

Shelter Connection

Spring 2011

A publication of Shelter House Community Shelter & Transition Services



Telling our stories

Thomas is "on the top of his game"
thanks to Shelter House.
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Creative

The Community Stories Writing

By Rossina Liu

On Being Part of History

By Anthony Balesteri

There was a recent article in the Iowa City newspaper about the new Shelter House opening. A person in the article was quoted as saying, “I am proud to be a part of history.” I, knowing this person, knew what he meant.

I was a resident of the old shelter in 2004, and then a part of it in 2010, a few weeks before the new opening. The living conditions in the old shelter weren’t all that suitable, but in all, it was still shelter.

I remember the new shelter went through many hoops and road blocks, faced a lot of red tape, court hearings, protests and community outcry in the new area. Nobody wanted us in their area for fear of their safety. Homeless. No good bums. Drug and alcohol abusers. Criminals. Hopeless beings.

Now that the new Shelter House was finally approved and awesomely built, after all the obstacles that the shelter house representatives had to endure, it is now a part of history, which makes me a part of that history too—not only in the year 2004, but in the year 2010.

In a town like Iowa City, recently designated a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) City of Literature, all writers in the community ought to have a space to create, reflect, and share drafts.

As writers and writing teachers, my friends Matt Gilchrist, Meg Jacobs, and I wanted to be part of that initiative to provide greater access to the literary identity of Iowa City. With support from the Shelter House, we formed the Community Stories Writing Workshop in fall 2010. Since that time, more than 25 resident writers have participated in the writing workshop—some of whom read their personal narrative essays on May 26 at Prairie Lights, which donated 10 percent of all sales that day to Shelter House. (Thank you, Prairie Lights!)

The Community Stories Writing Workshop—one of many specialized services at Shelter House—offers residents the space to enact their various ways of knowing, and in particular, focus on applied literacy and narrative construction of meaning. As a group, we collaborate closely with other service program facilitators and case managers at the Shelter House to recruit members who are interested in storytelling by way of narrative writing and alternative forms of expression (e.g., graphic creations, lyric poetry, mixed-form collage, etc.).

When resident writers arrive, we invite them to write about themselves as writers and readers and explore what they count as learning. If they wish, they may also compose their histories (i.e., family, school, and community), specific and global intentions, and knowledge of the world. These stories and creations help us and the writers better understand the cultural scripts that they bring to, and take from, the writing workshop. By identifying strengths and various ways

of knowing, members of the workshop build on other areas of reading and writing literacy.

In general, workshop sessions operate on a 12-week “curriculum,” which is intended to accommodate writers’ 90-day residency at the Shelter House; however, writers who wish to participate in the workshop after they have left the facility are invited to do so for as long as they want. Because we adopt a rolling enrollment system (i.e., writers may join the group at any time/ during any week), the first of 12 sessions varies for each person.

A typical curriculum consists of three stages of writing and revision processes that depend heavily on peer group feedback. Each week the group meets for 90 minutes



expression

Workshop

at the Shelter House and reads selected works (e.g., nonfiction essays, poetry, lyric forms, excerpts from graphic novels, etc.) as well as discusses the craft of writing, language construction and usage, narrative arc, writer's motivation, movement and progression of ideas.

Following the reading, resident writers are invited to draft their own stories (via any forms of expression) based on prompts related to the reading and discussion; writers may also opt to compose on any topic of their choosing. After writing time, we invite anyone who wishes to share excerpts to read her pieces out loud. Workshop members serve as the audience and provide feedback on elements that they believe work well in the piece and suggest possibilities for development.

Typically writers who have further-developed pieces may share their latest draft and offer it up for "workshop" after the read-aloud session. This concept of peer-group response is modeled after the Iowa Writers' Workshop paradigm, but with significant modifications. In the case of the Community Stories Writing Workshop at the Shelter House, the writer whose draft is up for workshop actively participates in discussion, communicating her goals for the piece and asking readers to pay close attention to key points she has intended for her narrative. Readers note the writer's concerns, and review the draft with these points in mind. The writer's presence during the workshop discourse ensures that discussions remain focused on her intentions and goals for the piece and not necessarily redirect it to just the audience's take on the piece.

