

YOGA, from page 4

people who have been homeless or who have experienced the grips of long term addiction tend to hold that in their bodies," said Michelle. She believes yoga releases a certain kind of grief and it allows those who practice yoga a freedom if you can learn to sit still and breathe.

"Yoga offers your mind a chance to be still and focus on something other than where you have been or where you are going. It allows you to be right where you are. When you can learn to be in the present, it changes you. It helps you to deal with whatever you have to deal with when you step off the (yoga) mat whether it be prison, homelessness, grief or pain. There is something about yoga that makes coping easier. If you can find joy in the midst of total chaos you can store it and tap into it when you need it. Once you find it, it is always present. Yoga helps you cultivate that."

Living Yoga offers more than 900 yoga classes in prisons, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, transitional facilities, and to populations who would otherwise not have access to it. Currently, Living Yoga serves 11 institutions with over 20 different classes/week. They have nearly 80 active volunteers teaching more than 10,000 student hours of yoga.

Repping the Roots

In memory of Nick Gefroh. R.I.P.
By Marlon Crump

Smile with energy
Ignition to your engine
Make not a sound wearing a frown
Holding a stack of the latest edition
No turbulence in the air quality
We flock to each other, a community
With equality
All "Hater Clubs" closed!
Upon our creativity
Community Is unity
True "quality of life" love led to the light
Supporters, not consumers
Powerful presence of sound, body, and mind.
Patience! Proactive with all! People!
All good and bad blanket us within a matter of time
Never measured by money!
Only by movement, body, and my mind!



Street Biography

PHOTO BY KENDALL

Shasta Smith

BY KENDALL

Listening to other women's stories is her mission in life. Shasta Smith has been unhoused off and on since 2004, in four different cities. She began being an advocate for women on the street around 2011, when she lived at Right 2 Dream Too, which is where she began to join other unhoused people in demanding systemic change.

Now she has housing, she has a caring partner who is involved in advocacy with her, and she's eight months pregnant. At the age of 38, she knows there are no guarantees about what's ahead. But she has a heart for women living on the street. She has been where they are, and she knows the hours and rules of the shelters for women in Portland and several other cities. She knows what pitiful few services are available for women on the street, and she can help others find them. She's a volunteer at Sisters of the Road. She's been clean and sober for two years and knows how to help others get addiction off their backs if that's what they want to do. "But I don't hound anyone," she explains,

"I have a young friend about 19. When we see each other, we both light up. When she's ready to be clean and sober, she knows where to find me, and she knows I'll support her. I don't have to say a word to her about it. It's her decision. I'll make phone calls for her. I'll lend her my phone. I'll go with her to rehab, I'll back her all the way. But that decision has to be hers. It won't work till she decides it's time."

Tossing her long hair and fingering the beads at her neck, Shasta stares out the window at people lining up for lunch at Sisters. "Each woman makes the best decision she can, for where she is in her life," She says. It's up to each one of us to figure out what she wants. I'm not here to tell anybody anything. I don't give advice. A woman on the streets is vulnerable in particular ways."

Shasta pauses to hug a woman who has come to Sisters to get a meal coupon and tells her, "I have a new journal for you in my bag. Wait a minute and I'll get it." Shifting her attention back to this interview, Shasta continues without missing a beat.

"Sometimes women with mental health issues need a journal to pour their heart into. Sometimes they need music, and I may download a song that will put a smile on somebody's face. Maybe on that day I'm the only person that woman met who had something to offer her."

Some women are intimidated, not just by men, but by the difficulty of living in the street, Shasta

says.

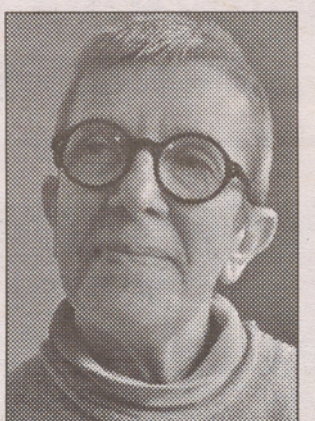
"Some women are quiet, afraid to ask for anything, afraid to speak up. I'm very loud and vocal, and I've always been that way. I think every female's voice needs to be heard. So I'm here to listen. That's the main thing I do: listen. ... There were times when I was out there when I just needed somebody to hear me, listen to me, be a witness to what I was going through and treat me like a human being. So now I do that for others."

"It takes me an hour to get into town from where I'm living and an hour to get back home at the end of the day, but unless I've listened to at least five women during the day, not just saying hello but really getting them to talk about what they feel, then I'm not ready to go home."

Shasta says the reason she doesn't burn out is that she knows the work of listening makes a difference in people's lives. But she sees a need for more day centers where women can gather in groups and support each other, more places where they can charge their cell phones and computers if they have them, and more places to sleep in safety. She'd like more empty buildings to be used as shelters. She'd like to see 24-hour hygiene centers. She'd like more services for women with mental health issues, more clinics, more therapists, more health care for everyone. She'd like to see more shelters for women and children who are dealing with domestic violence. There are waiting lists at all those shelters now, and women can get beaten up or killed while they're waiting.

Shasta concludes, "I know we're not going to get a better deal for unhoused women by standing around and wishing for it. We've got to get the Homeless Bill of Rights through the legislature. We've got to advocate for better programs for women and fight for them. We've got to keep talking about what women need, and we can't give up. And while all that's happening, I'm going to be right here, walking the streets — talking to women, listening to what they have to say. I'll be right here."

Kendall is a photographer, writer, listener, and retired college professor. She was on the Occupy Portland media team. Her work includes "Singing Away the Hunger," by Mpho Nthunya, and many stories of people on the margins of society who prevail against impossible circumstances.



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