resurrection

He was high stepping down the street, grinning from ear to ear. "I thought you were dead!" he exclaimed as he squeezed me a full bear hug right on the sidewalk as the traffic buzzed past. "What you said changed my life. I'm engaged to my girlfriend now and we're both singing in the church choir. I'm working full-time. I'm so glad you're alive! I thought you had died!"

Chris had changed from when I had first seen him some months before. Then he was angry and depressed and overwhelmed with life. He was taking medication to moderate his negative attitude. Now his face was bright and cheery as he told me that his doctor had taken him off medication. "You made me think," he continued. "You spoke straight to me about my problems. You called me back to a life of hope and faith. Thank you. I will never forget you!"

We parted. I whispered a prayer of thanks. People do change! My heart felt light and joyful. My own life was complete and full even though my body was losing its battle with cancer. I thanked God for one more day, and for changing one more person.

-a hostel worker



Belonging

My story goes back to 1980 when I was charged with theft and incarcerated for two years. I had many problems with drinking and smoking and other things. I knew that I did want to change my old ways and build a new life. In prison I attended AA meetings and got involved with chapel.

When I was released in 1982, I had nowhere to go and no place to live. I took a bus to Kitchener with a little over five hundred dollars that I had saved. The first night I stayed in a hotel room, and the next day was directed to House of Friendship. I sat down and started thinking about what I was going to do. I was quite confused. I got up and left. At the bus station I bought a one-way ticket to Walkerton.

I ended up in Southampton and for a month I drank a lot and hardly slept. I remember wondering what was the use of going on. Feeling very depressed, I tried to drown myself in the Saugeen River. Even though I felt hopeless, I still said, "God, there has to be a better way than this." And the river carried me to the bank.

I returned to Kitchener on July 23, 1982. I went into the House of Friendship and asked for help. And they helped me. I lived there for three years. After a while, they gave me a job in the kitchen preparing vegetables.

The cook was a great inspiration to me. She invited me to go to church with her family. My first Sunday there I asked the Lord to forgive me of all my sins. I felt I was truly forgiven.

I lived at Cramer House for another three years and continued to work in the hostel. I left Cramer House a few months ago. I have a new job and I live with a wonderful Christian family.

I have a great deal to be thankful for today. I belong to God's family now. I know my life is anew in Christ and I am still growing.

-a Cramer House tenant



Dear Little Child

Dear little child so deep within
could you ever forgive me for committing this sin?
I was so busy blaming and too blind to see
that all of my heartaches were lost inside of me.
You carried them for me so that I could give
some compassion to others so they too could live.

And for many a year you sat there rejected
while your needs and your wants I coldly neglected.
But what was I supposed to do
I had no idea what you were going through.
It took the wisdom of others to open my eyes
and to make me listen to your distant cries.
So with your forgiveness we can conquer our fears
and together we could shed all of our unwanted tears.

-a hostel resident

Pure Faith

When my stepfather Jack was ill and dying, Albert, a resident who was particularly sensitive, took it upon himself to ask me ten to fifteen times a week how Jack was doing. One Tuesday evening at Bible study, Albert asked me if he could say a prayer for Jack. His simple, pure prayer was that Jesus be with Jack.

