

Carleen Corbett reads her story to her writing class in the basement of Portland's Downtown Chapel.

Summer Art Workshops at the Downtown Chapel

Guests of the Downtown Chapel's daily Hospitality Center are making art this summer, working in clay, pastels, acrylic and other media as part of the summer arts program. Last week, local author Martha Gies convened a writing workshop. A few spontaneous responses to prompts appear below.

Homeless, pregnant teens

I can't forget a time talking to a psychologist about being homeless. The more I try to reason, it all comes out to mental illness or alcohol and drugs, or abuse.

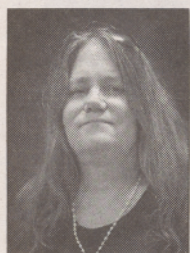
My own experience I can carry for a lifetime: there's no sleeping out there, and you have to wait for a place to rest, and watch your back from strangers. There's no time to stay in one place. The key was to keep on moving on.

I saw eight women living outside and today, four of them are pregnant.



Tyron Reardon

— TYRONE REARDON



Gayle Johnston

When I first came on the street, in 2005, one of the first people I met was a pregnant 14-year-old girl. My mind went back to my daughter, my youngest, who at that time was 12, and my heart split open so wide. I stuck to her like glue and was very fortunate to get her in the women's safe shelter at the same time I got in.

Chaplain J.R. at Portland Rescue Mission got her in to Shepherd's Door recovery program four days before I got in there. She stayed at Shepherd's Door for two years, completed the program, and now is raising her child and has her own place in the same apartment complex as her parents. She attends East Hill Foursquare Church in Gresham. Karen and I keep in touch, and my granddaughter and her daughter play together.

— GAYLE JOHNSTON

The loss of a pet

One time in my life I had a grasp on a brindle pet.

Passionate and loving was that dog in my abode.

Overly protective she became on her home ground:

She bit an outsider, what a terrible day. Sad it was when I had to sign her death. I still have dreams of the loving brindle.

In my heart I sigh and crystals fall down to the ground.

— MARK SPRINGS

I remember my first relationship with a dog. My sister brought him home as a stray. I was only four years old. I played with him and told him all my secrets. I loved to curl up with him where I felt safe.



Carleen Corbett

— CARLEEN CORBETT

One day he was hit by a car. He wasn't killed, but he couldn't move. My parents put him on a mat in the dining room. Every day I would sit beside him and talk to him. We couldn't play anymore, but he was still my friend. I don't know how long that arrangement went on, but it seemed a long time.

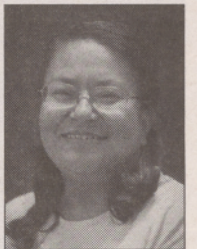
Then one day I came into the room and he was gone. My mother had had him put to sleep.

If I had wings

If I had wings I'd fly home to Montana where my parents are buried and visit their graves; put flowers on Grandpa's grave on Veteran's Day. I'd fly to Houston, where my boyfriend Wayne is and see if the hurricane hit today. I'd fly him here, fly him to see his grandbaby and his brother.

I'd fly to see my sisters in Kansas and Montana, and my older brother, too. I'd just hover over Utah and check on my little brother, then fly to heaven to Mom and Dad to report, and visit Grandpa and Grandma. I'd ride my horse Dusty and give him wings, too, so he'd be a Pegasus in heaven.

— RHONDA RADOMSKI



Rhonda Radmoski

If I had wings I would find myself flying up to the heavens where I could be close to my father's house. My life would be the most wonderful thing if I had wings.

I would find the largest mountain to fly around and look at God's beautiful earth as it is from high in the sky. I would fly to the ocean and fly the holiday and the night, until I couldn't fly anymore.

Back here, I'd go to funny and dreaming places, just to find a little peace in the world.

— PAMELA BRADFORD

Money

I wish I had more, heck, I wish I had even some. My current boyfriend says I don't save. I say I don't make enough to save. I do day labor and try to get a regular job. They don't seem to be hiring. Every now and again, I make enough to be comfortable - homeless. This needs to be constant. For there's stuff I need and want that the homeless services either don't provide or have no funding for.

It's hard to sit here in the city and watch people who have money. Wish I were in the country.

— RHONDA RADOMSKI

Money is for greedy people, except when you need it to buy food or pay for housing. People think it gives them power but they are sadly mistaken.

As easily as you were put on this earth you can be take off, either by natural death or by a sickness or by someone killing you.

— CHRIS PIKE

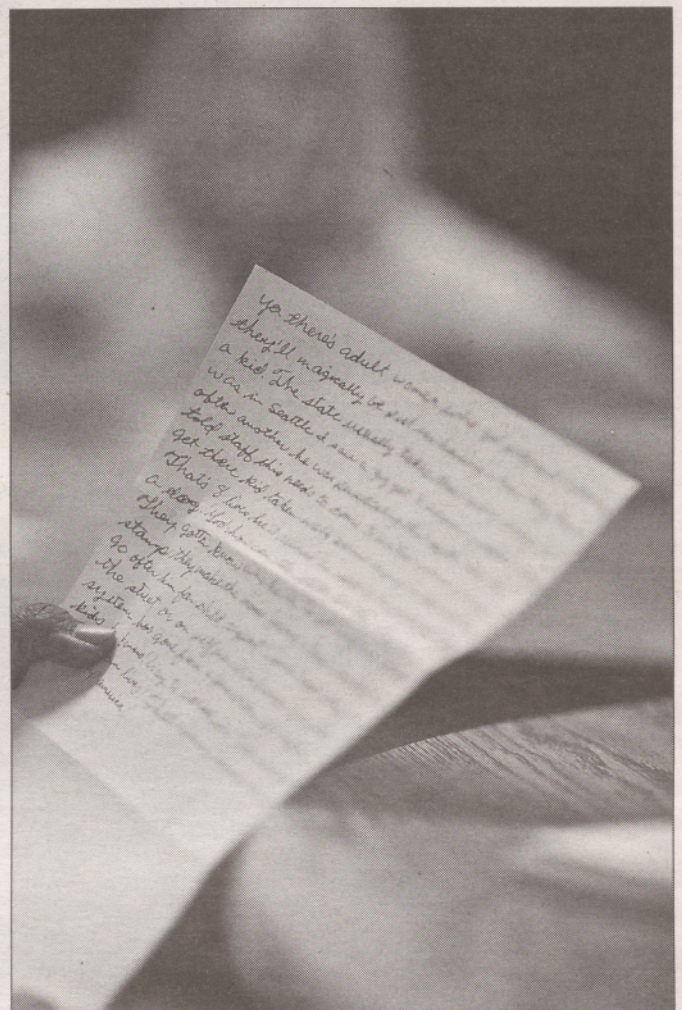


PHOTO BY KEN HAWKINS

Writer and educator Martha Gies listens as a homeless writer reads her short story to her class.