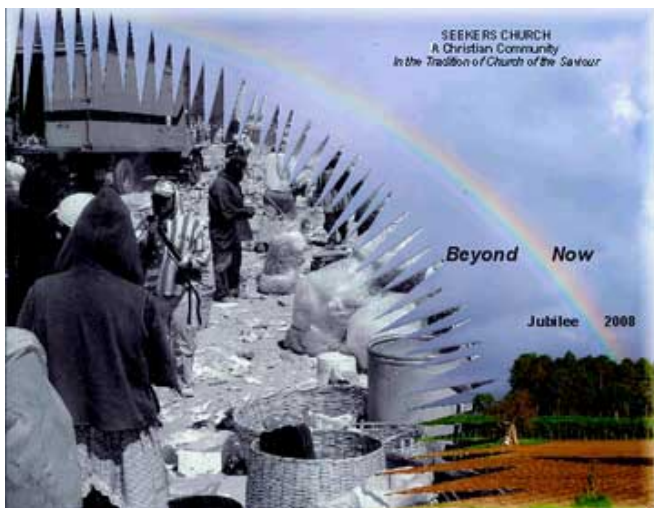


Presentation by Artists Mission Group

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November 23, 2008



Members of the Artists Mission Group presented stories from their lives in words and other formats. Here are a few examples.

Kathryn Tobias offered "I am in prison..."

1.
There was love to spare in my birth family. I was the second oldest of six and it often fell to me and my older brother to babysit the youngest ones. I loved holding babies and was an expert at shoveling baby food into little mouths and changing diapers. As a young teenager, I accompanied my youngest brother Philip to Sunday school and held his hand when he was

feeling shy. I always thought that I would be the mother of a brood as large as ours

When we lost Philip after a school bus accident when he was 10 and I was 21, we were devastated. But it was then that we all learned to hug and kiss each other hello and goodbye when we were away for periods of time. ...And I always thought that I would give birth to many children...but it didn't happen that way.

Fast forward several decades and I was in a Seekers mission group with Emily Gilbert. One day she mentioned casually that her son Bill, a single man, is looking for someone to be a female presence in the life of his hoped-for adopted son from Russia. I did not have to think long-and told Emily I would like to do that.

So four-and-a-half-year-old Dmitry came the following January, and he was a HANDFUL from the beginning. He broke two lamps in hotel rooms on his way to the United States. His first greeting to me was a head jerk to my chin. He didn't understand any English, and he would roll screaming across the floor of Bill's house if he couldn't quickly make his needs understood.

But I believed much could be overcome by love, and I found soft stuffed toys to comfort him, and during the government shutdown in 1995, I made him a quilt with an appliquéd boy on a rocket ship to the moon and a secret pocket inside with "love" written in English and Russian. He loved it and slept under it long after he had to unzip it to make it fit.

I would hug Dmitry whenever I saw him. But Dmitry's distrust for the world went deep, deep. His mother had been alcoholic while he was in the womb, and abusive and neglectful after he was born. So there was no early rock on which to base his worldview. I would hug him, and he would hug me back, but often too hard. He could not let go of his deep need for his

kind of survival-in which he alone made all the decisions.-but he was too little, emotionally, to make good decisions.

So he was in and out of residential schools, schools that gave him the 24-hour structure he needed. And periodically he would go back home-and get in trouble because no one person could give him 24-hour structure. Last summer his father Bill was becoming desperate to know what to do, as he would find strangers in his house in the middle of the night.

Then in August the news came that Dmitry had to go to jail, with serious charges of stealing. I'm told that the Fairfax County Jail is better than the state penitentiary, but it is still a grim place, where prisoners get ONE $\frac{1}{2}$ hour visit a week, through thick glass speaking into an old fashioned telephone receiver. We could not touch Dmitry or bring him anything except money dropped through a drop-box. He could phone out, collect, and he did that nearly every day, asking me "What's up?"

2.

I haven't known what to hope for in Dmitry's situation. Because he has such a hard time taking direction from others, he seems in no place to live on his own.