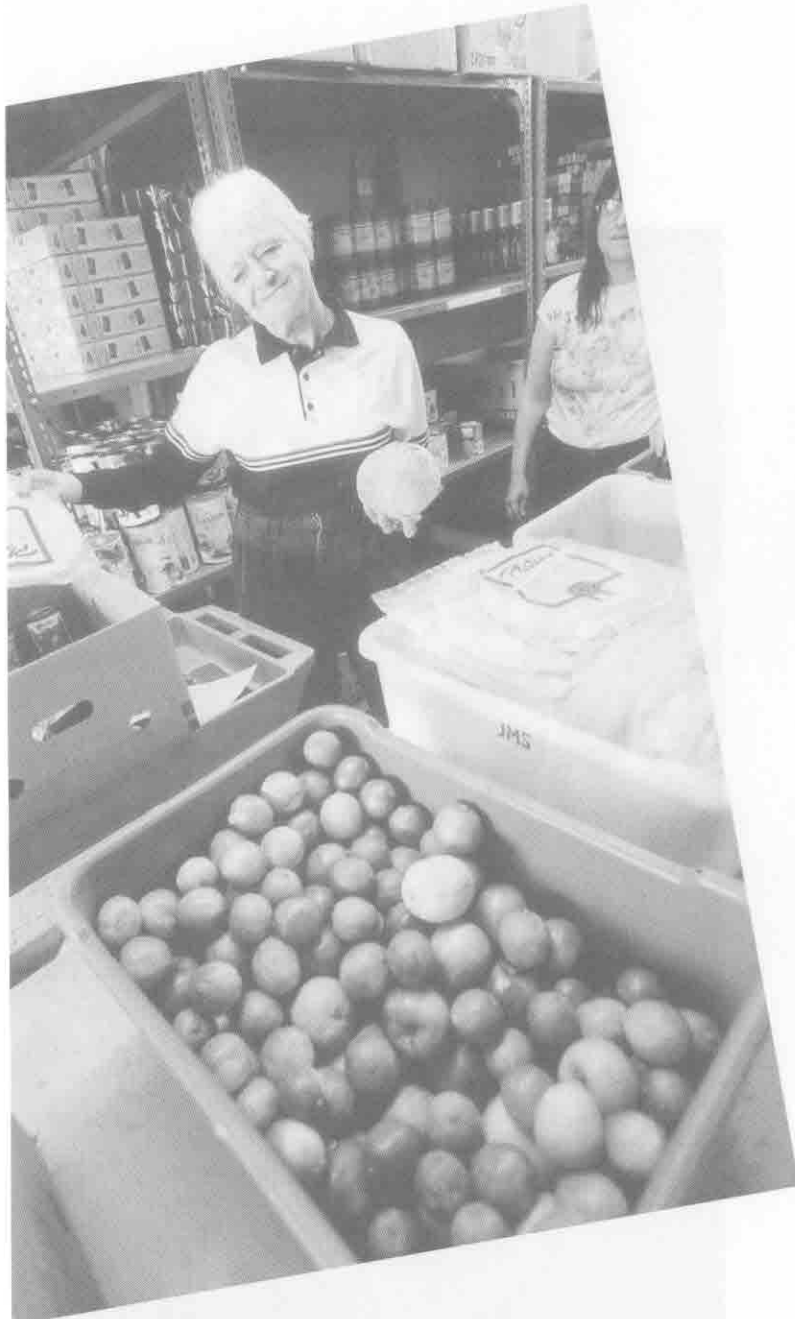
Jack died the following day. Albert came to the funeral home visitation. My co-worker drew me aside to tell me that Albert was quite upset because he thought that his prayer had not been answered. I, in turn, talked with Albert to thank him for his prayer, which I explained, had been answered because Jack was now with Jesus. He beamed.

A few months later he came to tell me that his father's friend had died. His face shone as he assured me that it was okay because now this friend was also with Jack and Jesus.

Could my faith be as pure!

-an Eby Village worker





"I Love You"

Two of the most difficult words in the English language are love and God.

One day I spoke with George, a man in his late 40's who had spent countless years in jail due to his violent, drunken brawls. He loved people, life and music. He wrote his own poetry, sadly much of it under the influence of alcohol or marijuana. The day we talked he told me of how hard his life had been. I felt only sadness, and when he left I stood up, put my arms around him and told him I loved him.

Afterwards when he called me from jail or his latest address, he would always include these words, "I love you." Something had been touched deep inside of him. One day he phoned me when I was in my office with another client. In closing, he said he loved me and I responded, "I love you too, man." I hung up and the man beside me, surprised by my words, said, "That sounds so good." He then talked of one of his friends who was always quick to speak of his love and of how great it felt to hear those words.

I decided then and there to overcome my embarrassment and say, "I love you" whenever I felt it inside. My way to share God.

-a hostel worker

Transformation

I was apprehensive as I began spiritual discovery groups at the Alcoholism Recovery Home. I believed they needed my experience and education as pastor and chaplain as much as any church.

But could I guide them? What would be the content of our groups? I learned to listen more than to speak.

I soon saw God present in their struggles and questions. How can I forgive myself and my abuser? Am I too bad and sinful for God to love me? Why do terrible things happen in our world to those who don't deserve them? What does "higher power" or God mean? How do I feel God's love and support? Can I live through the transformation into sobriety? Is there a better life for me if I remain sober?

Their questions and their life experiences needed to live in me, to enter my prayers and reflection, to work deep into my heart, soul and mind. As I worked with the men, their questions, the AA literature and my own teaching and preaching at churches, I was transformed—converted over and over again—experiencing ongoing repentance. The stranger in the man struggling with addiction is Jesus at the door opening up God's love to me again over and over.\

-a 174 King St. N. worker





Seeking God

I came to the Alcohol Recovery Home because I could not break the power of addiction alone. I wanted what church people had—a sense of contentment, fellowship and friendship, a decent family and a sense of God's presence in my life. I tried breaking my addiction through the ministries of my church. But it didn't work for me. I kept using drugs, I stole from church members and I was overwhelmed by shame and guilt from my past and my present. I was a no good bum.

I went to detox and then to the Alcohol Recovery Home. My church didn't understand that I needed professional help and the support of Narcotics Anonymous (NA). I talked with them; the elders and the pastors said that I could not be a member if I stayed at the Alcohol Recovery Home. I knew I would use drugs again if I didn't stay at the home.

