



# THE FACES OF IRON GATE

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2014



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

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# THE FACES OF IRON GATE



We work to keep Iron Gate a friendly, welcoming place. Not just for the people who need food assistance, but for the volunteers and staff, too.

Hundred of people come through our gates every day—either to the soup kitchen or the grocery pantry. Most have life stories that would break your heart. Unless we ask, they don't tell their stories. They come here for the food, the community and the refuge.

At Iron Gate, we see the same issues affecting people from coast to coast:

- This year, the new phenomenon of congregated “street kids,” youth 18-24 who are homeless for varied reasons from physical abuse to drugs. The national profile is that they stick together for safety and friendship and many have dogs as a family substitute;
- Veterans needing assistance for health care, housing, addiction and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. National statistics say 10-20% of the homeless population are veterans;
- Working families struggling with low wages (or no wages) and rising costs of food and housing;
- Individuals with mental diseases, physical disabilities, substance or alcohol abuse;
- Single mothers fleeing domestic abuse or family trauma.
- A large proportion of Native Americans, comprising one-third of the people who eat with us.

Some come to Iron Gate regularly, others we may meet only once. All are welcome. Our soup kitchen serves a hot, home cooked meal every day of the year 8:00-10:30 a.m. The grocery pantry distributes grocery bags thrice weekly. The Kids’ Pantry gives a Ziploc bag of kid-friendly, healthy snacks to every Iron Gate youth under 18.

We see staggering numbers of Tulsans living with poverty and food insecurity, but they are more than numbers to us—they are individuals. In this Faces booklet, you will meet some who ate with us this year. They represent the demographics of Iron Gate: age, sex, ethnicity, background and problems.

These are their stories.



# CARMEN RAMIREZ

WITH SONS ANGEL AND MAX

Carmen and her sons came to Iron Gate less than a week after her husband and the boys' father was taken off a ventilator and died in a Tulsa hospital.

"I cry every day," she said. "He was my soul mate. The love of my life."

Carmen has lived in Tulsa since she was 15. She was born in Mexico but grew up in Nebraska. "I was the only Hispanic in the whole school there," she said. "It was hard."

The family's health problems began four years ago when Max, now eight, was diagnosed with a tumor on his kidney. The treatment was major surgery followed by 18 months of chemotherapy and radiation.

Two years ago, her husband Gregorio's health began to fail. He was then 39, a concrete finisher and the sole provider for the family. Although diabetic, he had been doing well. Then things fell apart. He had surgery, respiratory arrest and an infection. For three weeks, he was in ICU on a ventilator. "The doctors and nurses were so good to us," Carmen said. "But there was nothing they could do for him." He lived seven minutes after being disconnected from the machine. "I was there till his last breath."

During those long months of hospital care, the family lost their apartment and their truck. Carmen, Angel, 10, and Max, were living at the Salvation Army when we met them. Her main concern then was raising money for Gregorio's burial. "His family wants to send him back to Mexico, but he wanted to be buried here."

Her conscience bothers her. "Sometimes I feel so guilty. He was diabetic and I didn't always make him eat properly." Carmen, 41, is also worried because she is pregnant. "I have grandchildren older than this child."

Carmen and Gregorio had been together for 20 years. "I will never marry again. I will be a widow forever."



*Your donation of \$2,500 will provide hot meals for 670 people like Carmen, Max and Angel.*



ANTHONY DREADFULWATER

BOOMER SOONER  
BLUES

Thanks to efforts by the Muscogee Creek Nation, Anthony, 24, (Creek/Cherokee) was released from foster care and reunited with his family when he was six or seven. It wasn't a Happy Ever After ending.

He was hospitalized several times as an abused child. "My dad was a bad drunk when I was a kid," he said. Anthony's parents were together "off and on." Although it was not a stable home, the kids loved them. "When they split up, we didn't know how to take it."

These days, Anthony lives on the street and works standby jobs. He lost his full-time job as a heavy equipment operator when he was injured at work, taken to the hospital and tested positive for drugs (methamphetamine.)

