

## My Story by Charley Turpin



**Charley Turpin**

*(The following is the text of the keynote speech which was delivered by Charley Turpin at the VMC Annual Dinner on January 31, 2013.)*

Good evening. My name is Charley Turpin – and you may have seen me around because I’m really a hometown boy. I was born and bred in Powell and graduated from Powell High School. I learned welding in high school, so when I graduated from school, I went

to work as a welder. I got married early to a woman who I thought would be the love of my life.

Sometimes, when problems start, they sneak up on you and you don’t realize it. That’s how it was for me. I started having problems at work, arguments, things like that. It seemed like I was having trouble getting along with people. It was like that at home too. My wife and I were fighting a lot. I wasn’t a very happy person and I wasn’t very easy to be around. She did things wrong too, of course, but mostly, it was me. I lost my job and became unemployed. That didn’t help at home. Finally, we both knew that the marriage was over.

I moved into my parents’ home, into the basement. Things did not go well there, either. I was angry and sometimes felt out of control – couldn’t keep a job, etc. Looking back, I think my parents were afraid of me at that time. They had good reason to be. One time while I was out of my mind with anger, I burned the house down.

I was arrested and went to jail. I won’t say much about that period of time except that it wasn’t good. But what you should know is that when I was released, I was given the same pair of shorts and t-shirt I was wearing when I was arrested. I was dropped off in front of the City County Building. It was winter and it was cold out; a sign on a bank downtown said 32 degrees. So I was dropped off and didn’t have a clue what to do. I couldn’t go home – I’d burned the house and relationships too. I had no place to go. I was as lost as I have ever been in my life.

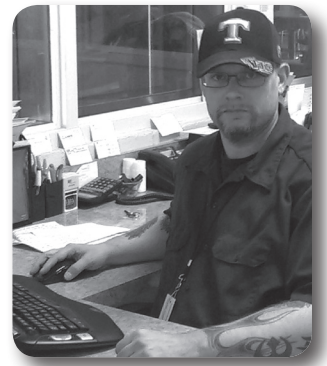
I saw some people who looked to me like they were homeless and I followed them and they showed me where

the overnight mission was. I slept there. Within a couple of days, people showed me to the Volunteer Ministry Center which was then in its old building on Jackson and Gay. It was a place where I found some structure and a sense of movement. I had spent so much time sitting in jail that I didn’t just want to sit around anymore. It was hard; I was homeless and a convicted felon.

One of the things that I remember was how wonderful it was to be asked to do chores. I worked a lot in that decrepit old kitchen. I loved that people began to count on me and I felt like I needed to be there to do those dishes. That was very helpful to me because it kept me busy. But the thing that was the most helpful was the VMC staff. They really listened to me. One of the Licensed Clinical Social Workers began to suspect that there was more to it than that I simply got mad from time to time. He got me into Cherokee Health and I started working with them. They made a diagnosis of bipolar disorder. It was really interesting afterwards; when we talked about the symptoms of my disorder, I recognized all of them in myself. All that time, I had thought it was normal to feel the way I did – and it wasn’t normal at all. It’s not normal to burn down a house.

I have a mental illness. I started on medication and it has changed everything about how I feel and how I function. But at that, I had to face the fact that I was not only homeless, a convict, but now also mentally ill.

I needed housing and badly. My first step was to find a job for a little income and Gabe helped me there. I started work at Krystal, not glamorous but it was a good way to work my way out of homelessness. The staff helped me to apply for housing at KCDC, the Public Housing Authority, and of course I was denied because of my criminal background. There was an appeal. VMC staff went with me to the appeal and I had made enough improvements in my life that they overturned the denial. I moved off of the streets and into Isabella Towers.





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March, 2013

Dear Friend of VMC,

Did you read Charley Turpin's story on the front page of this newsletter? He is a remarkable young man with a story of redemption to tell. We are so proud of him. And we are so proud of the work we do to help people like him become all that they can be.

You know by now that this is the letter in which I ask you to make a donation. A fundraising consultant told me one time that I have to be clear about why people should give to VMC, and why people should give now.

That's an easy task. You should give to VMC because we are really effective at helping people change their lives for the better. We help them sustain that change. Our success rate is wonderful when you look at how our newly housed, formerly homeless people retain their housing over the long term. We also help to prevent homelessness in the first place because that makes a lot of sense. In 2012, over 500 people avoided the slippery slope that leads to homelessness because of their association with VMC. You should give to VMC because our programs work. That means that your money works.