I loved the spiritual discovery groups and I learned a lot from the other men. I began to see how my growing up years had been full of tragedy and abuse. I wanted to be closer to God, yet I was experiencing rejection from my church.

I went back to church one Sunday and the pastor would not look at me or talk to me. I felt quite unwelcome. Finally I decided I would continue to seek God in the midst of my recovery at the Home and NA. One church member did agree to visit me; I value his friendship.

I am glad I am in a program where I can talk about my faith with the staff and with other men. I wish my church could be there for me.

-a 174 King St. N. resident

Gifts from God

“How do I see God in the midst of human suffering?” As a short-term worker at the House, I was challenged by the question. Here’s part of my answer.

I work hard to pronounce each person’s name as they say it. They come for food feeling frustrated, wishing they did not have to come. Something has gone wrong in their lives. So I listen carefully to their name and then I try to pronounce it as they do. I don’t anglicize it. When I make this very human, caring connection, the person smiles. I know God is with us. Something mysterious has happened. Their smile is a gift to me from God.

-a food hamper worker



A Debt Repaid

Hank attends a church some 15 kilometers outside of Kitchener. He offered to mow the church's grass but had no transportation. One of the church members loaned him a bicycle and Hank then rode out to church, cut the grass and rode back to town.

Recently Hank purchased a used bike with money he had saved. On the next Sunday he told the church member that he no longer needed the bike and he wondered if there was someone else who might be able to use it. Almost in passing, he said that he had replaced the tires with new ones and had given it a tune-up. The bike returned to its owner in better condition than when it had been loaned.

-a Cramer House tenant





The Christmas Spirit

The house at 85 Wilhelm (Kiwanis House) was buzzing with Christmas fever. The residents were baking up a storm and I was one of them. Ginger cookies, pumpkin loaf and Christmas cake emerged from the oven. We placed these with fruit in creatively decorated baskets. Gift baskets in hand, we went out with some of the staff to homes in our neighborhood sharing the baking and singing carols. Our mission was to bring joy to our neighbors, especially to those who did not get out much in the winter. The Christmas glow burns brighter when you give of yourself to others.

-a Kiwanis House resident

A Penny Saved...

Children at the Chandler-Mowat Community Centre, an outreach project of the House of Friendship, donated 100 pennies to pay the annual rent to North Waterloo Housing Authority. Their mothers also initiated fund raising events to help pay the monthly utility costs.

-a staff member





Payback

This past winter was tough. I'm a single mother with three children. I'm working on my university degree hoping to improve my employability. In February, the fuel pump on my furnace died. The weather was unseasonably mild and we made do with space heaters for awhile. But I didn't expect that to last.

I heard about House of Friendship and approached them for an interest-free loan to purchase a fuel pump. They approved it, for which I was very grateful. Through my church, I found a furnace repairman who was willing to install the pump without charge—another blessing. He arranged a discount on the pump as well.

When he came to make the repair, he told me that he had also been a recipient of House of Friendship. He had moved to Kitchener without money or friends and had stayed at the hostel until he had the resources to live on his own.

"Have you ever paid them back?" I asked.

"I'm doing that now," he replied.

"Someday," I thought, "I hope I'll be in a position where I can help someone the way I'm being helped."

-a loan fund recipient



Sharing

One day staff needed help with cleaning. They hired a resident to mop floors and paid him \$10. He in turn gave it all away in small amounts to other residents who needed the money for coffee or cigarettes.

-a hostel resident

The Joy of Service

On three separate occasions, I went with eight other people from my neighborhood, Chandler-Mowat, to MCC (Mennonite Central Committee) to pack noodles—oodles and oodles of them (nine boxes weighing 500 lbs. each). I really enjoyed learning more about the programs of MCC and House of Friendship. Even better was the fellowship. Best of all was the opportunity to be of service. We all commented on how happy we felt; we had been asked to help.

-a Chandler-Mowat volunteer





Remember Mom

I was working at a toy store one December when some people from a service club came in to buy toys for a Christmas hamper for a needy family. I noticed how the people were putting all the emphasis on getting toys and gifts for the children, which is a good thing. But I thought about my mom, a single mother who had worked hard raising me on social assistance. So I talked to the people. "Think about the mom in the family," I said, and told them about my mom. "These women often make unending sacrifices for their families. Think about putting something in the Christmas hamper which would be just for the mom." They listened carefully to me, agreed with me and thanked me for my suggestion. I think it will make some family's Christmas a little brighter.

-a single mom's son



Mr. House of Friendship

Donald is “Mr. House of Friendship.” For over twenty years, he was our most famous resident.

When he came, he was diagnosed with a neurological disorder that gave him shaky hands and an unstable gait. In spite of his physical limitations, he contributed in many ways. In the old hostel, he was a fill-in at the front desk when the staff on duty had to be elsewhere. He cut bologna for the food hampers and took out the garbage or delegated the job to another resident. As an informal security man, he protected staff and encouraged inebriated clients to leave the hostel. For a number of years he “rode shotgun” helping with pickups and deliveries and “breaking in” new drivers. He described himself as House of Friendship’s “spare man.”

