

# 10 YEARS BREAKFAST ON THE STEPS

SWISS CHURCH LONDON, 2024



Breakfast on the Steps is a warm and inviting space, friendly, supportive, caring, and nourishing. It's a place filled with compassion, offering help, joy, and calm in a safe and sociable atmosphere that fosters community and connection.

Friends! Earlier on I had worked as Volunteer Coordinator of the Saturday Sandwich Service for the homeless at Notre Dame de France for ten years until the pandemic arrived. When life was back to normal, I was offered a new volunteering role with Turn the Corner, the Mobile Library for the homeless on Saturdays at St Giles. At the same time the Swiss Church also beckoned me to its Breakfast on the Steps (BoS) on Tuesday mornings, by way of strong recommendations from a great homeless friend, so here I am. The BoS venue is incredibly spacious and bright and, despite the rush during the first hour of opening, there is a tranquil ambience in the room. Under the supervision of a coordinator, we are usually in a team of 4 or 5 serving breakfast and 2 to 3 unsung heroes in the kitchen. I work as a roamer/helper, looking after the guests and helping other volunteers when needed. The breakfast is open to all in the community, we welcome 60 to 70 guests. Most of them are very pleasant and courteous, and there is a real sense of community when regular guests join in to put tables and chairs away at the end of the session. Some have a great sense of humour, we share jokes and laugh wholeheartedly. One guest told me "I've been banned from a church, so I reported it to Jesus.

Guess what Jesus said "ME TOO! I've been banned". I know most of the guests by name and they also call me by my name. I feel like we are 'friends' without a definition. The smile and the fist-bumps of gratitude from a guest as he or she is leaving, the guest hugging me after we haven't seen each other for a long time, the friendly chats, the little sketches, and thank you cards. These are the things I will always treasure. . All in all, I have found the experience most rewarding. For instance, I was given a bunch of flowers, fully wrapped, by a regular guest. I thanked her and said "You needn't do that". She replied "Oh it's nothing, I just found them in a bin and thought they were rather nice for Marie". It's the thought that counts, and as Mother Teresa said "Not all of us can do great things, but we can do small things with great love". This year BoS celebrates its 10th year of service and I am delighted to be associated with the Art Exhibition project and the special Zine magazine. A BIG thank-you to all the talented guests who have made this exhibition possible, not forgetting Daniel Cole, our former guest who thoughtfully reminded us of the BoS 10th birthday. Unfortunately he can't be with us but he has recorded the history of BoS from 2014.

Marie, Volunteer

# VOICES

# FROM THE

# BREAKFAST

You can see in their eyes how much they appreciate our effort. Both Jake and I are the kind of people who really thrive on that energy to just be with people. We don't care about where they come from or who they are. We just love them and we love doing our job - I mean, this is not even our job, we're just love cutting hair! We just love doing it!

Bence, Volunteer Hairdresser



Jake and Bence

"I just love it. The people here are so nice. When you come and do their hair for them, it's just a really nice thing to do for them in a really nice space. It's not that much out of your life, really, is it? To give up two hours once a month to help people. It's not that much. It's not that deep. What you do for them is worth so much more for them than the two hours you put in."

Jake, Volunteer Hairdresser



Margret and Francois, the unsung kitchen team

When you arrive at Swiss Church early on Tuesday mornings Dave will be the first person to greet you at the door. He is Breakfast on the Steps' doorman. Dave is homeless himself. He discovered Breakfast on the Steps through word of mouth and became a regular guest. About four months later his predecessor left London and Dave was offered the role. His favourite part of the job is meeting and greeting the guests. Sometimes he has to turn would be guests away if he suspects that they are under the influence of intoxicating substances. He always tries to be cordial and respectful, explaining his reasons for turning them away and inviting them to return another week when they are more presentable. Dave thinks it's important for the doorman to be a member of the homeless community because it's easier to develop rapport with guests which makes his job easier to do.

Catherine, Volunteer,  
in conversation with Dave, Doorman

This is the second time James has been homeless. About ten years ago James experienced a series of phenomena he cannot explain and which lead him on an ongoing journey of spiritual discovery through Buddhism. He gave up his home when he decided to become a Buddhist monk and became homeless again after he left the temple. At the time we spoke with him he was staying at a homeless clearing house while waiting for a bedsit. James doesn't consider himself a materialistic person. The only material thing of value he owned was his record collection and he's never wanted a house or a car. He thinks that his non-materialistic approach to life has made it easier to adjust to homelessness but he thinks it's even easier to adjust if the person is not egotistical. James appreciates how Breakfast on the Steps opens at 7:30 am because it means he doesn't have to wait too long after waking up to get something to eat. He also likes the friendly people, the haircuts and hot breakfast which are offered once a month. James is not a stranger to making choices that alter his destiny. After he graduated with a degree in town and country planning his uncle invited him to go to Hong Kong, which James accepted. James has since lived and worked in nine different countries and travelled to a further 16. Every time he went to a new country or changed job it involved making a choice that affected the course of his life.