Once a writer's draft has undergone sufficient revisions to the writer's preference, it is published in the Community Stories Writing Workshop Portfolio created by the Center for the Book at The University of Iowa, and in other national venues such as the National Gallery of Writing site sponsored by the National Council for Teachers of English. As noted, writers may also participate in public readings, including the first one this year hosted by Prairie Lights.

In addition to the storytelling by way of traditional and experimental forms, residents who request instruction about the basics of job applications, resumes, letters of inquiry, registering to vote, finding services in the area, etc. are informed of weekly walk-in sessions in which they work one-on-one with a facilitator to meet their goals. In whole, the Community Stories Writing Workshop exists to provide community writers with the time and space to tell, write, revise, and make meaning of stories that define them, their lives, and their ways of knowing.

Dawn Flies Away Like a Mockingbird

By Thomas Case

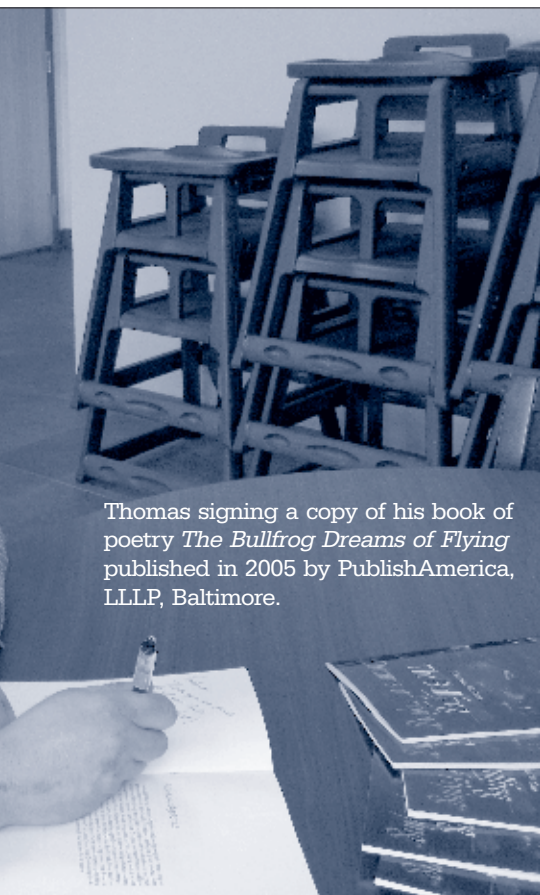
I flirted with
the sun as it
blushed
pink
through the trees,
their naked branches
spread wide,
wet
with dew.

Sticky sweet
dawn
winked with the
promise of
a
new day.

Swans mate for
life
and die in the spring.
And she
lied a little less than
the moon, and
the fog, and the
wet cat drunk on
feline dreams.

Her eyes looked like
they hated her face,
like
they wanted to
leap out
and roll down the street,
find a mountain brook
to wash off all they
had seen.

She saw too
much...felt too much...
as the
fractured dawn
laughed
and
flew away, like a mockingbird.



Thomas signing a copy of his book of poetry *The Bullfrog Dreams of Flying* published in 2005 by PublishAmerica, LLLP, Baltimore.

Stories teach us, inspire us, and unite us. At Shelter House, we love stories with happy endings.

Meet three Shelter House clients—including two who've been helped through the act of storytelling itself.

Thomas: Father, poet, chef

By Rossina Liu

If you ask Thomas about himself, the first two things he'll tell you are that he's a father of three, and he's a writer—a poet, in fact, one who writes wickedly honest poems about the harsh ironies of life, about its regretful moments, and about its demand for survival. His are strings of lyrical observations—beauty in the unlikely, poignant, and tragic. A dreamer since the age of five, Thomas recalls his first piece of writing.

“At five years old, on construction paper, I wrote a note that said, ‘Dear Mom, I’ve left home. Love, Tom.’ I walked around the block with a knapsack that day and thought, ‘I’m free now.’” Thomas laughs. “I can still see that blue construction paper and the marker I used and the wrong spelling.”