Anthony and his friends sleep "wherever we can." The night before, he had slept outside First Presbyterian Church. "We stay together for protection," he said. "Maybe five or six as a family, maybe 15-20 we can trust. Because some homeless people with a thug mentality wait until we go to sleep and steal our stuff."

He doesn't sleep in a shelter because he has a problem with confinement, the noise and the other people there. Some of these places are dirty, he said. "They stink and the floors are so nasty they're sticky." The day we spoke, he was on his way to Youth Services of Tulsa's drop in shelter to take a shower.

He comes to Iron Gate because of the food and to see his friends. "These are the people who make my day."

As a boy, Anthony wanted to be a lawyer. He plans to go back to school studying IT and business. "I will one day. First, I have to learn a lesson from this homelessness—not getting into trouble and keeping a job."

One day he'll change his life. "There's a big wonderful world out there I want to see."



*Your donation of \$3,000 will pay for one entire day's operation at Iron Gate—soup kitchen and grocery pantry.*



MARK LETTICH

"I don't consider myself homeless. I'm houseless sometimes, but I'm a resident of Tulsa," said Mark Lettich. His eight years in the U.S. Army Reserves (including six years as a lieutenant) gave him skills to handle camping outside in the roughest weather.

"I have never panhandled. Not one time—ever. For a very few it may be appropriate, but for others I consider it a crime. I am able bodied and can work."

Mark lost his job in recession cutbacks and was houseless for three years. Now he is staying with a friend. Whether sheltered or not, his routine is the same: he signs in at 5:00 a.m. for a day labor job. If there is no work, he catches the Morton bus to be at Iron Gate by 8:30 a.m. From there, to the downtown library, then to noon mass at Holy Family Cathedral. If he doesn't have city bus fare (\$1.50) or other transportation, he walks. "I just march off to wherever I have to go."

He checks back with Stand-by Personnel at 2:00 p.m. and often waits in the labor hall for two or three hours. "It helps to have something to read." Inveterate reading may account for his extensive vocabulary. Or, that may be because he holds an associate of arts degree from the Western Michigan University.

Mark is quiet, but he enjoys the camaraderie of the labor hall and Tulsa's annual Stand Down event for homeless veterans where he gets blankets and sleeping bags.

He also finds that AA is a good support group. "After 30 years, I have attended literally thousands of meetings." He doesn't abstain absolutely from alcohol. "I have my drinking days in the camp and my non-drinking days when I go to AA."

What he'd like to say to the world: "Setbacks can be a springboard. Even if you find yourself displaced through loss of jobs or residence, even with the frustration involved in displacement, you may step into a better world."



*You gift of \$750 will pay for 600 households to receive eggs with their grocery bags.*



# PAMELA PAYNE

"I was the black sheep in the family. My mother always told us, 'Try to work. Pay attention in school.' I was the only one who didn't pay attention in school."

That might be because she couldn't see. Her school years were spent in special education classes. Until the twelfth grade, nobody knew all she needed was glasses. By then she was so devoted to her teachers and friends—and so afraid of change—she wouldn't leave the special education classes.

Pam was one of five children born to a single mother who relied on welfare until the children were older and she could go to work. "It was a good moral family," Pam said, "but we struggled really hard."

She wanted to be a nurse's aide when she was a little girl, then when she was about 25 and still living in the projects, she became addicted to crack—"Trying to be cool." That addiction lasted 12 years. Along the way, she had five children herself including one daughter who is disabled.

"It's hard to get off it." She checked herself into 12 & 12 three times and into hospitals multiple times. "I saw I could not help myself. Finally, Jesus knew it was time for me to leave it alone."

Pam first heard about Iron Gate from the Day Center for the Homeless and has been eating here "for a big while." She likes the healthy food, especially the vegetables, and the strong coffee. "It's the goofest. Just like QuikTrip."

Today Pam is drug free and has been at the Salvation Army for six years. Finally, she has been approved for federally subsidized housing. Is that why she seems so happy? "The secret of being happy is forgiveness—forgiving myself. It's hard to do. I made my own life hard on me."