Catherine, Volunteer,  
in conversation with James, Doorman



Emmanuel and Dave



Fatima discovered Breakfast on the Steps through friends who told her about it. She loves the sociable atmosphere and the sense of community. Community is important to Fatima because that's where you have friendships that are also like family but more-so there is a sense of trust and sharing. Fatima is originally from Glasgow and has fond memories of the city but she calls London home now. Fatima worked in labour management for many years, which she enjoyed until she was made redundant. She had to go on the dole and received £30 a week from the government, which she found interesting and challenging. She remains unemployed. Fatima considers herself well read, acquainted with classical art, economics and politics, particularly marxism. She enjoys walking through Westminster and along the Thames which reminds her of the Clyde in Glasgow. Her favourite museum is the National Gallery and her favourite artist is Picasso because of his importance and palette. An important crossroads in her life happened when she met revolutionaries who believed in freedom of the spirit while she was travelling in France. Meeting these people taught Fatima to believe in herself.

Catherine, Volunteer,  
in conversation with Fatime



Lorraine is a regular guest at Breakfast on the Steps. Often she eats alone outside so what she enjoys the most about Breakfast on the Steps is the interesting conversations she has with other guests on topics ranging from religion, politics and films. For Lorraine community is a collection of people coming together for social interaction, support, information and enjoyment. The portal Lorraine stepped through in her life was when she was made redundant and instead of taking another job as a PE teacher she decided to go to Canada as a nanny in 1980. It changed her life because she had many experiences she would not have had had she stayed in the UK. While she was in Canada she was selected to swim in the master squad and attended international tournaments. She studied social work at McGill University which she wouldn't have been able to do in the UK where studying was more expensive. Lorraine feels blessed to be alive and been born in London in the UK. She wants equality and human rights for all.

Catherine, Volunteer,  
in conversation with Lorraine



“The Swiss Church is an essential touchstone during the week, not least for the delightful breakfast, served by generous hosts, but also for the plethora of services supported by so few. Haircuts, Clothes, Toiletries are an offer as well as an Art Club and more importantly an ear from one of the staff, a real treat!”

Brian, guest

# BOS ART CLUB

The Breakfast on the Steps Arts Club grew as a creative branch of the weekly Breakfast on the Steps program. Recognizing the powerful role art plays in healing and expression, the Arts Club provides guests with a quiet, welcoming space to develop their artistic practice, connect with one another, and share their stories through diverse forms of art. This supportive environment fosters not only creativity but also a strong sense of community and belonging. Currently, the club features artists including David Bedford, Lorraine, Matt, Katandpigeon, Lewis MRP, Alan, Andy Palfreyman, The Homeless Poet, Lui Saatchi, Tean, John Joseph Sheehy, David Fussel, and Eva. Their work will debut in the club's first exhibition, **PORTALS**. This exhibition, exploring themes of transformation, memory, and imagination, offers the public a rare opportunity to experience the unique voices, talents, and perspectives of artists whose lives and experiences are rarely seen.



Tean

"My art is cynical—it embodies the past, the present, and the future. Much of it carries deep history, with layers that most people aren't aware of, yet through the movement of colors, I can express whatever I want to say. I work intuitively, letting things flow naturally. I create as I keep moving forward. I believe that as one door closes, another immediately opens. We never truly die; we're more like programs, constantly evolving as we pass through the portals that appear."



Katandpigeon

"Art is a powerful mode of communication that can be intense, as it tells stories across all mediums. It's also a form of escapism at its best, allowing you to step outside of yourself. Some people might say they don't like art, but they don't realize they create it in their own lives, shaping their own narratives. I also appreciate art as a keeper of memories. Portals are everywhere, like little moments of time travel, where we revisit the past and create new memories at the same time. Art doesn't always communicate through language, yet it unites people in a way that transcends words."



John Joseph Sheehy

"Art is essential to me and has been deeply healing. It helps me overcome burdens, worries, and supports me through depression and difficult moments. It's comforting and consoling, often helping me more than I even realize. I paint instinctively, not in a traditional way, but as if the inspiration flows through my hand directly from god. To me, portals represent opening doors and entering new spaces, discovering places and soundtracks. Love is also a portal, it unlocks all doors and heals all diseases. Art is magnificent and fantastic. It's massive really, it is healing and it helps other people heal as well."



Lui Saatchi

"I create art to distract myself from the hardships of life. It keeps me busy and helps me channel something positive. In a way, it's my portal to another world—the abstract world of painting. Sometimes, I paint about the things surrounding me, what's on the news, or the current issues of the time."

Lewis MRP

To me, Portals are about accessing a new dimension. A portal can set the mind to imagine something beyond what exists, inviting you to picture what might be possible.