Why should you give now? That's an easy question, too. You should give now because this is when we need the money. VMC is not a wealthy agency; we are a grassroots organization focused on results, not fundraising. And this is a very challenging time of year for us. Donations traditionally drop after the largesse of the winter holidays. So this time of year causes us concern, using energy that is better spent on the delivery of service. It is very simple; we need your help now.

This is forthright talk; I realize that. It is also necessary. Charley Turpin walked through our door one day because it was open. It changed his life. We need to keep our doors open for all the other Charleys who are in need. And we need your help to do it.

With gratitude for all you do,



*Ginny Weatherstone*  
Ginny Weatherstone  
Chief Executive Officer

# A Message from the Chairman of the Board



**Mack Gentry**

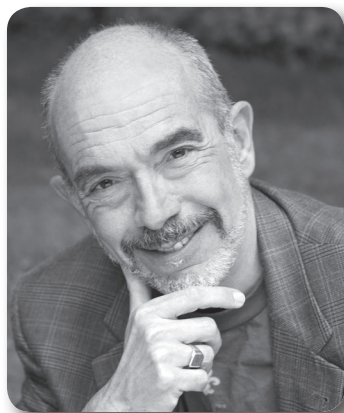
It is sometimes a mystery to me as to how I came to be Chairman of the Board of VMC. I agreed to be Vice Chair when I knew that I would serve under the leadership of Don Sproles. Don was a gifted man, truly passionate about the VMC cause and an example to me. I thought I would have a year to learn from him. That was not to be the case. Don's death from cancer in August of last year left me at the helm of a ship I felt ill-prepared to steer. Yet, in Don's memory, I could do no less than try. And I am clear that the most valuable thing that I bring to the table is the desire to be of service.

I never had a burning desire to save the world. But it is definitely part of my spiritual journey to be of service. It makes sense to me to serve where I am, to bloom where I am planted, so to speak. While I don't aspire to save the world, I'd like to have an impact on my little corner of it. And it makes a good deal of sense to me to help those individuals who really want to help themselves and who are receptive to the expectation of accountability. That's what I like about VMC programming and why I want to be involved here. Gone are the days when VMC distributed countless meals without a real relationship that encouraged change. Long gone is the emphasis on

"outputs" when it is the long-lasting outcomes that really make the difference. I like that about VMC.

I am aware that 2013 will begin VMC's second quarter century of service. And even though I sometimes feel ill-equipped, I know that I can rely upon the exceptional staff and the cadre of volunteers who never let us down. Even as I pledge to do my best, I ask for your continued support and for your best efforts as well. Together we can change our corner of the world.

## Carry the Torch Knoxville 2013



**Wally Lamb**  
(photo by Elena Seibert)

Knoxville's premier literary event, Carry the Torch, returns to the Knoxville Convention Center on May 8, 2013, and will feature *New York Times* best-selling author, Wally Lamb. The luncheon starts at 11:45 am and a book signing with the author will follow the program.

This is the fifth year that the Volunteer Ministry Center has brought in a nationally known author for the Carry the Torch luncheon to help raise funds to continue VMC programs and to help educate the public that homelessness is a community problem.

"VMC is a leader in our city in providing permanent supportive housing as a means to end homelessness," said VMC CEO Ginny Weatherstone. "Thanks to the efforts of numerous volunteers, the previous luncheons have raised more than \$600,000 to help support our goal of ending and preventing homelessness."

Tennessee Supreme Court Justice Sharon G. Lee is serving as the Honorary Chair of the Carry the Torch 2013 luncheon. "The Volunteer Ministry Center provides the resources that help the homeless obtain housing and those with housing to keep it. Please

join with me in supporting the important and life-changing work of the Volunteer Ministry Center," Justice Lee said.

Prior to the start of the Carry the Torch 2013 event, there will be a Mission Fair where attendees can learn about volunteer opportunities at VMC and other participating social service agencies. The Mission Fair starts at 10 am and is a good way to learn how to get involved in helping others in our community.

To register as a sponsor, table host or learn more about Carry the Torch, please call Mary Beth Ramey at 865-524-3926 ext. 229 or email at [mramey@vmcinc.org](mailto:mramey@vmcinc.org).



**Justice Sharon Lee**



# Our Chaplain's Prayer



**Jeff Perkins is VMC's Chaplain whose position is funded by a grant from the McMurry Memorial Fund at First Presbyterian Church**

Eternal God,

G. cried in my office today as he flew from a depressive to a manic state....quoting your words and asking for mercy... "Just listen and please don't be mad" was his mantra....God, You listened.

K. grabbed my arm in the parking lot this morning sharing how everything was coming together for him. His eyes smiled and danced as he described the act of waiting...for housing... and You. Thank You for his joy.

