

Lonnie

Unemployed, member of Cherith Brook Catholic Worker House

Interview by Chhaya Kolavalli at Cherith Brook in Kansas City, Kansas

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Transcribed by Chhaya Kolavalli

Note: Interview questions are written in bold, respondent's answers are in regular font.

Abstract: a 57-year old member of Cherith Brook discusses how he came to join this Christian intentional community. Formerly homeless, Lonnie first attended Cherith Brook to receive free meals and showers, and eventually ended up joining the household and moving in. Lonnie discusses how intentional living has changed the way he experiences his faith, touches on the difficulties he's had through his experiences as an openly gay Christian man, and shares his thoughts on why Christian intentional communities are so effective at providing charity and aid to the poor.

Ten years ago my house burned, lost everything, I didn't have insurance, I'm blind in my left eye, I couldn't drive because of that. Lost everything in a house fire, and was just basically sleeping on railroad tracks and getting drunk. I landed in Kansas City, homeless, shirt on my back, stayed at several homeless shelters and was scared to death. These are intimidating places, especially for a white boy that knew nothing about living on the street in a big city. So I hooked up with some of these guys that were living in parks, living in woods, living on railroad tracks and that sort of stuff. And one of them kept telling me about this place called shower house. And I was thinking along the lines of the missions, where the showers are scary places, they're filthy. And I wouldn't go, which is ironic. But he sat up one morning and said "Come on, you're going, here's a bus pass." It was about 40 blocks from where I was camping out here. And I came through that door when we, or when they opened, and immediately felt at home. It was a whole different experience from what I was used to. I was immediately treated like a human being, and was like, this feels like home—to sit down and have breakfast on a real plate, coffee in a little cup, and clean showers, clean clothes. And so I started coming back. I was in kind of a routine, I'd walk 140 blocks everyday, just to get three square meals, a shower, and clean clothes, and get back to a place that was safe to sleep. I just kept doing it, and one morning I was waiting out here and it was chilly, I remember that, it was cold. One of the members stuck their head out and said "We're short of help, could somebody wash dishes?" and looked right at me. And that was when I started volunteering here. I did that for a year, learned all the stations in here, how to do everything when Cherith Brook is open.

It was Christmas a year ago, I had fallen on the ice and hurt my back really bad carrying groceries back to the abandoned house I lived in. And I stayed down for about two days and when I got up I could hardly walk, and it was frostbite. I had some really severe frostbite on my feet. And it happened to be Thursday, so I

stumbled over here, they have community dinner on Thursday, and came in—course by then I knew everyone—and ate dinner. And after they all pulled me aside and said “You know, we really want you to just move in for a while until your feet are better.” And I said “Okay!” And I moved into a room right here. And soon afterwards they had a new intern, and he was a Jesuit novice, and this was part of his training to do something like this, works of mercy. And we became really close friends. 24 years old, and just as enthusiastic as could be. Completely changed my whole perception of what a Jesuit was, I became very very interested in what he was doing. And he encouraged me to apply for internship. At first, I didn’t think they would take me. I’m a drunk off the street. And so I waited for a few weeks and then finally asked for an application, and everyone said “What took you so long?” And so I interviewed, and took a hard look at where I was with faith. And it occurred to me that god had put me here for a reason, this was not accidental. And all this time on the street, the homelessness, the alcohol and the drugs, the people out there—I’d been doing that for a reason, and this was the reason. And that’s really formed the basis of my faith right there, call it a moment of epiphany where it suddenly became clear that god was working in ways that I couldn’t on my own. It’s not me who is doing the work it’s god, and he’s changing me for the good. It’s something I’m aware of on the subconscious level, I’m aware it’s something very powerful that’s happening in my life. I’m not privy to all the details, but I do get these a-ha! moments where things become clear, this is why this is happening. I’m seeing some therapists now for depression, I’ve had it all my life. I’ve been trying some anti-depressants, but I hardly need them now.

