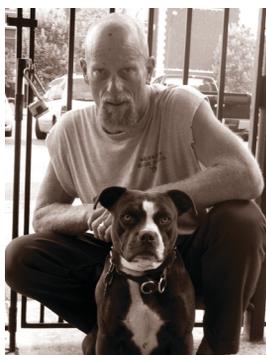
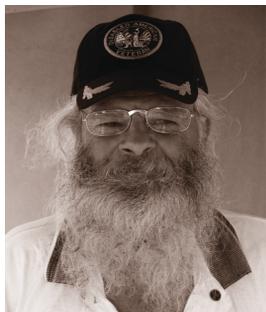


THE FACES OF IRON GATE

2013



IRON GATE MISSION:
FEEDING THE HUNGRY AND HOMELESS OF TULSA — EVERY DAY

THE FACES OF IRON GATE



It is tempting for a hunger relief agency like Iron Gate to focus on numbers—how many people we fed, how many tons of food we served, how much it cost, etc.

The people who eat at Iron Gate are more than numbers to us. They are people we come to know and care about. Often we learn about their lives, their setbacks, their successes and their dreams.

We feed veterans, seniors, homeless (temporary or chronic) and working families with children. Some have physical or mental disabilities. Some have alcohol or substance addictions.

Most (60 percent) are not homeless. One-third is Native Americans of many tribes, but predominantly Cherokee and Creek. The majority are white males, middle-age or older. Some are homeless teens and young adults. Some are single mothers with children.

Some eat with us regularly, others only temporarily. We feed people three ways: (1) the daily soup kitchen (8:30-10:30 a.m. every day;) (2) the thrice weekly emergency grocery pantry (guests can receive groceries once a month;) and (3) the Kids' Pantry with bags of healthy, kid-friendly snacks for every child.

In this booklet you will meet some of the people who ate with us this year. They represent the demographics of Iron Gate: age, sex, age, ethnicity, background and problems.

These are their stories.



THOMAS FREEMAN

When Thomas, age 4, got his Kid's Pack at Iron Gate, he tore it open on the spot and ate the fruit cup.

Thomas says he loves fruit cups. Also apples, oranges, vegetables, grapes, milk, ice cream cones and—pizza!

Thomas is verbal and has a lot to say. And a lot to ask. "What's that?" is his favorite question.

What does he want to be when he grows up?

"A big boy."

He has big shoes to fill, said his mother, Doetta Hicks, full blood Creek. He is named for his grandfather Thomas Harjo, a tribal leader who stood 7'1".

This summer was tough for Thomas's family. In June, Doetta's job was terminated, she discovered she was pregnant and her partner Russell Toppah, Kiowa, was out of work, too. Suddenly, for the first time in their life, they were homeless.

"I never thought I'd be at Iron Gate," Doetta said. Then their car broke down and they were without transportation. For months, bureaucratic snags delayed assistance they needed. They lived on the street, sleeping "wherever we could lay ourselves down." They spent the days in city parks with splash pads so Thomas could stay cool. At night, they put him to bed at friends' homes.

Question: What do they want for Thomas?

Answer: The best education he can get. Not wind up like us.





RAYMOND NEUOK

Ray Neuok, 68, began having panic attacks at an early age, but he was adept at hiding them, especially from his harsh father. Consequently, “my mental illness went untreated.”

After one panic attack in public that led to hospitalization, his father screamed at him all the way home about the insurance expense.

Except for an abusive father and a mother cowed by her husband’s temper, Ray describes his childhood in Milwaukee as average: baking German bread with his mother and learning electronics, welding, hydraulics and construction from his father.

Ray has a sharp intellect, an expansive vocabulary and a penchant toward verbosity, so he talks with detail about his military service in the Air Force: flying helicopters, B-52s and KC-135s; working on RC-47s and RBJ7-Es. He talks about his tour in Korea in mid-1960s; “I had to kill people and I feel bad about that.”

He was married for 14 years and has four children, all college educated. And then he “came apart.” What was that like? “It’s something that happens in your mind. It’s scary. You can’t believe it’s your mind.”