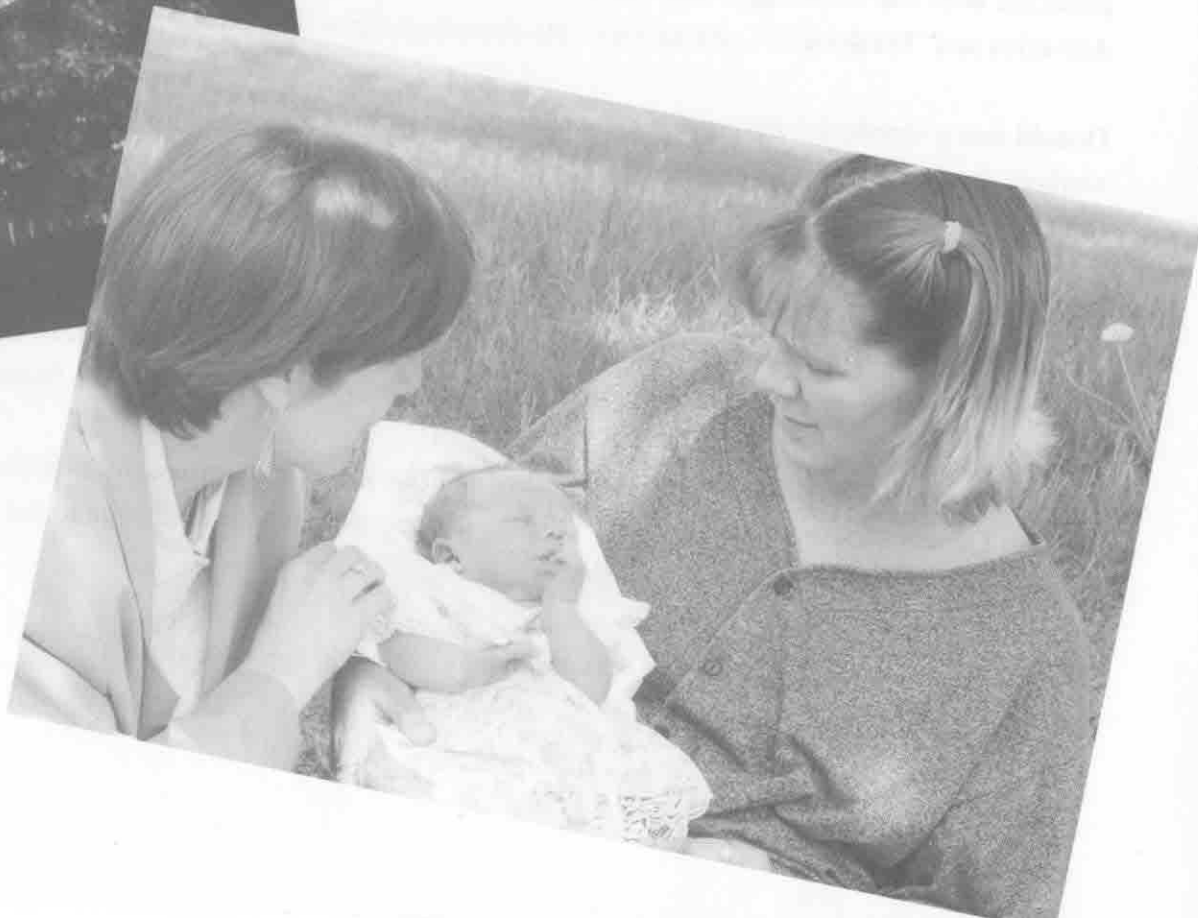
Donald was a wonderful informal representative of “the House” to the community. He was well-known to police officers, bus drivers, city workers, hydro and telephone crews and many others, all of whom he referred to as “my buddies.” His quick smile and big wave are known to hundreds.

Perhaps Donald’s most important contribution was his example. He was a positive role model to both staff and participants. From him we learned what it is to give and receive gracefully. He loved to give a pen as a gift of friendship. To children he gave new dollar coins. He gave staff carefully selected birthday cards. To everyone he gives compliments, friendship and a smile. If he can help you, he will.

Donald showed us how to live with a disability and rise above it. In spite of his difficulties with mobility, he did more than his share of work at Cramer House where he lived. He also showed us how to be sensitive to the needs of others and how to help meet those needs. At times, his selflessness was overwhelming.

Through him, House of Friendship became more visible and more tangible.

-a staff member



A Bighearted Banker

For over 20 years, Jim lived at House of Friendship. He arrived as a transient and, over the years, made friends with staff that lasted until his death in May 1983. A staff member, shared the following reflections during a memorial service.