I did go to AA, I found a sponsor, and I’m working a 12-step program. I’m really enthusiastic about that, it’s really made a big difference in my life. Mostly Cherith Brook is it. I feel closer to god here than I ever can imagine, and this forms the base—I still spend a lot of time out on the street with the homeless, I still have a lot of friends out there. I don’t hang out with them as much as I used too, I don’t go drink with them, I don’t go out and get high with them. But I do keep in contact and I encourage them to come in. I encourage them to follow some of the path that I have. I learned how to jump through the hoops of the system—getting people food stamps, getting people housing, getting people SSI, getting them off the streets.

I also have done a lot of work with city hall. There was an ordinance going through that was trying to pass, that would regulate the food trucks that feed the homeless. On the surface it looked like a good thing, and it came down to “Okay, we’re going to regulate them so nobody gets foodborne illness, etcetera.” And I think that’s great, and “We’re going to regulate them to make sure trash doesn’t pile up”—I think that’s great. But the actual intention behind it was very very different. There were some nice neighborhoods here in the northeast where the homeless were camping back in the woods. And last winter, when the leaves fell, winter before last, those camps became visible, and the people in those million-dollar homes were not at all happy. So they started this push, and they pushed so hard that the police came down and raided the camps, destroyed their camps. So they were out at a time of the year when they were the most vulnerable. Talk about some righteous anger! I

was angry. Pushed me out of my home, maybe I can forgive, but it's really really hard for me to forgive that. Because those people had no place to go, and they had lost their blankets, their tents, and everything.

Back to the beginning—something I didn't catch, where were you born and when were you born?

I was born in Vida Missouri, 1957. It was kind of a lower-middle class family, extended family, which ranged from very tolerant to very very racist. My first stepfather's family was just incredibly racist. But, interestingly enough, my grandfather on that side, he worked out at the old Bendix Plant. And he, after he worked there in the 50s, he had illness and I'm certain that's why—breathing in the heavy metals and stuff. So I've got a personal stake in peace-making here. I don't think our world needs any more nuclear weapons, and it doesn't need any more people getting sick making the parts for them. So I often protest. I haven't crossed the line yet—the reason I haven't crossed the line yet to go to jail is that our membership is down to four adults, and we actually had to cut back on our hours. If I was in jail it would be a lot harder on my family here.

Were you raised in a religious home?

Like I said, my religion went about lip-deep. One of my—my great grandmother was very religious and very sincere about it. She belonged to the Methodist church. I went to a little country Methodist church that was on circuit. The pastor would preach at three different churches on a Sunday, and the last one he'd preach to he'd go home with someone for dinner, that was part of his salary. Growing up, I had an intense love of music, which was encouraged—I took pipe organ lessons. And later went to Southern Methodist College, and the conservatory there. But it was for the music, not for the faith. The faith never rang true with me. Eventually I became pretty agnostic, almost kind of atheist. Actually hitting the streets here with nothing but my entire possessions in a plastic bag, and I was sleeping at Washington park, which is right between Crown Center and Liberty Memorial Station. It's just a small park. After my bad experiences at City Union Mission, I swore I would never go back to there. I was just walking around aimlessly, thinking "Well, what am I going to do now? I have no money, the shoes I've got on my feet are falling apart, I'm going to be eating out of dumpsters I guess." I didn't know about a lot of the soup kitchens then. And I walked through Washington Park, a light rain was falling and I was just miserable. This was about the first of September—two, three, four years ago, it's been that long. So I'm walking through the park, up comes this guy, and he's pulling one of those suitcases on wheels. He walks right up to me and asks "Are you homeless? I'm homeless too." I go "Yeah, I am." He goes "That's alright, sit down, there's going to be some other guys that show up here." And one of 'em sat down and set up a little private stove and made coffee, and we sat under the Link and got out of the rain and had a cup of coffee. And we talked, and within a few days I knew where to find drugs, I knew how to get food, they got me to Catholic Charities, I had a blanket of my own. I had a library card, was back on the internet, and was just like

