



# THE HAVEN HERALD

Fall/Winter 2013

UPPER VALLEY HAVEN • 713 HARTFORD AVE. • WHITE RIVER JUNCTION, VT 05001  
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## TAKE A WALK IN THEIR SHOES

We are pleased to be sharing our latest newsletter with you, written by some of the area's most distinguished authors. Who better to write our latest newsletter than the professionals themselves! Their assignment was simple: write about your experience with poverty and homelessness. We were hoping to have the authors uncover things we didn't know, shed light on what we do, and give us all some new perceptions about the complicated worlds of homelessness and poverty.

What we learned was astonishing. First, all of the authors had a very personal relationship with poverty; and at least half of them had experienced the hardship first-hand. Woven throughout their pieces is the importance of family, community support and a safe place to call home. Katharine Britton

and Sarah M. Buckley wrote about small acts of kindness that made enormous impacts; keeping them afloat, and with hope, for one more day. Pamela Voelkel lived knowing what it was like to be without a safety net, and sheds light on one of the most crippling effects of poverty: the inability to plan for the future because each decision made is to solve an immediate crisis. Willem and Ida Lange gave their daughter Martha an invaluable life lesson we all can take with us: the importance of sticking together as a family in a crisis, and the value of being present for the hard work so that one can come out stronger on the other side. Jodi Picoult's story addresses the "collateral damage of prejudice against sexual orientation" and the longing to be normal in a judgmental environment, which is what

children in poverty are up against when they don't appear to be like all the rest. Sydney Lea beautifully describes universal themes of humanity, sorrow and music - all portrayed in different forms and economic circumstances.

As Sarah S. Taylor describes, these authors will masterfully place you into someone else's shoes. These stories are a gift to us, and those we serve, because they offer hope as we head into the coldest and toughest of months for those without adequate resources. The holiday season, a time of plenty, creates great stress for those who have very little. The stories in these pages affirm the need for a community resource such as the Haven, and illustrate just how powerful each simple act of community kindness can be in making a difference in the life of those who need it most. Enjoy!

### JODI PICOUTL



It got easier and easier to spot them. They were teens who hovered at the edge of the crowd where I was giving a book talk. They carried huge knapsacks and didn't make eye contact. Some wore tattoos battle scars; others sported and sneakers. They came from all different walks of life, but had one thing in common: They were LGBT youth whose parents had disowned them after they came out.

I like  
sweats

I was in the middle of a 35-city book tour for SING YOU HOME, a novel I wrote in 2011 that examined the controversial issue of gay marriage in America. At each stop, I met homeless teens evicted by their parents. Their tales became familiar: I told my parents I was gay, and they kicked me out. I've been on the streets for a month...six months...a year. Some came hungry. Some couldn't afford a ticket, and begged the bookstore owners to let them inside. They wanted to say that my novel had made them feel normal, in a world that told them they weren't. They wanted to hear that their lives would one day be different.

When my own son came out, the reaction was different. Although he has faced prejudice - from losing some conservative friends, to being called a faggot for holding his boyfriend's hand - he has always had the full support of his family. Until I met these young LGBT kids on book tour, I had not considered the collateral damage of prejudice against sexual orientation: your parents can withhold financial support; you might have to drop out of school; you may not have a place to sleep at night. Gay youth who are rejected by their families often face even bigger challenges than gay adults, simply because they lack the resources to provide for themselves.

When I ran into these kids, I would ask the local organizers of the book reading for information on food pantries and homeless shelters. I told them about organizations like the Point Foundation, which provides college tuition assistance to LGBT kids who have been rejected by their families; and Live Out Loud, which provides mentorship. But I couldn't give them what I most wanted: the security of a home, where they were valued for being themselves.