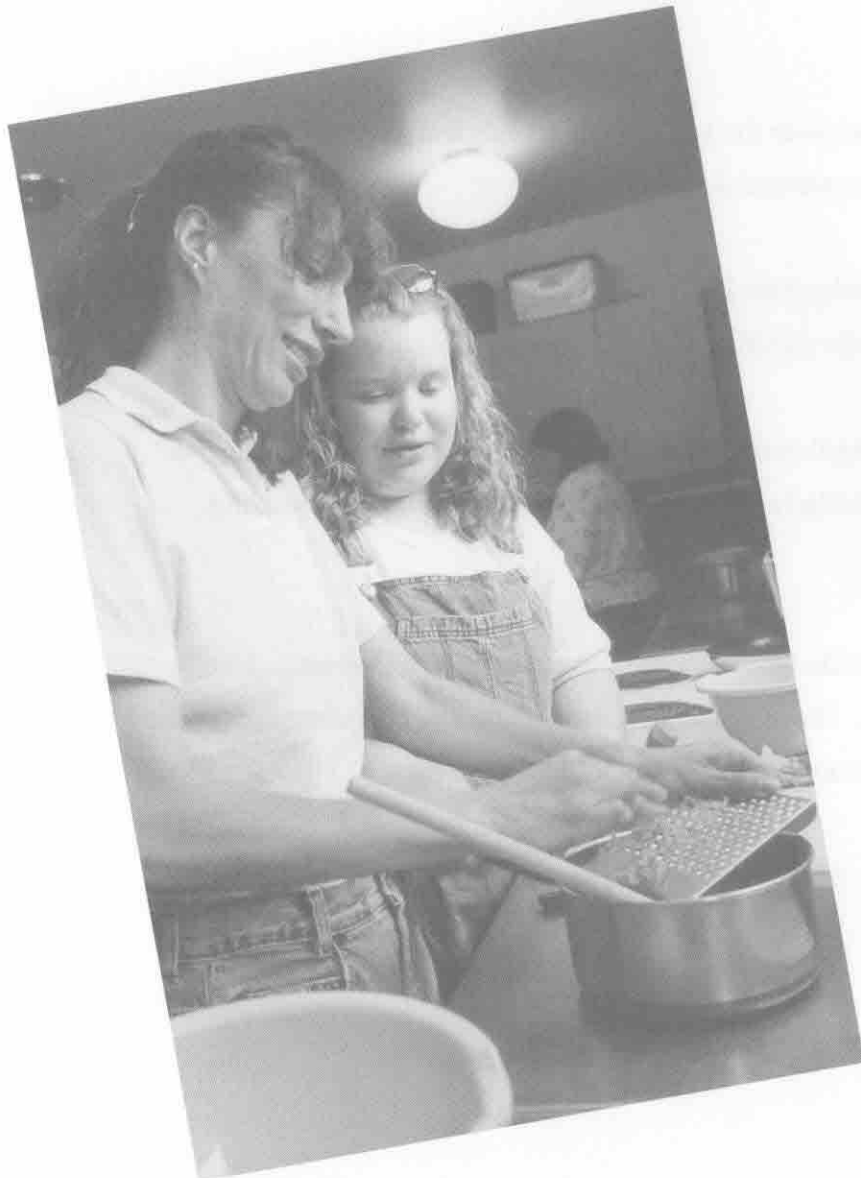
“Those of us who knew Jim, worked with him, or were his friends, found that underneath his gruff exterior was a friendly man, small of stature and big of heart. This was best seen in his gentle relationship with my little children.

Jim enjoyed movies with happy endings, country and western music, and growing flowers, especially roses. Jim liked cooking. It gave him pleasure to prepare a meal for his friends. Fishing was one of his joys, particularly when he caught one! He collected tools and received immense satisfaction in fixing or making things.

Jim always took pride in his work. Among his good habits was putting money aside for vacations or things he wished to purchase. Residents at the hostel often called on him for loans when they had emergencies. He would usually lend the money on the strength of the person's word. He did not always get paid back but he accepted that with understanding and continued to make loans.

Jim would be pleased to know we gathered here to pay our respect and love. He would have wanted to say goodbye to each one here and to thank us for our friendship.”

-a staff member



Checkmate

David is back, illuminating the place with his smile, and his cheerfully ironic humor. He's always willing to indulge in some witty repartee.

I played a game of chess with Sam tonight. He beat me, and had the kindness to point out the move that led to my down fall, and what I should have done to stay alive a little longer. It was a good, even game, back and forth, but he has an incisive skill, an unrelenting attack.

I had a chat about the weather with a kindly, old grandfatherly man at about 2:00 a.m., when he interrupted my cleaning chores with a smoke and coffee.

One more pleasant picture: I was sitting at the front desk, and I heard a tap on the window that looks out into the corridor. There I saw a grizzled old smiling face and a hand raised in a "goodnight" salute. I saluted back, smiled, and wondered at the good humor and warm humanity present in these often broken lives.