Ray is not sure how long he lived on the street after his breakdown, “close to 20 years.” Now he lives in a duplex on a military pension. He says that Tulsa psychologists, psychiatrists and lithium carbonate saved his life.

Ray’s wish for the holidays: Finding a solution to the causes of mental illness.





BOBBY JOHNSON

Bobby Johnson, 54, looks like the happiest man in town.

He's always cheerful and smiling. What he loves about life is people. Except people who smoke. "I lost five sisters to lung cancer. I don't go anywhere near anybody who lights up a cigarette."

He would be happier if he had a job. It's hard to find a job in Oklahoma, he said, "it's a poor state."

Bobby grew up in Muskogee in a family of 12 children. As a boy, he wanted to be a firefighter. Instead, he joined the U.S. Army at age 17, right out of high school. It was a smart decision, his mother told him.

He liked the military. His was a peace time service, stationed at Ft. Leonard Wood in Missouri. A diagnosis of Sickle Cell Anemia forced him to leave the army.

He married and settled in St. Louis, but the marriage did not last. On poor terms with his ex-wife, he lost touch with his two daughters and hasn't seen them in five years. He returned to Oklahoma for his father's funeral. Then, out of work.

For three years he was on the street. Now, thanks to the Veterans Administration, he is off the street. "I worship the V.A. I couldn't survive without them." He gets \$200 a month in food stamps.

If Bobby had three wishes: (1) to see my daughters graduate high school, (2) to buy a decent house, and (3) to travel—Hawaii, Fiji, London, Australia, Bahamas...





STREET CREW

They refer to themselves as the crew.

They're all 19, homeless and best friends. They didn't finish high school, live on the streets and stop by the Youth Services of Tulsa's Drop-In Center for sandwiches, showers, clothes and laundry facilities. There they can socialize with other homeless teens and young adults.

When they're ready, the Drop-In Center can help them move out of homelessness. In the meantime, "It's everything to us," one said. "You can meet girls. You don't have to be on the street."

How do they survive on the street? Temporary construction jobs, house hopping with friends, sleeping under a bridge or at John 3:16 or in the back of a pick up truck in a church parking lot, food stamps, hustling and, they admit, sometimes selling the sandwiches they get at the Drop-in Center.

What's hard about the street? Police, rain, bugs, no place to secure their stuff. "People will steal your stuff while you're sleeping."

MEET THE CREW:

Chris Hammond from Sherman, Texas. On his own since 14.

Ruben Harris from Tulsa. Out of the home at 18.

Allen Harris from Oklahoma City. Left home at 16.

Joseph Brown from who knows where. "He just appeared one day and we said he could hang with us."

Some would like to find a way to go back to school or get a G.E.D. and then join military. Until then, they wish they had a little house where they could all live together, off the street.



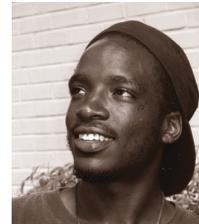
Chris



Ruben



Allen



Joe





JACQUALIN JOHNSON

Jackie Johnson's happiest childhood memories are of being with her Cherokee grandmother on the Tahlequah farm—picking huckleberries, catching crawdads and learning to cook biscuits and gravy.

Her parents drank too much, she said, so her grandparents adopted her along with five siblings and a cousin. It was a church-going family that lived close to the land, fishing and gardening. They had a horse named Geronimo.

But Jackie chose a different life path. At 17, she ran away from home, landed in Oklahoma City and started drinking. She married, went to Mexico, lived in Arizona, worked as a nurse's aid. Then she ran away again. She woke up at the Port of Catoosa, intoxicated and beginning a life on Tulsa's streets.

"Alcohol takes you down a path you don't want to go," she said. "I have seen the worse in life. I've been beaten, raped and shot at." She has been in prison three times for assault.

"I keep looking to the sky. I keep working on my artwork. She signs her drawings "Two Feathers." It means Courage, she said. What her Cherokee heritage gives her is not pride, she said, but the courage to keep going forward.