When I wrote SING YOU HOME I wanted to address an epidemic in America: how those born straight take for granted certain rights that those born LGBT don't always have - like getting married and having kids. But I wound up learning, on tour, that epidemics can breed other epidemics; and that some basic needs straight youth take for granted are denied to LGBT kids renounced by their families - such as a hot meal, or a roof over their heads. A home is defined as the place we live, or the people we live with. The title of my book suggests that all we want, whether we are gay or straight, is a safe resting place. And it is truly my hope that one day, we will live in a world where this particular cause of homelessness, at least, is eradicated.

*At the Haven, we are sometimes faced with finding resources for people who have been abandoned by their families due to their sexual orientation. We do not discriminate based on age, race, gender or sexual orientation; and serve all who need our help.*

*Jodi Picoult is the NY Times bestselling author of My Sister's Keeper, The Storyteller, and 23 highly acclaimed novels. Jodi and her family, who live in Hanover NH, are actively involved with the Haven through volunteering and more. Learn about Jodi at jodipicoult.com.*

## WHEN I WAS HOMELESS - PAMELA VOELKEL

 For a while when I first lived in London, I was homeless. I had been evicted from my flat by a thuggish developer (no time for court cases when someone is hacking a hole in your floor right in front of you.)

In a panic, I called the virtual stranger who worked across the desk from me in my badly-paid writing job and asked if I could store my stuff in her suburban garage. (There wasn't much - I transferred it all in one journey by double-decker bus.) Then began my new daily routine of trying to beg a bed for the night.

I didn't know anyone who had a spare room. In fact, I hardly knew anyone, full stop. My contacts were all like me: young, new to London, living in moldering bedsits. I slept where I could, mostly on floors. The worst floor was in a mouse-infested

kitchen in Hackney.

My strongest memory of being poor and homeless is of having no safety net. No parental home I could return to for a bed in times of need. No rich friends I could borrow money from for a deposit. No options. No let up ever. I pretended I was a secretary so I could eat the free cheese at employment agency recruitment evenings.

Eventually I got a flat on a council estate in Brixton with some equally desperate friends. It had been deemed unsuitable for families as it was in a rundown block opposite crack den central. The customers used to wait impatiently at the bottom of our stairwell, so they could rob us for drug money. It wasn't ideal, but I look back at that place with so much affection because it was my first proper home in London.

Because here's the thing. No matter how many locks you have to put on it, there is no better feeling

than coming through your own front door at the end of the day. You have a place to leave your stuff so you don't have to carry it round with you, a kitchen to store food in, a place to sleep where you won't get walked on, a bathroom with your own hair in the plughole, an address you can use to fill out forms.

When you're homeless, it's impossible to think about anything else but where you're going to wake up tomorrow.

That might be why, thirty years later, I still have an obsession with doormats that say "Welcome Home." They're two of the best words in the world and I don't take them for granted, ever.

*The Haven has already helped 1,029 families and individuals find housing in 2013. Pamela and Jon Voelkel write the Jaguar Stones books, a series of Maya-themed adventures for ages 10-14. (More info at [jaguarstones.com](http://jaguarstones.com).) They have three children and live in Norwich, VT.*

## WILLEM LANGE



A little over thirty years ago my contracting business sank beneath the waves. Unfortunately, I had remortgaged our house to cover some of its debts, so that sank, too. We were forced to sell it.

What would we do? Where could we live? Both my wife and I were still working, but had no place to live. Friends came up with temporary shelter, and a local businessman very kindly let us store furniture and shop tools in an empty part of his warehouse.

We did still own ten acres of woods in the hills of Etna that no creditors could touch. We looked at rents in our area, and decided we didn't want to spend that much. Then Mother suggested I cut a road into our acreage, and she'd get a travel trailer for the three of us – we had a daughter in high school – to live in. Mother's a game gal, but I wouldn't have dared suggest that myself.

Our daughter Martha returned from summer camp, looked at the situation, and declared we were ruining her life. She'd been invited to live at a friend's house while we got straightened out, but Mother pointed out that this was a family emergency, and we'd go through it as a family.