-a hostel worker

Why Not!

I would like to tell you about one special tenant at Eby Village with whom I have had the privilege of sharing an apartment. Like me, he is living his life courageously with significantly challenged abilities. He compensates for his limitations with great courage and apparently unlimited optimism. His trademark saying is, "Why not!" After a conversation with him, I have more spring in my step as I walk away. He is a major inspiration to me.

Recently I have switched from mostly volunteering jobs to mostly paying jobs, a feat possible because of the support I have received from House of Friendship. God's blessing to House of Friendship to continue its mighty torrent.

WHY NOT!

-an Eby Village tenant





Every Other Month

A friend from Eby Village and I go out for lunch once a month. Every other month I pay. The other month I am his guest. How can I be the guest of someone who has much less than I do? Yet if I always pay, I deny his dignity. I become paternalistic. Our friendship would end.

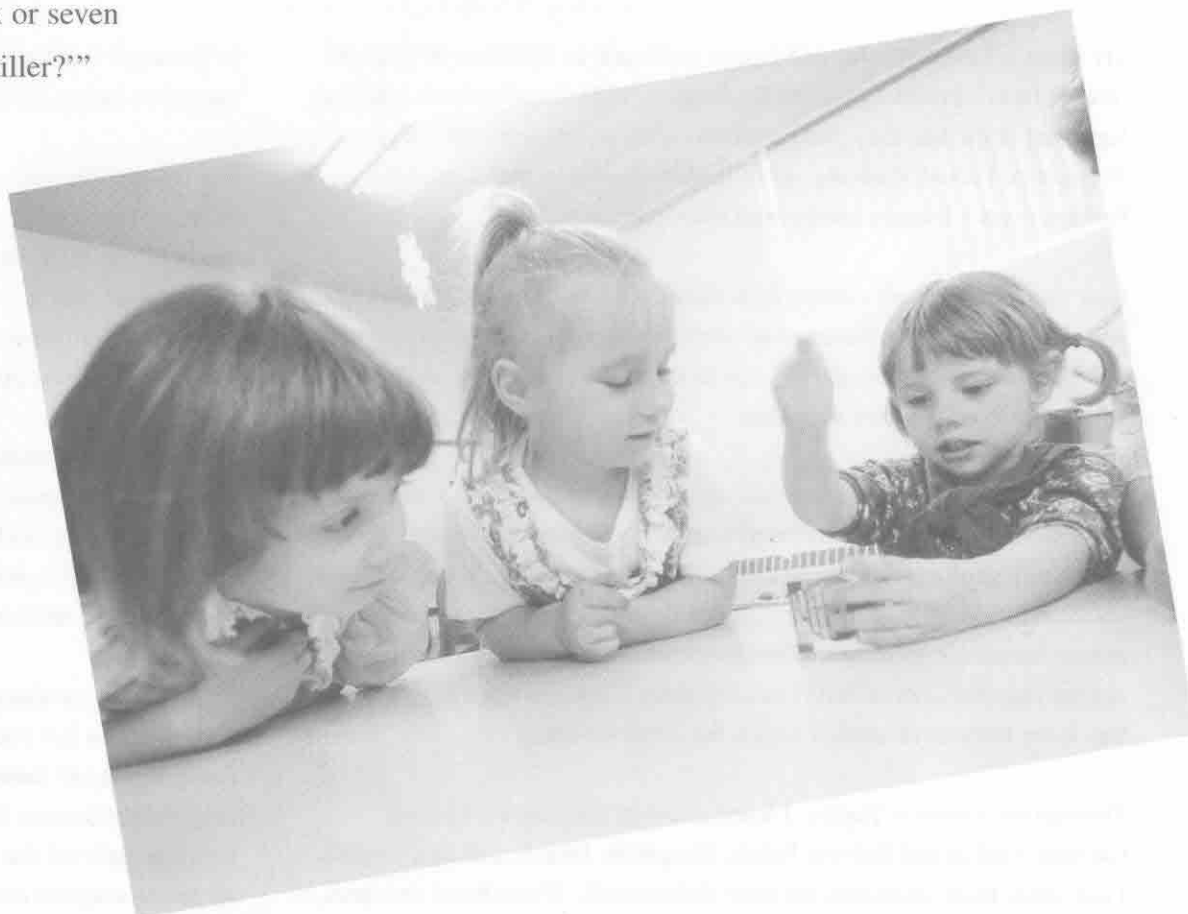
Can I accept this friendship? Sometimes it's harder to talk because he doesn't always have a lot to say. I need to take the initiative. And yet this friendship is important for both of us. Love comes in many forms...and we both enjoy pie!

-a staff member

A Punny Smile

One resident told me with a smile, "If I eat six or seven bowls of cereal, does that make me a 'cereal killer?'"