In retrospect, the story seems silly but this was the first time he knew he wanted to be a writer; it was the first time he realized he had fallen in love with the craft. Between the ages of ten and twelve, Thomas had compiled his first series of poems and short stories. A natural-born writer, he would continue to write throughout adulthood. Yet, Thomas admits that writing wasn't

always at the forefront of his life. Like many writers, he recalls, “It came in waves at a time. There was a time in my life when I went through a dark funk—drank a lot—and didn't write as much for five to six years. Then I just started writing a little at a time; it was mainly cathartic.” Yet what was “mainly cathartic” soon became essential—vital—to his existence. “There was just something inside me that said I had to write. I think as writers we filter life, we make sense of it, through our writing,” he says. And certainly this sentiment is reflected in the poems and stories he writes. In *The Bullfrog Dreams of Flying*, Thomas writes about memories of the race track and his father's death, about marriage counseling sessions and his eventual divorce, about growing up on several acres of land and youthful yearning for life. With a little bit of humor, sarcasm, and irony, the collection represents some of his most accomplished work.

More recently, Thomas writes about his mother, the last thing he had said to her before her sudden passing and his unyielding regret. In the short story, readers sense the sadness he still bears on his shoulders. After all, how does one possibly revise such an exchange—no matter the number of drafts? Besides stories of his parents, Thomas also talks

about childhood memories, mainly those with brother Toby.

“I'm writing a lot these days. This is the first time in a long time that I've felt revived,” he says. “I'm on top of my game, and I have the Shelter House to thank for that. Will Chambers has played a big part in me feeling welcome and human here. And of course, Crissy Canganelli and Rita Offutt have opened life-changing opportunities for me.”

What Thomas is referring to is the incredible Culinary Starts program that Shelter House offers. (See House Notes, page 7.) Since winter, he has been working in the kitchen at Shelter House and learned a great deal about the food industry. “Sam Kron is a phenomenal chef,” Thomas says. “He's taught me everything I need to know in the kitchen. I am so grateful to him. Because of what I've learned, I now have a new lease on life. I'll have independence, and sustain four walls around me so I can write.”

These days, between the hours of 2:00 to 7:00 p.m., you can find Thomas in that kitchen making anything from stew to pastries. And when done, when he has free time, you can bet he's writing. “I have to write,” Thomas says. “I'm afraid if I don't write, I'll die or go crazy.”

Clarence: Safe, settled, part of the community

By Thomas Case

Before coming to Iowa City, Clarence Mueller, 51, lived in Chicago and worked at a hospital processing medical supplies. Clarence's health problems caused him to miss some work. He lost his job and stayed with friends for a short while in Waterloo. His diabetes worsened, and Clarence was admitted to University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics. "They brought me out here and amputated the toes on my left foot," he said. While in the hospital, Clarence was able to get health care, but he knew no one in Iowa City. "I felt lost," said Clarence. A nurse suggested the Shelter House.

After discharging from the hospital in November, Clarence arrived at the Shelter House. "The first person I met was Faith; she was very kind and calmed my nerves," he recalls. Clarence used the aid of a walker and had a cast on his leg, so when he was told that he could use the elevator, he was relieved.

Shortly after his arrival at Shelter House, Clarence met Megan, a Supported Training and Access to Resources (S.T.A.R.) Program case manager. "He had originally planned to return to Waterloo, but after we started working together he decided to stay in Iowa City because of the services," she said.

Through the S.T.A.R. Program, Clarence was assisted in filling out an application for Social Security benefits. "Megan helped me get transportation to needed medical appointments," he said.

Clarence healed slowly, but he desperately wanted to get back to work. "The S.T.A.R. Program helped me with vocational training for a job, when I was ready. Megan also helped me reconnect with my family." Clarence hasn't seen his brother and sister in four years; this summer, they are planning to visit him in Iowa City.

Clarence has moved out of Shelter House, and now supports himself through part-time work at a job that he is very grateful to have.

"Clarence is a wonderful person. It breaks my heart to see what people go through—their struggles and obstacles—yet Clarence took it with dignity and respect for all at Shelter House," Megan said. Clarence smiled. "I feel safe, settled, and relaxed, like I'm part of the community."

Clarence Mueller has come a long way since that lonely night in the hospital after his surgery when he wondered if he would ever walk or work again.

Below: Clarence outside his place of employment. He is glad to be working again and says that the vocational training he received through the S.T.A.R. Program helped him get the job.