“Wow!” We just camped right there in the park under the trees, that was where we lived. At that time the police were not running people out of that area. They are now. And late one night, it had been a strange day, it had been raining again, and there had been a double rainbow—most beautiful thing I’d ever seen. They were setting up for the Irish-fest, and they were testing the sound system. And they put this song on called “Something for Nothing,” and there was a lyric about looking for the rainbow’s end to find that pot of gold. And this is right when that rainbow came out, and I had this rushy feeling in me like something was changing inside of me. It was almost like being on LSD, it’s that kind of a—doing it to me whether I want it to or not. I was thinking “This is the end, I’m out here on the street, I have no prospects, no way to find a job.” So late that night, about two o’clock in the morning, just listening to the trains go by, I got down on my knees and prayed. First time in my adult life, and a peace came on me. I looked around and I saw these guys laying on their blankets and I knew right then what I was going to do—I was going to help them. The presence god has never left me since then.

So all that led you to living here at Cherith Brook. How do you feel like living here has changed the way you live your faith?

I can no longer hold this to myself, for one thing. I have lost all of my possessions and I don’t regret that, none of it. I could lose everything—what little possessions I have here and I wouldn’t miss any of it, I could give it away and I wouldn’t regret it. Everything that is placed in my hands is ultimately god’s. And if I don’t immediately need it, I need to give it to someone who does. That’s a profound change in the way I live my life. I don’t mind admitting to anyone that without god I am nothing. Every time I try to take my life in my hands, take the wheel in my hands and drive, I’m going to make a mess of it. And of course I still do, I backslide, and burn myself. Sooner or later down the line I’ll realize the error of my ways, god will show me the error of my ways, because it is not about me, it’s about *we*. We here and my family at Cherith Brook, we the human race...god asks so little, just to walk humbly with him and love my fellow men. When I judge, I know I shouldn’t but I judge, we all judge—I judge them on how they treat me and how they treat others. Not by the color of their skin, not by how much money they contribute, not by anything else. It’s just a matter of are they treating others right? How do they treat those around them?

I have a philosophy, two philosophies actually—first of all, have I learned more about myself and the world than I knew yesterday? And how can I help relieve someone’s suffering. And that’s really it, that covers it all. And this is an evolving thing, it’s never been static. My awareness, my contact with god evolves, grows, sometimes it’ll seem like my prayers just go dry for a period of time—I pray and pray and I’m not getting answers. Then it just comes in a rush. I think god was flipping the switches inside, saying “We’ve gotta get you ready inside before you can know it up here. We’ve gotta get you ready first.” And that is so true. If I follow my head I’m always going to be driving off a cliff, but if I follow my heart....Admission of my own sins, confess my sins, that’s become part of my life. Owning up to my own

mistakes, promptly, really thinking about why I made the mistake. I used to keep a pen of scapegoats out in the back, I could almost rent 'em out on E-Bay. But now I make a mistake, of course I slip occasionally, but I try to take responsibility for my own mistakes. I know the sooner I do, the easier it'll be to right what I've done wrong. And living here—the commune itself—has given me a feeling I've never had, and that is I know, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that everyone here loves me for who I am. And they care about my welfare, and that's not something that I ever ever have to doubt. That alone just makes personal, spiritual growth so much easier. I'm not having to bang my head up against a closed mind of insecurity all the time. When someone here asks me "How're you doing today?" I know that they genuinely want the answer, they want the truth, they're not just asking. They're genuinely interested in how I am, and I am in them. Our peace work is important, our hospitality is first here—service, works of charity. And going green. Obviously our gardens speak for themselves. In eight years Cherith Brook has never had to tap into city water for it's gardens. We save all our run-off in above ground tanks. We raise chickens, which are the ultimate personal garbage disposal units—and they give us back eggs, they give us back meat. We all take care of them, take our turns in the garden, taking care of the beehives. This is only our third year with the beehives. The first year they got a couple quarts or a couple pints. Last summer we got 15 gallons! We were sticky for a week, harvesting it. That was just amazing. We have a wood stove we put in last year, and we're gonna put two more in before winter, maybe three if we can swing it. We get a lot of our wood donated, so that helps with the heating bill. We have solar panels on the roof here, 60% of the power here comes from solar. We're working on a project to put in a DC circuit for additional panels for water pumping so we don't have to carry five gallon buckets to water our garden from the cisterns. We have a bicycle shop, we rebuild bicycles and give them away to people that need them.