-a hostel worker



Answering the Call:

The Story of Joseph Cramer

My name is Joseph Cramer and I came to Canada in 1932 as a 40 year-old refugee from Ukraine. I came to Kitchener in 1939. I can't believe what has happened in the last sixty years. I met so many people from Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland, Germany, all of Eastern Europe as they came here. Perhaps I was a friendly person who knew their language.

Now you have refugees coming from Albania, Kosovo, and Yugoslavia plus Africa, Asia, and other places. And your food assistance program provides more hampers in one day than we did in a full year! Let me slow down and let you know a little more about me.

I was Jewish. I was born in Kiev on July 13, 1892—as you say it—with a silver spoon in my mouth. My parents were very wealthy and we had servants. I received a good education in Russia, Romania, and Austria. I wanted to be a doctor, but in 1918, the Russian revolution began and I ended up a refugee. My parents treated our servants well and they tried to protect us from the Bolsheviks and the anarchists, but in vain. I saw my father killed and I fled the country. I was in my last year of medical school, but could not finish.

Through my travels in Europe, I learned several languages—Russian, German, Yiddish and Hebrew, Polish, Hungarian, French, and then English. I can speak many languages but none of them well. If you heard me speak, you could hear my heavy accent.

In Toronto I heard a man preach about Jesus. Even though he was being hassled by others, he remained calm. Later I decided to become a Christian.

I had always been interested in religion, especially after seeing so much suffering because of the devastation in Europe after World War I. How can one best help those who suffer? Where is God in the midst of suffering? Doesn't God call us to relieve the suffering? So I engaged in relief work. Eventually I settled in New York City and worked at a community centre called God's Power House.

God calls us to respond to the suffering of others. How can you and I have so much and the poor have so little? I wanted to follow Christ and be an example to others, so I have very little of my own. If I had two coats, I would soon meet a man who only had one. Why do I need two coats when another man is shivering?

Because I had an interest in theology, some people thought I was a rabbi. But I was merely a Jew converted to Christianity. Yet I was always a Jew. Some Friday nights and Saturday mornings, I would go to the synagogue to worship. I appreciated hearing the Hebrew language and saying the traditional prayers. Yet I also believed that Jesus was the Messiah. But God also speaks through the Jewish tradition and the Hebrew scriptures and prayers.

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While I was working at God's Power House, Mrs. Motz from Toronto heard me speak. She was a missionary to the Jews and was connected with the Toronto Bible College. She knew some people in Kitchener-Waterloo who wanted to start a mission to the Jews and she recommended that I visit them. After much prayer, I decided that I was called to Kitchener-Waterloo and came here on the train.

Ilda Bauman was part of the prayer group that was discerning how they might start a mission in this area. Ilda was a graduate of Toronto Bible College and knew Mrs. Motz. Most of the members of the prayer group were Mennonites. Mrs. Dahmer was a member of Bethany Mennonite Brethren in Christ Church (now Missionary) and I stayed at her home at 30 William Street in Waterloo. The Dahmers had several children who were noisy and bothered me, so I didn't stay there long. The children didn't understand my heavy accent—I was skinny, had few teeth and must have seemed strange to them. We used the Dahmer home as a headquarters and visited the Jewish people, distributing tracts, and loaning them books and other literature. But we needed our own place.

Bishop C. F. Derstine then got involved and our mission changed, not only to evangelize Jewish people but also to help the poor. Dr. Marshall Bingeman, a veterinarian, invited us to use part of his building downtown. We had a

reading room, chapel, dining room, kitchen and several bedrooms upstairs. We had only 177 men overnight that first year—less than 15 beds per month. Now you have 45-55 men per night!

Bishop Derstine, or C.F. as he was affectionately known, was a good and generous man. His wife Mary always made plenty of food and often had a picnic table of hobos. C.F. was very interested in helping refugees and others who needed shelter or food. At that time, transients were often sent to jail or put up in the Walper hotel, whichever was appropriate. C.F. was distressed that transients were jailed.

Once we were set up, Bishop Derstine went to Kitchener city hall and told them we would provide meals and beds for homeless men and also food hampers for hungry people for \$1000.00 a year. That was half of the city's budget for food, meals, and shelter for the poor, so of course, they said yes. Then we had some money to get started.

This mission grew but it did different things than you do now. We did home and hospital visits, evangelistic meetings, worship services in some of the eastern Europe languages, literature and Bible distribution, and served meals to our hostel residents and other needy people. We also found work for men on area farms.

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But we did not do as much work as you do in other areas. We only had twelve food hampers all year plus the seven food hampers that we did at Christmas.

Ilda Bauman was my helper, cook, volunteer coordinator, and administrator. She knew the people in the area and gave her life to the House of Friendship as a deaconess. She worked very hard to make sure we had pianists for our worship services and people to cook and prepare food. She would have made a good director for the House of Friendship but women were not considered for these positions then. Times change!