Last week I went to visit him in a mental health institution three hours away in Staunton, Virginia-not far from my brother's house, as it happens. Dmitry had been sent there by the court to be assessed. After a meeting with him and his team, Bill and I sat down with Dmitry for a fast-food lunch we brought in, a special treat for him after days of indoor inactivity and institutional food.

Dmitry seemed distant and asked me "what's up?" as he always does, listening politely but without much comprehension of a life that must seem so unrelated to his own. I struggled to provide an answer or a question that would engage him. As my questions drifted into his protected territory, he abruptly

said he needed to go to another meeting with his teacher-a meeting we knew was scheduled for a half hour later.

"Are you saying you want us to go?" I asked.

"Well," he answered noncommittally, having learned something in Russia and at his father's house about politeness. I remembered then that I hadn't had a touch from Dmitry, let alone a hug, since he went to jail in August.

"Well then, give us a hug," I said. And tall Dmitry melted into my arms.

"I love you," he said.

I still don't know what to hope, for Dmitry. But I know that love matters. And I am grateful.

Billy Amoss offered a chant he wrote, called "One Love Endures Forever."

ONE LOVE endures forever

Billy Amoss

The image shows a musical score for a three-part setting of the chant "One Love Endures Forever" by Billy Amoss. The score is written for Soprano, Alto, and Bass voices. It is in the key of B-flat major (two flats) and 4/4 time. The melody is simple and repetitive, consisting of a sequence of quarter notes: G2, A2, Bb2, C3, D3, E3, F3, G3, followed by a whole note G3. The lyrics "One love en - dures for - e - ver" are written below each staff, with hyphens indicating syllable placement. The Soprano staff starts on a G2, the Alto on an E2, and the Bass on a G1. The piece concludes with a whole note G on each staff.

Jean Adams offered reflections on her work with the men at Christ House:

I volunteer at Christ House once a week, leading an Art Workshop. Patients, formerly homeless and addicted men and women, can come to make greeting cards, paint pictures, draw, use clay, etc.

One of the men, I'll call him Tommy, had been a patient for several months, and was a regular attendee at the workshop. One day he painted a large bright red rectangle on his paper, with rainbow colors of smaller rectangles inside of it.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed. " I was going to paint a black hole,'cause I've spent so much of my life feeling like that's what my life was like. But I just saw these colors and made this. I just felt it right here!" he said, tapping his chest. He had surprised himself and was delighted with what he had painted.

A few weeks later, when he stayed to help me clean up I asked him if he knew how much longer he'd be at Christ House. In his reply he told me the story of his life and how he happened to be at this healing place.

His story was that life got tougher after his father had left, and his grandmother had passed on.. One morning, when he was 16, his mother announced that she was leaving. She called a cab, and left.

Tommy and his 15 year old brother were left to fend for themselves. Tommy insisted that his brother continue to go to high school, and went out on the street to "hustle" and do what he could do to get enough money to pay the bills. His brother did go on and finish high school. He eventually went into business, married and had a son. Tommy's life went on a downhill spiral. He became homeless, addicted, and when he

had episodes of blanking out he went to the hospital. He was told that he needed immediate heart surgery, and the chances were 70% that he'd heal if he could change his lifestyle. If he didn't have the operation the doctor said within 6 months he'd be dead.

Tommy's grandmother had always said to pray and God would answer you. "It may not be what you want but it would be what you need.". Tommy prayed.

After the operation a taxi cab driver took him to Christ House, even though Tommy gave him another address. "This is where you are supposed to go" the driver said. And Tommy began to realize that his prayer had been answered with just what he needed.

He has had AA meetings, great medical care, nourishing food, caring attention by staff, and a community within which to live during his weeks of healing.

"You know, Tommy, I'm no expert, but after hearing your story and seeing your painting, I think your heart is surely healing, " I said to him.

"You think so?!!!!" was his reply.

For Tommy and for the beauty of the human spirit, I give thanks.