Ours was an awkward meeting, as most first meetings can be at times. The room was big and dark, and as new facilitators, Meg Jacobs, Matt Gilchrist, and I were unsure of our roles. This was most apparent when Anthony posed his question, “Why the homeless shelter?” For a moment, the room just went silent with polite smiles. Then, the three of us looked at each other. We cleared our throats, and we answered one by one—sometimes tripping, sometimes tumbling, sometimes dancing, in circles.

Anthony: Keen observer of the everyday

By Rossina Liu

In the room, in the corner, by the window, he sits and he stares and when he does neither, he writes. He is Anthony Balesteri, a writer in the Community Stories Writing Workshop at Shelter House. (See story page 2.) He is also one of the first members of the workshop when we started in October-November 2010. He writes mainly about his days but sometimes when he is in the mood, when he is especially inspired, he writes about his memories—precious ones, those that give him hope.

Back when the workshop was brand new and without a permanent home, our group, then small, would conduct the writing workshop sessions at the Wesley Center. Shelter House was in transition at the time, on its way to move to the new facility, a bigger and nicer building on the other side of town. Anthony, along with one other resident writer and the three of us facilitators, met in the church center’s lunchroom for the first session, the same room where free meals are served daily at noon to anyone who wants to eat—no questions asked.

Ours was an awkward meeting, as most first meetings can be at times. The room was big and dark, and as new facilitators,

Meg Jacobs, Matt Gilchrist, and I were unsure of our roles—who we were to resident writers, and how we would be received. This was most apparent when Anthony posed his question, one that seemed so obvious and so standard, and yet so unexpected. “Why the homeless shelter?” he asked. For a moment, the room just went silent with polite smiles. Then, the three of us looked at each other. We cleared our throats, and we answered one by one—sometimes tripping, sometimes tumbling, sometimes dancing, in circles.

*Literacy.
Writing.
Reading.
Community
Stories.
Yours.*

I cannot speak for Meg or Matt, but I struggled to articulate my thoughts that afternoon. In truth, the Community Stories Writing Workshop was all these things and more, and we knew that. But we struggled, I think, because the “and more” was yet to be discovered, “and more” was yet to be defined—by members, members like Anthony.

Anthony is now living independently in Iowa City and works at the Goodwill Store. Whenever possible, he still joins us for a session or two, and often with a draft in hand. “I haven’t come to the group

meetings lately,” he’ll say, “but I’ve been writing.” On one of his return visits, he handed me a thick stash of paper, folded in quarters. “I was looking at that golden arch, the one at McDonald’s, and I thought about the [writing] prompt you gave us a while back: ‘write about an object you want bronzed.’ Well, I want to bronze the cheeseburger,” he said.

This cheeseburger, the one in his story, is based on a memory Anthony has of his then three-year-old daughter; it is a memory of her refusal to eat the cheese and beef sandwich and of his poor choice of words in response. Striking, on this draft, is his rich vocabulary on the page, vocabulary that is not always available when he speaks. Striking, too, is his presence on the page—so strong are the attitudes, the sarcasm, the rhythm, the timing. Although he has written many other stories during his time in the workshop, this is the first piece Anthony has shared about his daughter, for his daughter, and perhaps one day, with his daughter.

I think of Anthony quite often, about the stories he has written and about the stories I know he will write. His are powerful stories of the everyday, of keen observations about father-daughter relationships, independent living, and community memberships. His is a voice, one of many that, when combined with others, creates the literary diversity that is Iowa City.



From the Director

Dear Friends,

The past six months have been a whirlwind of activity with new partnerships, new opportunities, new friends to Shelter House—all offering hope, opportunity, guidance, and skills to improve the quality of the lives of the people with whom we work.

Since moving to the Southgate facility:

- The UI College of Nursing has opened its weekly Nurse's Clinic.
- The University's Counseling Psychology Program has continued to provide weekly counseling and has added a series of workshops on self-empowerment, mindfulness, and employment preparedness.
- Rossina Liu, Matt Gilchrist, and Meg Jacobs, also with the University, have offered a weekly writing workshop, giving those who do not feel heard an opportunity to share their voices through creative writing.
- A Shelter Choir has formed and meets weekly in partnership with the UI Music Education Program.