I only lived ten years after I came to Kitchener and I died in my room at House of Friendship. I tried to live simply. My estate consisted of:

- an iron bed, steel wardrobe, studio couch, library table and two chairs;
- a pair of pillows and cases, comforter, two sheets and pair of flannel sheets;
- an electric heater;
- an electric shaver (not working);
- four sweaters, a winter coat, a spring coat which was being repaired, a fairly good suit and a bathrobe.

Perhaps it was too much.

I did have two hundred dollars that the board offered to the Dahmers for my initial room and board, but they declined. Instead the money was used for my monument in the First Mennonite cemetery.

I'm glad the House of Friendship continues to do the work of Christ in Waterloo Region. I watch over you—the staff, the volunteers, the board and most of all the hungry, vulnerable, and hurting people who need to know God's love, even in the midst of their suffering and tragedy.

I feel honored that a house has been named after me, but it should be named after Christ, perhaps the Good Shepherd House or the Home of the Divine Love. I never wanted fame; I was only a disciple.

So continue to care for God's children, especially the refugee, the vulnerable, the sick and lonely...and help them to know that God has not abandoned them, but is here to save them. AMEN

-by Brice Balmer, Chaplaincy Director, House of Friendship

from information in A Mighty Flood: The House of Friendship Story,

by Ferne Burkhardt, House of Friendship, 1989.

HOUSE OF FRIENDSHIP

INTRODUCTION

House of Friendship is a non-profit human service agency founded in 1939 to serve low-income persons in partnership with Christian churches in the Waterloo Region.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of House of Friendship is to serve low-income adults, youth and children in need of support and to promote opportunities for personal growth, wholesome relationships and community development, through the application of holistic Christian principles.

I want to see a mighty flood of justice, a torrent of doing good.

-Amos 5:24-

PROGRAMS

House of Friendship operates several programs in the areas of Addiction Services, Community Services, Family Services, and Residential Services. These programs are outlined below.

ADDICTION SERVICES PROGRAMS

- **Alcohol**

A residential treatment program for women addicted to alcohol and other drugs.

- **174 King St. North**

A residential treatment program for men addicted to alcohol and other drugs.

COMMUNITY SERVICES PROGRAMS

- **Appliance Repairs**

Provides low-income persons with repairs to major household appliances.

- **Christmas Food Hampers**

A gift of food for people in need during the holiday season that is coordinated through the Christmas Bureau. The Christmas Bureau is a joint venture of House of Friendship and Salvation Army.

- **Emergency Food Hampers**

Distributes food collected by the Food Bank of Waterloo Region and House of Friendship to hungry persons living in the Kitchener- Waterloo community.

FAMILY SERVICES PROGRAMS

- **Community Centres**

House of Friendship provides staffing and administrative support to three community centres in low-income housing areas of Kitchener and Waterloo. These centres provide support to local families and facilitate community development in partnership with neighbourhood associations, local churches, housing providers, municipal governments and other community agencies. The centres are located in the Chandler-Mowat and Courtland-Shelley neighbourhoods of Kitchener and the Sunnydale neighbourhood of Waterloo.

- **Live & Learn**

This program organizes weekly group meetings for low-income mothers with pre-school children. The groups provide opportunities for mutual support, socialization, and life-skills training for both the women and their children.

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- **Summer Camp Sponsorships**

This program provides a five-day summer camp experience for children of low-income families who would otherwise not have that opportunity.

RESIDENTIAL SERVICES PROGRAMS

- **Cramer House**

A long-term residence for adult men who are seeking a supportive community setting.

- **Eby Village**

Affordable apartments where single adult women and men live in a supportive community setting.

- **Kiwanis House**

A transitional residence for young men who are preparing for independent living.

- **Men's Hostel**

An emergency shelter that provides room, board and counselling to homeless men aged 16 and older.

FUNDING SOURCES

House of Friendship is supported financially by churches, community groups, businesses, individuals, United Way, and all levels of government. Government funding from both the provincial and municipal levels is program-specific and provided on a fee for service basis. Program participants that have a source of income pay modest fees to stay in the residential facilities.

House of Friendship is a registered charity and donors receive an official income tax receipt.

FRIENDSHIP FUND

In 1995 an endowment fund called the Friendship Fund was established to provide ongoing financial stability for our chaplaincy and community outreach programs. Through a will, bequest or other donation you can make a lasting gift to support the work of House of Friendship in perpetuity.

AFFILIATIONS

House of Friendship is an interdenominational Christian organization that is supported by many churches. Services are provided without discrimination to the most needy members of our community.

House of Friendship works cooperatively with many community agencies. It is a member agency of the United Way of Kitchener-Waterloo and the Townships of Wellesley, Wilmot and Woolwich, the Food Bank of Waterloo Region, and the Volunteer Action Centre.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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