

# Happy Travels

Cashana Betterly

didn't know what I was doing.

*Structured chaos* is the only phrase that came to my mind when I stepped inside the homeless shelter for the first time. I had never volunteered in a place like this before. I was as nervous as ever, but I didn't quite know why. Well, maybe I do.

For starters, I arrived 30 minutes before all of the other students. This was the first anxiety provoking event of the night. I knocked on the side door. Maybe it was the back door. Or the front door, for that matter. I really wasn't sure. But I knocked and knocked until a younger Black gentleman in his late 20's approached me from behind, noticing how clueless I looked.

"Can I help you?" he asked with a puzzled look on his face. "Um...yes, maybe. Sorry. Uh, I'm a med student and

I'm here to help with giving health screening tests and doing blood pressures," I said, not really knowing if that description adequately covered my tasks for the night.

"Oh right! Today's Monday! Come in here through the kitchen."

And off we went.

The smell of meat and potatoes filled my nostrils. It was humid. Pots and pans were hanging off of the walls. Clinkings and clankings were heard all over the place. We weaved our way through narrow walkways between cupboards and stoves. We eventually arrived to a common area at the bottom of a staircase.

"The women live upstairs. Sometimes they bring their children with them. The men are right over there."

I peered into the adjacent room and took in the sight of about 40 homeless men sitting at picnic tables, all in their 50's and 60's.



## I could tell she had a story. Everyone there did.

Sound was blasting from a small television set in the middle of the room. Fans were scattered about, cooling down the men while they waited for their food to be ready.

“Where do I even start?” I thought to myself.

Just as I was about to walk in, the physician overseeing the event and the other students arrived. Many of the other students decided to start doing health screenings in the men’s living area, so I wandered upstairs to work with some of the women.

Upon reaching the top of the stairs, I saw a room containing four bunk beds. The women’s living area was in a room adjacent to that. This one was much smaller than the men’s living area, much more humid. Same picnic tables, complete with more fans and a tv. And connected to this room was the back porch, where the women were allowed to take ten-minute smoking breaks.

To this day, and I don’t exactly know why, there was one woman in particular who stood out to me. She was in her late 40’s with sandy-silver hair. I think she reminded me of a babysitter I once had. The half-moons under her eyes exposed her fatigue and stress. At the same time, I could sense a comfortable warmth about her. I could tell she had a story. Everyone there did.

“Excuse me, ma’am, would you like to have your blood pressure taken today?” I said to her, knowing deep down how much I actually stink at taking blood pressures.

“The doctor is coming to me this time instead of the other way around! How wonderful!” she joked.

She ended up being the only woman I spoke with that night. We talked in the women’s common area, we talked in the back porch during her smoke break, and we talked in the common area again. As it turns out, alcohol was the demon that brought her to this homeless shelter. She once had been a stewardess for a well-known airline. Her daughter is a current college student. She hadn’t spoken with her in years. An unstable marriage combined with an already existing addiction led to the trying circumstances she’s living with now. Last I

### **Naples Pier HDR** *Ryan Humphries*

■ *Ryan Humphries* is a third year medical student at Florida State University.

spoke with her, she was doing well on her anti-depressants, staying sober, and getting ready to re-take her stewardess exam.

This was a year ago.

I have no idea where she is or what she’s doing now. I would like to, though. I would like to know all of these things. I told her that I would try to visit her again. So far, I have not kept that promise.

I don’t want her to be there when I return to the homeless shelter. I want her to be reunited with her daughter. I want her to be on airplanes again, putting new and nervous passengers at ease with her warmth and sense of humor.

To the sandy-silver haired woman, I wish you safe and happy travels.

■ *Cashana Betterly* is a second year medical student at Florida State University.

## Laugh *Cathaley Nobles*

Never knew my father  
Was told he disowned me  
Mother never wanted me  
Because he disowned me  
Older sister died  
My only source of love and support

Fear, loss, and anger consumed me  
Repeated molestation by a family member aged me  
Start of alcoholism by 12th grade

First bout with cancer – lung – told no one  
Serious drug addiction – cocaine  
Cut remaining hair off – hated treatments  
Cancer in remission – still a drug addict  
Eight times in drug rehabilitation –  
Eight times non-completion

Second bout with cancer – abdominal – told no one  
Serious drug addiction – cocaine – crack – alcohol  
Head already shaved – hated treatments  
Cancer in remission – drugs and alcohol not

Made a meeting – made new friends  
Started to know and love myself  
Still making meetings – still sober and clean  
I laugh everyday – mostly at myself