The weather got colder as winter approached. The trailer was a bust. So I built a 12 x 20-foot frame cabin next to where we hoped to start building our next house. No running water, no heat except for a kerosene burner and an

electric radiator at night. Martha bunked in a loft overhead among the rafters; Mother and I slept on foam cushions that doubled as a pad on a settle during the day. If we lay perfectly flat, the cold coming through the floor didn't bother, but if we pushed down with our elbows to get up, we could tell we were only an inch or two from freezing.

It was a long winter in the Shack, as we called it. We kept up our usual work and school routines. Martha and I showered at the Dartmouth gym, where I had a locker; Mother at friends' homes when she did the laundry. I worked on the new house, and on May 4th turned on the hot water for the first time. What did we learn? All kinds of things. First, never to judge people who show up in public with hair in a tangle or clothes not so neat; we have no idea what they may be dealing with. Second, the value of friends, many of whom came to visit the Shack, just as if it were a nice home. And third, that you can endure a lot if you have hope. What a gift it is to have the Haven in our valley, providing shelter, sustenance, and a friendly ear – but most of all, hope.

*Willem Lange is a beloved New England writer and master storyteller. He has been a friend of the Haven for decades, and generously donates the proceeds of his annual presentation of a Christmas Carol, at Saint Thomas Church in Hanover, NH, to the Haven. He and his wife Ida live in East Montpelier, VT.*

## BLUES FOR THE TENOR MAN - SYDNEY LEA

You guard that treasure with a fierceness as great as your playing  
Is masterful. So I imagine. I see it's a Selmer,  
Top of the top of the line, the kind of sax  
You could pawn for at least a grand – no, more than that:  
Even ten wouldn't cut it. I see your pants belonged  
To somebody else at one time, their shredded cuffs risen  
To display a strange blue latticework of lesions  
On ashen shins. The paper placard's scrawl  
Is HELP IM A HOMELESS VET. I'd never have thought

You smoked, and a pipe of all things. Its wet rough stem  
Pokes out of your Navy pea coat's rough side pocket.  
You're so good you make some better part of me float  
To a long-closed club, with someone like Sonny Stitt  
Sweetly trotting his horn through "The Sunny Side  
Of the Street," which happens to be the song your Selmer

–Above this tuneless traffic– sweetly offers,  
Quietly but so intensely I'd bet the flesh  
Under your woolen hat must actually flinch.  
  
Raveling watchcap, it creeps on your head, it shivers.  
I might of course recall the other Sonny,  
Or the great Coltrane, or the under-prized Lucky Thompson.  
Jack and I played them all in that student apartment  
Where, kids that we were, we imagined ways to resolve  
The world's most unaccommodating problems,  
Of which, at least to us, Racial Relations,  
As people said back then, were among the first.  
We were children, but worshipped the art that Roland Kirk  
  
Had dubbed Black Classical Music. And here you are  
To push me back to reverie and reverence. (continued on page 3)



## KATHARINE BRITTON

Most families become homeless due to an unforeseen crisis: a house burns down, a parent loses a job, a medical emergency drains the family's resources. Over 630,000 people are homeless on any given night in the United States, the seventh wealthiest country in the world, according to ZeroHedge.com. I doubt the number was that high when I had no home.

I was thirteen, and we didn't call it "being homeless." We called it "staying in a hotel until we found a house." What I remember, in addition to a sense of near weightlessness brought on by the instability of the situation, were the box lunches prepared for me by friends of my parents. I stopped

by their restaurant each morning before school to pick up that day's offering. The concern in their eyes, and the thoughtful items tucked inside those cardboard boxes, reassured me that someone cared. Our stay wasn't long. We moved in with friends, and then rented a house of our own. Two years later we were once again in temporary housing, this time a hotel in New York City, where we knew no one.

Children won't necessarily express their fear or sadness over an unstable living situation. But that doesn't mean those feelings aren't there. It can be a lonely time, and a simple act of kindness can



make all the difference.