Jackie is hoping for a future free of alcohol and to sleep under a roof. "Never in my 41 years have I asked my Cherokee Nation for help. But Meredith Frailey (former Cherokee Nation Tribal councilor) is making me believe in my own nation. There's still someone who cares!"





ANITA PHILLIPS

All Anita Phillips ever wanted to be was a wife and the mother of a big, happy family in a stable environment. What she didn't want to be was like her own mother.

Anita grew up with a single mom and several stepfathers involved with drugs. The family moved a lot.

At age five, she was put into child protective services and "something really bad happened to me," she said. She was raped by two teenagers.

Anita married when she was 22, began a family, taught Sunday School and worked for a church day care center and soup kitchen. Then her life began to unravel. She found herself working in a bar and the mother of five children by three different men, some involved with drugs. "I have always loved God and I know He's watching over me. That's what keeps me from doing drugs and keeps me going on."

A year ago, Anita and four children came from Texas to join relatives in Tulsa. They ended up alone in a rental house without electricity. That's when they came to Iron Gate—to eat, to get emergency groceries and to get out of the heat. "I worked at a soup kitchen," she said. "I never thought I'd eat at one."

Her wish for the holidays: "For everybody to love one another. For there to be no hunger, no homelessness and no sorrow."





PAUL & T-BONE

Even when he was homeless and living on the street, Paul Wood, 46, slept under a bridge instead of going to a shelter. That's because pets aren't allowed at Tulsa's shelters and Paul won't leave T-Bone. They are inseparable.

"He saved my life," Paul says.

The year Paul was born in Pennsylvania, his Merchant Marine father died. Two years later, his mother was committed to a mental institution. His nine siblings went to live with relatives; Paul was sent to a children's cottage. For the next 14 years he lived in 13 foster homes, boys' homes and detention centers.

At 16, he was accepted by Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey Circus College in Florida. His specialty act was juggling chain saws and bowling balls while climbing ladders.

Then seven years in the Army Reserves. When his wife left and took their two daughters, Paul's life fell apart. He became addicted to methamphetamine.

"One day, I saw people giving away a dog, bone thin and covered with ticks. I took it just to get it away from those people. In one hour, T-Bone and I fell in love. I got down on my knee and told him, 'I will never reject you. I will never mistreat you. I will always love you.' T-Bone got my focus off of 'poor me.'"

Now Paul is clean and sober. He and T-Bone are moving into an apartment.

"I owe it all to Tanya. (Tanya Moore, Iron Gate staff.) She got me connected with Veteran's Association and Volunteers of America."

His wish for the holiday? "That's easy, man. To have my daughters come to Tulsa to visit me."





Iron Gate is one of Tulsa's largest hunger relief agencies.

Our mission is simple: we feed hungry people.

In recent years, the number of hungry people in Tulsa and across the nation has reached epic proportions. Since 2006, Iron Gate has seen a 396 percent increase in hungry people.

- Last year, we fed 302,000 people at a cost of \$3.67 a person.
- We serve an average of 600 meals a day from the soup kitchen.
- We distribute 800 grocery bags a month.
- We hand out 600 Kids' Packs a month.
- It costs \$3,000 a day to keep our gates open

How do we do it?

- Iron Gate is financed entirely by contributions from individuals, foundations, the faith community, businesses and social organization.
- We have free rent and utilities from Trinity Church, but no direct financial support.
- Our elected Board of Directors comes from a variety of religious affiliations and professions.
- About half of the food we serve comes from the Community Food Bank of Eastern Oklahoma (free or purchased at a discount.) The rest we buy from other sources. About 6 percent is donated by food drives.
- Much of our labor is voluntary, hundreds of volunteers a year.

Iron Gate is a nonsectarian organization that requires neither chapel attendance nor self-improvement programs. That is one of our core strengths. As one of our founders said, "We don't make our guests sing for their supper."

We need your financial help. Please make your donation today by mail, in person, by phone or online.

IRON GATE

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Visit Iron Gate on Facebook to keep up with our news and activities.

IRON GATE PHILOSOPHY:

We call the people who eat with us our guests because we invite them to eat with us. We believe that we are all guests on this earth, and guests treat one another with courtesy, kindness and respect.

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