It is a full-time job living here, but at the same time I am moving to a point now where I'm like "Yeah, I could handle a part-time job," somewhere between 10 and 20 hours a week. I am not a full member at this time. Last year when it came down, I was very close to getting engaged, very close to marriage, did not work out. That guy and I split up, he's got his own problems. So I did not join, and I had a really really difficult time. Again, the community was right there the whole time, supporting me through it. It could have really really destroyed my life, what I was going through. And I came through it stronger than ever. I have some new boundaries in place for relationships, and as far as my drug and alcohol recover, my sessions with my therapist and psychotropic drugs—I have 100% support. Anything that is contributing to my recovery, they are behind me. You can't put a price on that. I had tried to get off drugs before while I still had my relationship with my family, and their attitude was "Well, it's just a matter of willpower." A lot of people still think it is. If I had had terminal cancer and was struggling with it through treatment therapy, etcetera, they would have given me everything they had. But alcohol addiction and drug addiction in particular, it's not only a disease of a single person, it's a disease that touches everyone in their lives. My family was not strong enough to cope with that, they just couldn't. Whereas here, we talk about it

all the time. We have alcoholics, practicing alcoholics, drug addicts, pimps, prostitutes, losers, dealers, you name it, they're coming through the door all the time. At first they were like "Isn't this going to trigger you?" No, no, I can't run away from it. No matter where I go, there I am. The disease is going to go with me, I have to meet it head on, and meet it on it's own terms. And it actually helps to do this kind of work.

For a lot of people, this is a place of last resort. People coming in detoxing obviously need medical attention which is something we're glad to do. I mean, I've been there, I've been there with all of it. I can spot it, and believe me, I can empathize. When I see some person stagger in, shaking, I say we need to get them help now. We need to get them in a controlled environment. I've been in an intensive care for more months than I'd like to remember. But what I do remember helps a lot.

So you said that when you first came to Cherith Brook, you felt like they were actually seeing you. And you said that you hadn't felt that way in other aid programs or charity programs. What do you think accounts for that difference?

Part of it is just the—we try to see Jesus incognito in everyone. We try to see Jesus in you. But most of all, I can see Jesus in the poor, the destitute, the outcast. Which...Jesus was homeless. He was homeless too. He was beloved by the poor. It's an amazing thing. A lot of the people who come in here are in a bad space. Their camp was raided maybe, someone came in and stole from them, maybe it was cold and they had no place to get warm, it was raining and so they were wet and cold, maybe they couldn't get to another food kitchen for supper so they come in hungry. Maybe their last pair of shoes fell apart on the way here. These are people who are on the edge of life. And no matter what their mood, we realize that Christ is at work behind their eyes. So I'm gonna do what I can.

Even if I got a job and decided perhaps that I would move out and get married someday, and I'm not ruling those out, but I cannot imagine life without doing this kind of work. This is where I live. This is my life. Anything else, that's just secondary. If I was ever to find a mate, a soul mate, they would have to understand that, they would actually have to be a part of this or they would not be a soul mate. I won't say that everyone is cut out for this life, nor will I say that everyone could come in tune with it if they so desired. But this is not practice, this is not reading about it, this is not debating it in a college course. This is the real thing. This happens every day, every moment, every second of my life. This is where I am. And it's so refreshing. Once I hit on that rhythm, it's like 30 years fell off. 30 years of anxiety just evaporated into morning mist that just lifted from me. And now...it is an ultimate in not being self-conscious about who I am. I take pride in showing off my family here, you know, and saying "Yeah, I'm part of this." I feel like god has put us on the front line for a reason.