*The Haven's After School Program at Bev's House is the fullest it has ever been with 25 children participating. Children work with community volunteers and Dartmouth students to do their homework, as well as learn about health eating and nutrition, basic money management principles through our Financial Literacy Initiative; and also have the opportunity to express themselves through the arts and music.*

Katharine Britton lives in Norwich VT. Her new novel, *Little Island*, has just been published by Berkley Books (Penguin, USA). Learn more at [katharinebritton.com](http://katharinebritton.com).

## SARAH STEWART TAYLOR

For those of us fortunate enough not to have experienced homelessness firsthand, our initial encounters with the idea of not having a roof over your head or enough to eat probably came through children's literature. I don't remember many depictions of homelessness or poverty in the mostly comforting picture books of my early childhood, but as soon as I could read chapter books, they were everywhere.

There were the homeless Boxcar Children, from the series by Gertrude Chandler Warner, and of course homeless orphans like Oliver Twist, Frances Hodgson Burnett's Sara Crewe in *A Little Princess*, Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer, any number of characters from Roald Dahl's novels, and the runaway siblings from E. L. Konigsburg's *From the Mixed Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler*.

But while these books ably (brilliantly in some cases) conveyed the emotional experience of homelessness and hunger, its depiction in some of these classics of children's literature made it not much more than a plot twist, a condition to be born until a twist of fate puts things to rights.

Contemporary children's literature has done a more authentic job presenting the experience of homelessness. Vermont's own Katherine Paterson has written sensitively about children in the foster care system. Cynthia Voight took on homelessness and parental abandonment in her poignant Tillerman series. In the last 25 years, we've seen more books for young readers addressing poverty, hunger and homelessness. Barbara O'Connor's 2007 novel, *How to Steal a Dog* begins with this unforgettable

first sentence: "The day I decided to steal a dog was the same day my best friend, Luanne Godfrey, found out I lived in a car." A 1991 picture book by Eve Bunting called *Fly Away Home* takes on homelessness for the younger set.

For a fiction writer, these well made-up characters offer a powerful lesson about narrative: well-crafted stories can put you in the shoes of someone very different from yourself. They can make you care about the characters and, after you've closed the pages of a book, care about the issues raised by those characters' stories.

I want to see more of these stories and I want to see stories written by children who have experienced homelessness and hunger themselves, who have used their unique voices to share their experiences with those of us who need to hear them. The Haven's literacy programs help to introduce kids to books that can help them feel not-quite-so-alone and perhaps give them room and inspiration to tell their own stories.

*Visit the Haven's website for Sarah's recommendations for young adult and middle grade literature that addresses homelessness and hunger. The Haven focuses on literacy in both of our shelters, and in the After School Program at Bev's House.*

*Sarah lives in Hartland, VT with her family, and is writing a series of adventure novels for children. The Expeditioners and the Treasure of Drowned Man's Canyon was released in 2012. Details can be found on Sarah's website: [SSTaylorBooks.com](http://SSTaylorBooks.com).*

## BLUES FOR THE TENOR MAN CONTINUED...

(continued from page 2)

You slide straight into a blues in a minor key,  
A blues new to me. Eyes clenched, you rock and sway,  
The tenor igniting the stars. Blue pigeons drop  
From government marble, as if their tiny brains  
Understood the mix of resolution and pain  
The music spreads around their strut. Their plumage  
Seems to glow more warmly now, yet the damage  
  
That anyone's life can attract appears more clearly,  
Brightness cutting the dark: that's the way of the blues.  
But what do I know? I'm headed off for a meal.  
To hand you a coin would somehow be to feel  
A lesser person. I wonder where Jack lives now.....  
The Lucky, the Coltrane, the Sonny, and hundreds more:  
They were gems we'd gathered from hockshop and secondhand store-  
And were stolen one night. If only we'd kept up our guard.  
It wouldn't have happened if only we'd known how to hold

Onto what we treasured. How suddenly things can be taken,  
Though a record collection is only a record collection.  
You'll huddle beneath whatever wrappings you gather  
Against the cold of night, the noble Selmer,  
The pearl of great price, locked on your chest with both hands  
As you sleep. Or so I imagine. As evening steals in,  
Your horn moans an aching cadenza that ends the tune.  
Commuters pour downward into the Metro, unhearing.  
The pigeons flap roostward. Soon there will be nothing

For you to lie down with again what you love,  
Under a bridge, in a shelter, wherever you live.