## **I'm Not Homeless**

**I'm not homeless,  
laying sleeping bags on smooth concrete,**

**I'm not homeless,  
praying for sleep in a spirit of ragged defeat.**

**I'm not homeless,  
feeling the night breeze wafting over my face,**

**I'm not homeless,  
listening to strangers pass by at a hurrid pace.**

**I'm not homeless,  
seeing contemptuous eyes radiating pure disgust.**

**I'm not homeless,  
knowing I am seen as scum everyday men mistrust.**

**I'm not homeless,  
catching sad reflections from a shop doorway window.**

**I'm not homeless,  
cursing the exposed entrance amidst sheltering shadow.**

**I'm not homeless,  
despairing through isolated hours how I can really endure.**

**I'm not homeless,  
accepting a latent threat is always abiding quiet time for sure.**

**I'm not homeless,  
resenting a fact I will never acquire permanent accommodation.**

**I'm not homeless,  
surviving tough streetlife incarcerated inside fractured resignation.**

**I'm not homeless.**

Author  
The Homeless Poet

## **Juggling**

**euphoria airways always heinous**

**outside influence brings anxiety**

**an agitated pupil's attention**

**cobblestone hinged, mastering**

**ruled forgiveness, jumble grabbing verbs**

**Wormwood-Scrubs prison cell**

**Du Cane Road, pronunciation rising**

**rocks the locus spot of water's loneliness**

**sorrowful streams toppled the worms**

**burying holes, complaining about the subject**

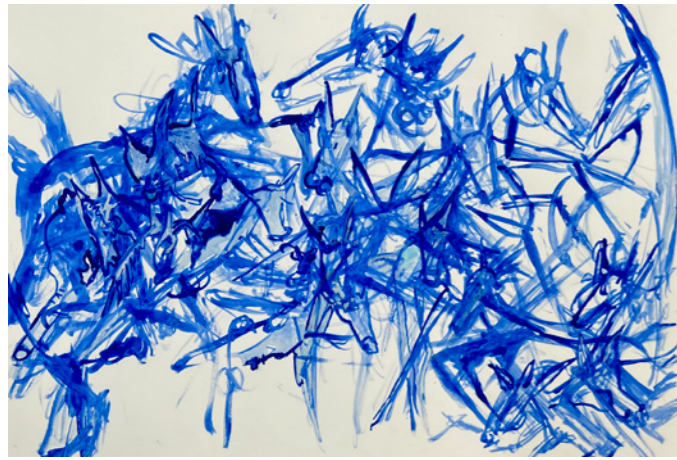
**mistakes circling on BT Tower**

**off Tottenham Court Road**

**Good Morning London**

**How's it going?**

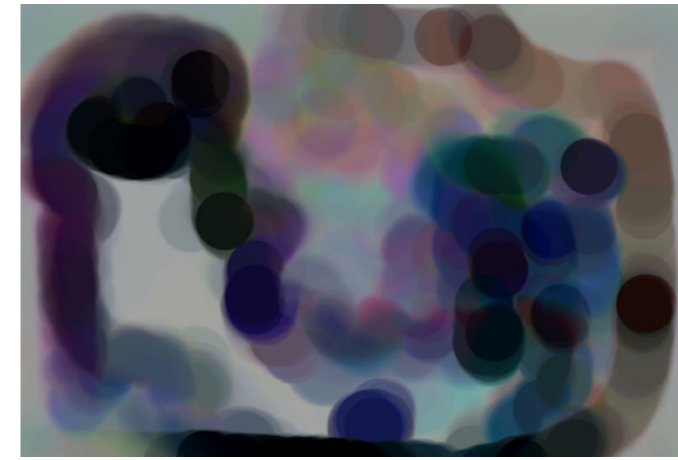
Author  
John Joseph Sheehy



Katandpigeon



Katandpigeon



Lewis MRP



Matt



Tean



Tean



John Joseph Sheehy



John Joseph Sheehy



Lorraine



Lorraine



Eva



Lui Saatchi

“I started coming to Breakfast on the Steps at the Swiss Church shortly after it began in March 2014; my first visit was in April of that year. Back then, it was just a camping stove and take-away egg sandwiches with a cup of tea or coffee. Since then, it has grown into what it is today, with a hot breakfast every month, haircuts, and even clothing donations from time to time. The people at the Swiss Church are incredibly caring—they look after us and treat us with kindness. I am truly grateful for all they do for us every Tuesday morning, and I thank them with all my heart on behalf of myself and everyone who comes here.”

Danny Cole, guest

Our Breakfast on the Steps program continues to grow, with an average of 75 guests joining us each week. While many of our visitors have been with us for years, we're now welcoming many new faces as homelessness and poverty affect even more people.

Our guests truly appreciate what we offer, and many look forward to it all week.

With the rising demand, we rely more than ever on our dedicated volunteers and generous donors. The good news is that an exciting opportunity to raise significant funds is coming up! We're part of the Big Give Christmas Challenge, a match-funding campaign where every pound raised between 3rd and 10th December will be doubled. This is an incredible chance to support our project and make a lasting impact. You can access our Big Give Project page by scanning the QR code below, or via the provided link. The link will also be available on our website, in our newsletter, and on LinkedIn and Instagram. Please share widely and give as you can!



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