M. needed a safe place today to unfold his thoughts. He claims to be a doctor and states that he can read my mind by touching me. He doesn't believe in You. He may never. However, he believes in me because he can see me and touch me. We talk. He touches my shoulder and smiles. God, You know him and love him.

T. is healing today. She has been hiding her face all week. This morning the bruise around her face is turning green-blue. Healing is coming...slowly. She trusts You and still was injured. I don't understand the mystery of it all. Yet, she and I know You love her and keep her warm on the coldest nights outside.

Mercy, joy, knowing, healing...I see You in my friends and neighbors.

I am thankful for the "Guardian Angel" song that R. sang in my office today.....calling on you to keep him from the dark cave of addictions. A song from his heart and Yours.

I am grateful for my colleagues who serve, love, give, and patiently wait with our "neighbors" for Your provision.

I am grieved by the rejection our friends feel when turned away from stores, restaurants, and public areas.

I am encouraged when I see a young volunteer cry on account of the compassion she feels for "the homeless". They were scary strangers to her before yesterday. Today she sees them as Brother and Sister.

Thankfulness, Gratitude, Grief, Encouragement...The fruit of knowing You and Your children. Thank You.

## Sunshine Studio is Born



**Resource Center members at work in Sunshine Studio**

well result in a work reference for someone looking for competitive employment.

While the product line will expand over time, the two original items were "gifts" from the women of The Episcopal Church of the Good Samaritan who provided instruction and basic materials. B&W Y-12 donated materials and basic supplies. In December of 2012, a grant was received through St. John's Cathedral in memory of Martha Anne and Kent Withers which allowed purchase of materials, shelving and staff time to help this project take off. It also allows for immediate payment to the worker as acceptable items are produced. Visit VMC on any Tuesday to hear the hum emanating from Sunshine Studio. Busy workers are doing their best to produce great products, earn money and build a resume. Sunshine Studio is born!

Every Tuesday brings a buzz of excitement to the newly designated "Sunshine Studio" area of the VMC Resource Center. Participants in the Resource Center enjoy the opportunity to spend their day producing two items which are sold at a number of local venues. Under the direction of staff member Lisa Wells, folks will create fashion scarves from yarns, ribbon and other materials as well as earrings which feature hand rolled paper beads on sterling silver wires. Ms. Wells provides instruction, supervision and the final quality control. Items which are deemed acceptable for sale are rewarded with a payment per piece for the creator.

Sunshine Studio is an effort to bring meaningful and remunerative work to the homeless. Basic work behaviors and skills are emphasized. Regular participation allows one to earn and save a little money which can be used as the first month's rent when they move into housing. It also affords the opportunity to learn budgeting skills. Ultimately, long-term participation may



**WATCH FOR SUNSHINE STUDIO PRODUCTS AT CARRY THE TORCH ON MAY 8!**

# B&W Y-12



One of VMC's greatest friends and benefactors is B&W Y-12, the company that operates the Y-12 National Security Complex in Oak Ridge. B&W Y-12 employees have provided thousands of hours of volunteer service at VMC providing landscaping services, painting, maintenance, and organizing the Clothes Closet at the Refuge. The VMC has benefited from an annual coat drive at Y-12 since 2002. Y-12 employees collect coats and winter wear during the year to make sure that VMC has all the coats they need for the winter months. In addition to the coat drive, Vicky Marrow started a project in April 2009, where she matched donated yarn with caring crafters who wanted to help VMC keep their neighbors warm. Since that time, Y-12 employees have donated over 700 handmade toboggans and more than 100 knitted or crocheted scarves.

Many Y-12 employees come to the VMC campus to perform volunteer service as part of B&W Y-12's annual Day of Volunteering. This Day of Volunteering project starts at 6 am when the Y-12 volunteer group provides food for VMC's breakfast and helps serve the meal to those in need.

Elaine Warren and Karen Dixon have co-chaired many of the Y-12 volunteer efforts at VMC. Warren said, "Many Y-12 employees appreciate the work that VMC is doing to end and prevent homelessness in our area. Each year, Y-12 employees nominate programs to be part of the Day of Volunteering. For the past six years, VMC has been selected as one of the agencies to receive support for this company event. The Y-12 volunteers who come to the campus to serve breakfast and help with other projects have been able to see firsthand how VMC's program of compassion and accountability is changing lives. We have a great group of volunteers and many of the volunteers keep coming back to the VMC, donating their time, talents, or items needed to help the VMC move more people into housing."