Her Christmas wish: "To be in my apartment, in my own furnished place. Nothing special—just a TV and a bed. And to get my daughter back."



*Your contribution of \$500 will pay for 400 households to have bread with their grocery bags.*



LEVI HILL

Christopher Levi Hill was born 19 years ago in Oklahoma City. Ask about his family and he replies, “I don’t have any. My father died the day before I was born.”

When he was eight months old, he was put in Department of Human Services (DHS) custody and stayed there virtually all of his childhood—in boys’ homes, shelters and foster homes. He was reunited with his mother for a few months when he was 17, but he has been on his own since he was 18.

He wasn’t physically abused in foster care—well, maybe once, he admits—but the main reason he didn’t like it was because he couldn’t do the things other kids did.

“You’ve got no money and you can’t go anywhere. You can’t spend the night at a friend’s house.” He’s never been to Disney World or to a state fair.

Levi has something now he’s never had before, something more precious to him than anything—his year-old dog Dynasty. “She’s my family. I would do anything for that dog.”

Dynasty is one reason Levi is homeless. He can’t take a dog into a homeless shelter. He can’t get an apartment with a dog. “I’m a hard worker, but I can’t get a job, or even look for a job, because I have no place to leave her.”

Beyond the issue of Dynasty, he has been barred from the Salvation Army, John 3:16 and the Day Center for the Homeless. Why? “Trouble.” He does go to the drop-in shelter at Youth Services of Tulsa.

He sleeps, “wherever I can lay my head.” The hardest thing about being homeless, he said, is the weather. And continually having his stuff stolen. And the police; “We can’t be anywhere.” He’s always on the move. “My feet hurt. Dynasty’s feet hurt.” Recently she was attacked by another dog and both she and Levi were bitten. “Her ears are hurt, and my thumb’s infected.”

Levi’s three wishes for the new year: a house, a car and a job.



*Your donation of \$250 will provide home cooked, healthy meals for 67 people living on the street.*



TRACEY FRYAR

Tracey was born in Tupelo, Mississippi, where he grew up with seven brothers and two cousins raised by his single mother who worked in a sewing factory.

The hardest part of his childhood? “I wanted to be a girl.” When he was a teen, his mother asked him, “Are you or are you not?” With that question, Tracey said, “I busted out of my shell and told her. ‘I still love you,’ she said. ‘I would have been angry if you hadn’t told me.’”

Tracey’s biggest regret is that he wasn’t a better student. “I acted a fool in school. I’m a kind-hearted person. I love everyone, even if they don’t like me. I made my mistakes trying to be nice. Too nice with money. I was always trying to help someone.”

He is still trying to help people, especially the young homeless people he meets. “I tell them to go back to school.”

Seven years ago, Tracey was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. He lives on the street, eats at Iron Gate and goes to the Day Center for the Homeless to shower.

After four years on the waiting list, with help from his counselor at Family and Children’s Service, he has a voucher for subsidized housing from the Oklahoma Housing Authority and is trying to find an apartment. “I’ll be happy to sleep in my own place.” His dream is to go back to school and study interior decorating. He also likes nursing and making older people smile. He’s much like his mother, that way. “She makes a party every day. She loves to cook and gossip and go to the casino.

“It’s hard being on the street, but I’m okay. I just live my life every day. I thank the Lord for waking up in the morning. I hate it when people look down on me. I love life. And I love being Tracey.”



*Your gift of \$100 will pay for coffee for half a week at the soup kitchen.*



ANGEL PROSSER & JOHN LANDIS

“Hi, remember me?” asked Angel Prosser, 13. “I used to come here when I was little.” She was sitting in the Iron Gate dining room eating chocolate cake and cradling her take-away Kid’s Pack of snacks.

“I raised her from the time she was two until she was about ten,” said her grandfather John Landis. The two have had plenty of hard times.

After suffering what he describes as a nervous breakdown, John was homeless for three years. Angel was homeless herself for a while and stayed at the Tulsa County Shelter. “I hated it,” she said.