Can you tell me more about your family here? How many people live in Cherith Brook?

There are four adults. Let me see...there are nine of us, ten of us with Sean—he was a novice. The Garbasons are man and wife. They live in the apartment above us and they have two teenage children. When I moved in there was Allison, who lives upstairs, she's an RN, there was Elizabeth, who worked at a restaurant, there was Josh who worked at a youth minister at church. He later married Elizabeth and they moved to Sweden. And there was Nick who just has a lot of jobs. Nick moved out last summer, and is engaged. He's going to be married here within a few weeks, he's gone now. We've had people intern for a while, for a month, sometimes three months. For instance, Melanie and Caleb are here as interns. Melanie is leaving tomorrow, she's been here a month. Caleb just came last week, he's staying a month. And then last week we had Theo and Nicole—who are husband and wife—they came and stayed for a month. They're going to spend a month with their family, and are discerning whether to join the covenant here or not.

I have thought about doing so too, actually joining the covenant, which would be a years commitment. But I have way big medical bills right now for the times I ended up in intensive care with seizures, etcetera. We're talking several hundred thousand dollars in medical bills. I'm just saying, I refuse to let the community take any responsibility for any of that. So I cannot be on the checking account. But that's actually not a problem. I am an exceptional case, in that I am the first person that's ever actually joined that came off the street, that was homeless. There's no real significance to that fact, I just happened to be the first to ever ask. So that's where I stand with that. So I'm kind of more than a guest, but less than a full member. Because of my financial status, I don't have direct control of the checking account, which is no big deal.

This place is about trust. As a matter of fact, no one owns Cherith Brook. It is all in a trust, and we have a board of trustees. Some of whom are members here, some of whom are former members here, and some of whom are just really good friends. Matter of fact, Sunday, we'll have a trustee meeting. They are not trustees in the corporate sense at all. They are a very knowledgeable sound board, so that if we were to make any major financial decisions we would run it by them. I attend trustee meetings. I do not have a vote, because I'm not in the covenant. I believe, and everyone agrees, that if I make a good argument my vote counts anyway (laughs). We do everything by consensus. Once a week we have what we call our agenda meeting. It's always Wednesday morning. It's absolutely mandatory, all of us have to be there. We go over everything. Absolutely everything that concerns us personally, concerns the community, concerns our interaction with other communities—we do the week, we do the month, we do the years ahead. Anything and everything. It's an amazing process. We can do in five minutes what most committees couldn't do in a year. Because we know each other so well, we're on such intimate terms with each other that we pretty much know how we're gonna react before we even ask. And it's very much a faith-based decision making process.

Quite often, we don't come to agreement, and we just say let's pray about it for a while. It always does.

We are celebrating, next month, the loan on the property will be paid off and we will be free and clear. This was purchased with an interest free loan, and we won't owe anything. That's a huge celebration for us. We're gonna celebrate that Sunday at the trustee meeting. So that's been my project for the day, making elaborate desserts! (laughs). That's another part of it, I learned to cook practically as a child, then I hadn't used it. I'd been eating fast food or out of a dumpster. And now I don't even think twice about cooking for 60, 100 people. We've got four complete kitchens. If I gear up I'll have all of them going.

That's a lot of work and planning!