In addition to their volunteer work, B&W Y-12 has also been a sponsor for the annual Veteran's Day lunch, sponsored VMC's Annual 5-K Race and Fun Walk since 2004 (one of VMC's main fundraising events), and donated computers to the VMC Refuge, Resource Center and Minvilla Manor.



## My Story by Charley Turpin *(continued)*

But the biggie was yet to come. I'd always liked school and had never really considered college. I'd needed to go to work right after high school. But when I talked to Gabe Cline, my VMC Case Manager, about my dream of getting more education, she thought we could do something about it. We applied for funding from Voc Rehab and I applied to Pellissippi State Community College and I was accepted. The big surprise to me was how well I did in college – and how much I loved it. Maybe, on medication, my mind was really clear for the first time, I don't know. But I did well. On September 29, 2011, this formerly homeless, mentally ill convict was inducted into the Alpha Theta Xi chapter of the Phi Theta Kappa National Honor Society. Gabe was there.

I completed Pellissippi and Gabe was at my graduation. I began at the University of Tennessee in the fall of last year. I am now in my second semester and heading towards a degree in Biology. I am fascinated by science and know that Biology will allow me to move into several different areas of employment. I know that Physics and Calculus are challenging for me but I've also learned that I can do more than I thought I could. I am now beginning to dream about a professional position in a field that I love.

Two last things. None of this would have happened without VMC and without Gabe Cline and other VMC staff. My life has been transformed. I am a hopeful person now – and a person of some accomplishment. I have a future.

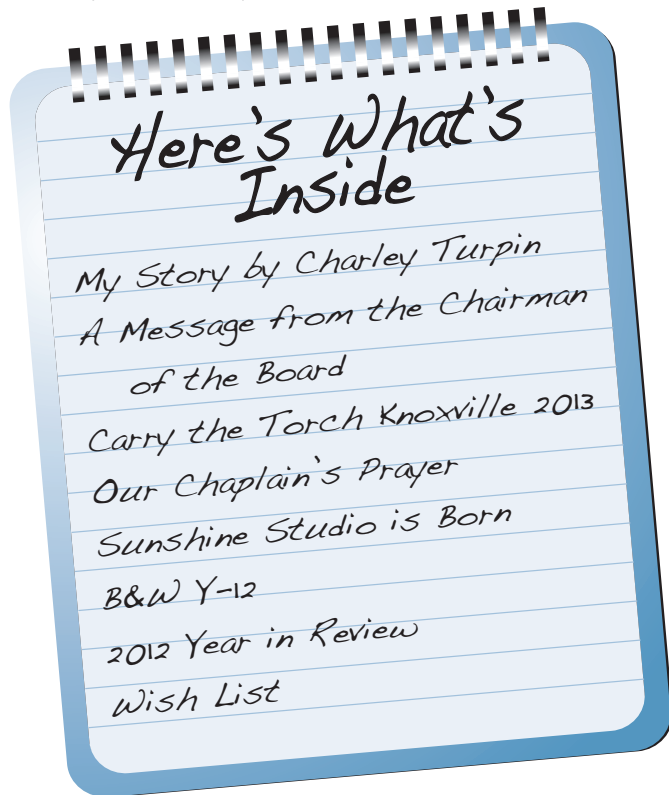
The second thing is this. The Krystal where I had been working all this time recently closed and we all lost our jobs. Don't worry about me, though. I have a new job. I will be working on weekends at the desk at the VMC Resource Center. I hope that I can provide some encouragement and some hope to homeless people who come in as lost and as alone and as sick as I once was. As I once was.

I do realize that my life has been transformed because of VMC. And I realize that VMC has been transformed because of you and your generosity. My message tonight is one of thanks. I could never have made it without Gabe and VMC. And that really means that I could never have made it without you. You keep the doors open and good people working there – so that people like me can walk through the door and get the help they need. I thank you.



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## 2012 Year in Review

- 103 people achieved housing
- 93% remain in housing over the long-term
- 5,119 individuals/families were assisted through the Refuge
- 502 individuals/families received utility or rent assistance
- 769 patients were seen in the Dental Clinic
- 1,202 dental procedures were performed in the Dental Clinic
- 122 shoppers participated in the Holiday Store
- 488 people received Christmas gifts through the Holiday Store

## VMC's Wish List

- Copy Paper and Post-It Notes
- Toilet Paper
- Deodorant
- Toothbrushes and Toothpaste
- Socks and Underwear (for men and women)
- TV Converter Boxes
- Feminine Hygiene Products
- Blue Jeans (for men and women)
- Yarn Remnants (for knitting)
- Laundry Detergent (HE)
- Reading Glasses