Sydney Lea is the Poet Laureate of Vermont. He lives in Newbury, Vermont, and is active both in literacy efforts and in conservation. This is the first printing of *Blues for the Tenor Man!* We are honored to share his poem and insight with our Haven friends. To learn more about Sydney's work and accomplishments visit: [sydneylea.net](http://sydneylea.net).





# UPPER VALLEY HAVEN

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authors' views  
on poverty,  
homelessness  
and hunger...

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## PAY WHEN YOU CAN - SARAH MASTERS BUCKEY

When I was 21, I finished college early and started working at a newspaper on the Jersey Shore. The salary was small and the hours were long, but I loved the work and I was supremely confident that I could manage on my own.

In summer, the shore is sunny and crowded with tourists. But in spring, the winds can be cold and the beaches bleak. That spring,

I came down with a nasty sore throat. My tonsils turned as red as the cherry-flavored lozenges I sucked, and I shivered with a low-grade fever. I didn't have a car, but I found a doctor within walking distance. He prescribed an antibiotic and rest.

I dragged myself to the nearest drugstore. The gray-haired pharmacist filled the prescription and told me the price. I looked at him in horror.

In the fog of fever, it hadn't occurred to me that I'd need money for the prescription. I fumbled in my purse. I only had two dollars and a few coins. I didn't even own a credit card.

I stuttered something about coming back later, and then I turned to leave.

The pharmacist stopped me. "It's all right," he said, handing me the pills. "Pay when you can."

I felt shivery and weak, and I really wanted that medicine. With mumbled thanks, I accepted the pills and hurried home.

My throat soon healed, and I repaid the drugstore. But I've never forgotten the help that pharmacist gave me. He could have sent me away empty-handed – but he didn't. Now, many years later, one thing that I truly appreciate about the Haven is that it enables everyone in the community to get help when needed – and to give help to others whenever we can.

*The Haven serves more than 2,500 people per year through our Community Case Management Program. Individuals and families from the community work with the Haven's Case Managers to solve immediate problems in order to prevent homelessness and hunger.*

*Sarah Masters Buckey is the author of more than a dozen books published by American Girl. She lives in Hanover, NH, and consistently lends a hand to help us.*

## GIVING TO THE HAVEN

Announcing the **"Peas, Please!"**

## CHALLENGE

*We are in need of more than peas...  
We appreciate donations of ALL nutritional foods;  
perishable or non-perishable. Challenge funds will  
help purchase items to supplement donated food.*

**An anonymous donor will MATCH  
all monetary donations to the Food Shelf up to \$50,000.**

## CORPORATE FRIENDS PROGRAM

A partnership program providing exposure opportunities for local corporations. Funds donated support the *Work Practice Program*, which focuses on resume and interviewing skills, as well as training in a workplace environment to gain experience.

**CORPORATE HERO - \$2,000:** Your business will be featured in one of our printed newsletters (mails to 16,000+ households); and highlighted in one of 12 monthly e-newsletters (sent to 5,000+ addresses).

**CORPORATE LEADER - \$800:** Your business will be featured in one of our 12 monthly e-newsletters (sent to 5,000+ addresses).

**CORPORATE COMPANION - \$400:** Your name and logo will be printed in one full-page Valley News advertisement, and a VT Standard display ad.

**CORPORATE SUPPORTER - \$200** Email [liz@uppervalleyhaven.org](mailto:liz@uppervalleyhaven.org) for details...  
*All Corporate Friends will be mentioned on our website & at the Haven's Community Businesses reception; and have the opportunity to engage in our work.*

To learn more about the Haven watch our video, **HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT**, on our homepage: [www.uppervalleyhaven.org](http://www.uppervalleyhaven.org)