It's a lot of fun, though. Almost everything we do, if possible, we do together. We cook together, we pray together, we eat together. We don't just talk about community, we gel as a community. And we all have our unique talents and skills, which...I knew how to do electrical work, I knew how to do plumbing. I worked as a manager for rental properties for a long time. It's not a matter of "Okay, I automatically become Mr. Fixit," while I am fixing, I teach others how to do it. Everyone else has their skills, like Allison, she's an RN. In terms of first aid and etcetera, we really need skills like that. I'm a CNA but I've got a lot to learn. She's teaching me, and she's teaching others her skills. Computer skills, public speaking is something that I was terrified of. And Eric, who is an ordained Presbyterian minister and truly our spokesman, our voice, he's coached me a lot and now I go to city meetings and speak up and it doesn't bother me a bit. I try to become the voice for those who have no voice out there. I needed a strong voice to do that, and I'm growing into it. I don't back away and go through anxiety attacks anymore at having to do things like that. Bring it on! (laughs).

Do you all have pretty much the same beliefs about Christianity? You were all raised in different denominations, I imagine?

Well I can't say that we have the same beliefs any more than we have the same realities. Every human being has their own reality. And sometimes we will agree on certain sections of the reality. Faith, to me, my perception of our collective faith...we all have our own personal relationship with god. There are some aspects of our faith that we share, but...for instance, one of the other members they have what they call home church, and other former members and close friends meet at one another's homes. And I tried that for a while, but, the fact that I'm gay is a non-issue here. But the fact that I'm the only gay here, and in a Christian environment I feel 100% accepted for who I am in the home church and I'm welcome to go anytime...at the same time, this is such a period of transition in the Christian church in general, I felt like nowhere am I more needed than out there.

I believe I have found a home church, now, for me. Which happens to be Trinity Methodist, oddly enough, after all these years I'm full circle and I'm back at the Methodist Church, which is in a period of immense transformation in accepting LGBT. I'm not saying 100% that I'm gonna land there. I've tried Presbyterians too, Metropolitan Community Church—which is primarily a gay church, I tried that. And, oddly enough on the same day I was introduced to Cherith Brook, the same guy took me over to Hope City, which is on 24th street and Denver—they're run by International House of Prayer. I started going there because they serve lunch, and I was living in an abandoned house about five blocks away. So I started going there and I really got close to a lot of people there. Not necessarily their theology, but I was actually baptized there, in a tank, in a prayer room. I continued to go there, I still have a lot of friends. But their doctrine started getting more and more hostile to gays. At least, that was what I was hearing. There were one or two searing sermons about the latest earthquake, or the latest tidal wave, or the latest forest fire, because another state had ratified and was allowing gay marriage. I had had enough. "Okay, I've still got my friends here, we're still going to be friends here, but I'm not going to support this doctrine. I feel like I can be of more use elsewhere." And by then, I knew it wasn't a matter of where the next meal was coming from, it was a matter of where is the next person coming through the door that I need to be there for. And it was here, not there. So I quit going to those meetings. I still go through there all the time and talk to my friends, and even leadership over there are close friends of mine. And I get that they still like me, they understand me, but they're kind of between a rock and a hard place. They might agree with me in private, but because of the position they're in they're having to toe the party line coming down. And I just can't do it, I've been down to IHOP several times with friends. And they do great work—City Mission, Rescue Mission. Rescue Mission is pretty homophobic, but they still do a lot of great work, and there are a lot of people who depend on them. I don't have to agree with their doctrine to say "Hey, you're helping people that really really need help. What can I do to help you do it?" It's not a matter of my pride getting hurt by that. Just because I'm helping them in their works of mercy doesn't mean I have to worship the same way or that I have to have the same reality, the same personal contact with god that they have. That's something that we do preach around here—inclusiveness. Everyone is welcome here, and not only Christians but people of any faith, or no faith. They are still god's children and they are still allowed here. As long as they respect others, come on in. Have breakfast, take a shower.

I asked that question, because I've talked to a few community members who were a part of communities that disbanded because of ideological differences.

If I woke up this morning as an agnostic, or as a Buddhist, or whatever—it would change nothing. Absolutely nothing.