In collaboration with the Department of Veterans Affairs and VA Medical Center, 14 of our beds have been prioritized for veterans who are homeless. This summer, in partnership with the local chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI), Shelter House moves into the arena of permanent supportive housing with the opening of our first Lodge. And finally, our kitchen is open and ready for business, offering a socially conscious alternative to meet your catering needs.

Shelter House welcomes Mark Sertterh, Resident Services Director, and Kelsey Tanning, Shelter Coordinator, to our team. And welcome to our new members of the Board of Directors: Carolyn Gross, Carolyn Henderson, William Liu, Pastor Mark Pries, Sara Rynes-Weller, Steve Schornhorst, Gene Spaziani, Liz Swanson, and Nancy Williams, with thanks and deep gratitude to our departing members for your years of service: Reverend Mel Schlachter, Jean Berge, and Dorothy Persson who served as President of the Shelter House Board for nearly a decade. You are right, Dottie: "There is never a dull moment!"

As I turned off my computer last night to head home to prepare dinner for my family, I left knowing that there were 40 more people who had a place to sleep tonight who a year ago would have had nowhere but the street to turn—guaranteed a bed, a shower, a nutritious meal, and so very much more. I left to the sound of children playing and laughing in our backyard—what a simple and yet extraordinary thing!

I thank all of you who have given of yourselves through financial gifts, in-kind contributions, and volunteerism. I believe that you each share equally in our challenges, and our successes. You touch the lives of many, and you make a difference in the lives of hundreds of men, women and children each year: mothers and fathers, sons and daughters—all members of our community.

With deepest gratitude,

Crissy Canganelli
Executive Director

House News



Culinary Starts is a new program offering vocational training to Shelter House clients. Trainees undergo 12 weeks of classes and hands-on training to master skills in kitchen sanitation, safety, and food production. The training prepares clients for a national certification in food preparation, and better positions clients for a wide range of employment opportunities. Culinary Starts launched our first Guest Chef Night on Thursday, June 2. Guest Chef Night brought community chefs and our trainees together to prepare a formal meal for the public. The event allowed our trainees to work directly with area chefs to network and explore various employment options, while the chefs had the opportunity to showcase new menus, and guests enjoyed a delicious and socially conscious meal. Guest Chefs for June were Melanie Ewalt, Executive Chef, and Kasi Tenborg, Restaurant Manager, The Hotel at Kirkwood, Cedar Rapids.

Culinary Starts is also expanding in other ways, with a full line of catering and contract meal options. We've recently started our first ongoing meal contracts with a University of Iowa Fraternity and the Hospitals and Clinics. We continue looking for ways to expand so we're able to incorporate more trainees into the program.

Don't Miss These Upcoming Events!

June 24, 2011 (8:00 AM – Noon)
Shelter House Golf Tournament at Brown Deer

August 13, 2011 (5:00 PM – 7:00 PM)
Girls' Night Out at The Mansion

Check the Shelter House web page for details and updates:
www.shelterhouseiowa.org



P.O. Box 3146
Iowa City, IA 52244-3146

Shelter House is a tax exempt 501(c)(3) organization. As a partner agency of the United Way of Johnson County, we have successfully met all local membership accountability standards in finance, ethics, governance, and diversity.

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YES! I want to support Shelter House Community Shelter & Transition Services

Each night men, women, and children who are homeless come to Shelter House in need, uncertain of their future, afraid, confused, and without hope. At Shelter House, they find a safe, caring place for the night as well as support and hope for a brighter tomorrow. Please give today and help with extraordinary change in our community.

- \$175** will sponsor a week of shelter and supportive services for someone trying to restart their life.
- \$100** will sponsor a night of shelter and supportive services for a family in need.
- \$25** will sponsor a night of shelter and supportive services for a person who is homeless in our community.

Name _____ Amount enclosed _____

Please print your name(s) as you wish to be acknowledged. Check here if you wish to remain anonymous.

Address _____ Phone _____

Please make checks payable to Shelter House and send to P.O. Box 3146, Iowa City, IA 52244

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For more information or to donate online please visit our website at www.shelterhouseiowa.org.