Angel is as cheerful and chatty as a chickadee: she has a gray fluffy dog named Awesome; she loves music, games, friends and family; soccer is her favorite sport; when she grows up she wants to be a song writer or a poem writer or a singer or an actor; she has two nicknames, Squirrel and Sonic because she runs so fast; she loves country music and the band One Direction. “I know all of their names—Zayn, Niall, Harry, Louis and Liam. But I don’t know their last names. I have a One Direction pencil holder and poster and backpack.”

John was a young man operating a successful remodeling company when his 39-year-old wife died of lung cancer, leaving him alone to raise two young daughters. “I did it. I raised them.” But he was so overloaded with work and stress, “I crashed and burned.” He lost his business, his home and his car. “I was out of it,” he said. John survived by staying at the Day Center for the Homeless, the Salvation Army “and by praying to God to help me.”

Both Angel and her grandfather have homes now, but occasionally they still visit Iron Gate’s soup kitchen and grocery pantry. “Good food,” Angel said, although this particular day she didn’t care for the macaroni and cheese with—pimento! The homemade chocolate cake was good, though. The Kid’s Pack was a special treat.



*Your donation of \$1,000 will provide 200 Kids Packs for youth like Angel.*

# THE NUMBERS

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 407 percent increase in hungry people.

- Last year, we fed 309,370 people at a cost of \$3.85 a person.
- We serve an average of 600 meals a day from the soup kitchen.
- We distribute 1,000 grocery bags a month.
- We hand out 1,200 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 and co-op (free or purchased at a discount.) The rest we buy from other sources. About 3 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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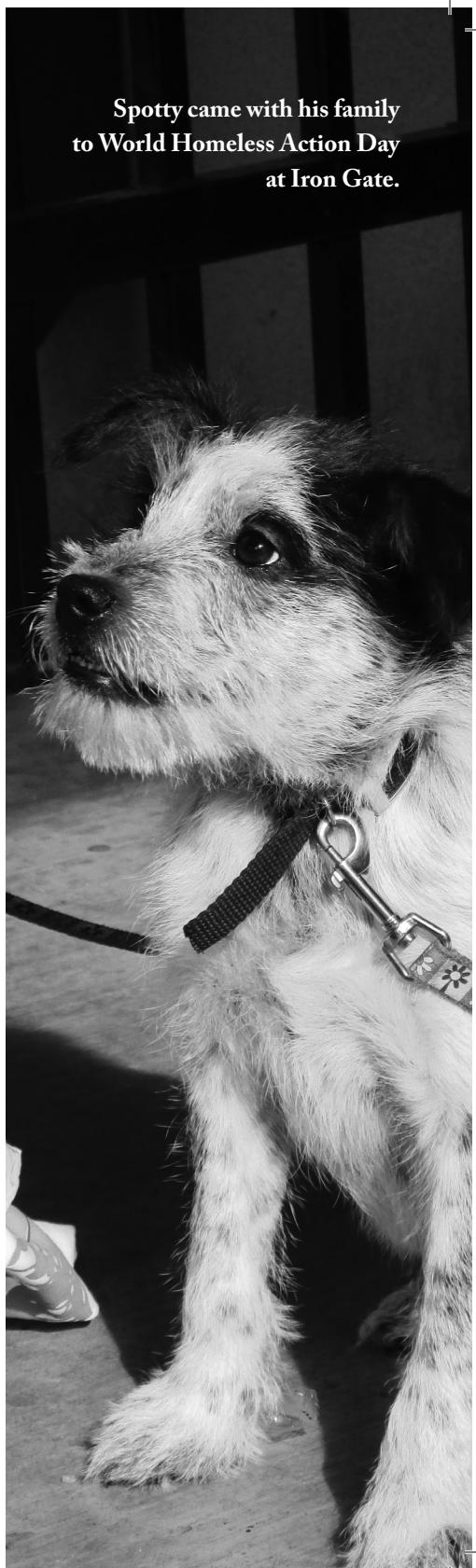
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**Spotty came with his family  
to World Homeless Action Day  
at Iron Gate.**

### **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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