I think that's all I have to ask. Is there anything important that you'd like to add?

I want to emphasize the Catholic Worker movement. Unlike a lot of charities, we are completely independent. There is no central office that is going to be sending us papal decrees, saying that this is the way it's going to be. One of the reasons we are able to allow our differences in faith to unite us, not to separate us—this is one reason why. We all do things a bit differently, every Catholic Worker does things a bit differently. Even on our busiest day we'll barely top 100 doing breakfast here, some will top 200 on a daily basis. But we all have found our own balance, and we're constantly making little adjustments here and there. This is one of the coolest things about living here—okay, we've got some fairly hard and fast rules, but we are small enough and secure enough in what we do that we can make exceptions to almost any rule. The one rule that is that we need to respect each other. If you are not being respectful, we will call you out on it. When someone is threatening someone else, when someone is being intimidating, when someone is insulting someone else—no. It's amazing that we—we don't consider ourselves staff. There is no staff here at all. There are the people that live here, but we even consider ourselves volunteers. We volunteer to do this, to live our lives this way. Often, when this room is full of guests and volunteers, etcetera, the line just completely disappears between us. We are all as one, and whenever something occurs—a disrespectful scenario occurs, most often it's one of our guests, not one of the volunteers. Because we all respect the space so much and how the space is so important to everyone that comes through, that we just don't allow it. It's a matter of no, we don't call the police except in an absolutely extreme case like someone draws a weapon. Or someone starts throwing punches or is obviously intoxicated or something. Then we don't call the police, we call a crisis intervention unit. But almost never do we have to have the authorities intervene. It's something we work out here. And usually it's not in this space, it's out in the parking lot, or out in the sidewalk. Everybody participates in it, everybody had been through it enough times to know what to do in situations like that. And you can just see it, whenever there is an altercation the whole room becomes aware and rearranges itself and prepares for nonviolent intervention. And a large charity—like Hope Faith or Catholic Charities, where they've got hundreds of people in there, where to even get in you have to have a meal ticket or an ID—it's impossible to do such a thing. We know almost everyone that comes through that door on a first name basis. We know their story, and we would not want to grow any larger because we would lose that personal contact, that intimacy with our guests which is what makes this work. It's not that we always have enough food, it's not that we have good coffee, it's not that we have clean clothes and showers. It's this intimacy that we feel with our guests that makes this really, really work.

Our philosophy is that if there was a need, instead of us trying to grow Cherith Brook larger, have another house someplace that can do the same thing we do or something similar. Because there are people, just like I did, that every morning we'll walk 50 blocks, 100 blocks to get here. I've turned a lot of people on to Cherith Brook, just like it was word of mouth that got me here. I've told a lot of friends, who've told their friends, and it's probably 6th or 7th generation by now. And some of them come once, some of them are regulars. Some of them have become so

regular that they've got into this and have eventually gotten SSI, or gotten jobs, gotten off the street. I can name probably two dozen that I consider personal success stories, where "Hey, I remember when I saw you up on Main Street and told you to come up for breakfast because you were hungry!" And now they're doing great. At the same time, we do have our failures. Just last winter we lost three dear friends—one died in an abandoned house of an overdose, one died in an abandoned house, she froze to death, and one was beaten to death right around the corner. And he had a house—he was almost on his doorstep. I will not say that we don't have problems, and it's emotional burnout. I can work all day. Physical work, I'm getting stronger every day. But that emotional jolt you get, continuously people coming through that door with that look in their eyes that says "I don't know what else to do, I'm in trouble, help me." We do take retreats. We take personal Sabbath days just to talk to god about this. We take retreats as a community. Just last week we went up to the monastery in Atchison and spent two nights. It was just for us to chill out with each other, and put this on the backburner and get our balance back. We're well aware, experience has taught us, if we don't do this eventually we will burn out on it and we won't be at peak efficiency. When we're open we have to be.