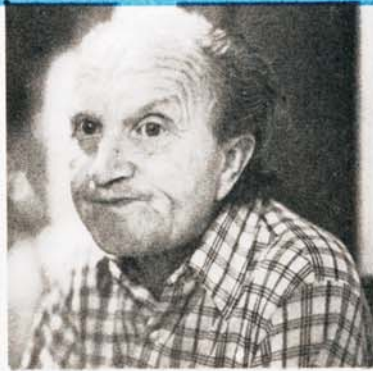


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**A mission
of hope**

**Washington Street Mission
is 75 years old**

photos by Bill Foreman
layout by Linda Jacober

“Everlastingly at it”

After seventy-five years, the
Washington Street Mission still
serves the poor

by Fletcher Farrar, Jr. photos by Bill Foreman

It could be Joe's Diner, with Marie Eagan as the waitress bustling about serving coffee and longjohns to the morning crowd, and her husband Bob seated at the back table greeting those he recognizes as they walk in. Except you notice after a while that the Eagans' cheerfulness is about all the cheerfulness there is. There's none of that noisy banter and clatter of dishes that goes with breakfast at Joe's, and there's the picture of Jesus and the Bible verses on the wall.

This is the "neighborhood coffee hour" at the Washington Street Mission in Springfield. The coffee room is in a wide, dimly lit hallway of the rambling building at 408-410 North Fourth Street, which formerly housed an automobile garage. The coffee is free, the doughnuts are stale, and the people are poor. Poor people, at least the ones who come in here, drink their coffee slowly and don't say much to strangers. They keep to themselves because they've been beaten down too many times to want to get out on the limb that conversation would require. Or they're old, or cold, or don't think so well, or they're afraid, or ashamed, or don't feel good. There are lots of reasons to drink your coffee quietly when you're poor.

Which is not to say they're unfriendly, or won't speak when spoken to. I asked one old man what he was going to do Christmas Day. "That's my birthday. I'll be fifty-eight years old. So I'm going to praise God. And eat. I'm going to praise God and eat," he said, and turned away to his coffee, having said all he had to say. A young man who said his name was "King David" works out at the Y everyday because he can't find a job. A thin young woman with a sad thin face said she doesn't like winter because she can never, never get warm. A middle-aged man described how a big dog attacked him on his way to the Alcoholics Anonymous meeting last night.

Those who run the mission would like to



At 6:30 each evening the mission comes alive with children's playtime.

be sitting with the coffee drinkers, using this opportunity to talk to them about Christ, but they're usually too busy doing other things. That, after all, is and has always been the mission's first purpose: "to carry the gospel to those who have no other church affiliation." The second purpose, according to a mission brochure, is "scarcely to be distinguished from the first: to relieve distress wherever found." The mission is not tax-supported, is not affiliated with a church or religious denomination, and doesn't get funding from United Way. Its only support is through voluntary contributions of money, clothing, food, and prayer.

"Our motivation is to share our Christian faith," said James Beatty. He and his wife Lorraine are directors of the mission. "We don't use strong-arm tactics or pressure tactics. But they know what we represent. Other groups provide social services without attending to spiritual needs, but that's not what we're here for."

Beatty is philosophical about his success rate. "It is comparatively rare that we get through to people. Sometimes the nuts and bolts of running the operation keeps us too busy, so we don't have the opportunity to witness as much as we'd like to. We know that people on welfare are no more interested in spiritual things than the country club set or the Yuppies or anybody else." He smiles. "But they're easier to talk to because they don't have anything else to do."

Beatty sounds a little like one of those Bible-thumping hypocrites who would much rather feed a man's soul than his belly, but he doesn't act like it. When he complains of being too busy with the "nuts and bolts" of running the operation, that usually means he's off

in the other room looking for a coat the right size to fit a man who doesn't have one. Or, on one occasion, he was talking to a man who wanted his Social Security check sent to the mission, because it had been stolen last month. One morning a black woman came in to coffee hour so overwrought she seemed about to cry. "I need to talk to Mrs. Beatty," she said. Soon Lorraine Beatty had her arm around the woman as they went off into the other room to talk. Little acts of love like these seem to form the substance of the mission now, just as they have since the mission opened its doors January 10, 1910, a year after the great evangelist Billy Sunday had conducted a six-week revival meeting in Springfield (see sidebar). The Billy Sunday motto, "Everlastingly at it", became the mission's watchword, and seems more fitting as the years go by. The formula, as stated in a mission publication, is simple: "to learn what the needs are and set about finding a way to fill them." But the coffee hour and the free clothing, the elderly women's Bible fellowship, and even the gospel worship service every night of the year—these things just bring the Beattys and the mission volunteers into proximity with the poor. The real work of meeting physical and spiritual needs of individuals takes place quietly, in and around the formally structured events of the mission's day.

The primary "ministries" of the mission today are relatively few. There is the "neighborhood coffee hour" from 9 to 11 a.m. Monday through Friday. The next hallway over is the "clothing hall" where used clothing is given away at 10 a.m. every



"We try to put some structure into these little lives that don't have any structure."



The clothing hall, where those in need can shop for free clothes at 10 a.m. four days a week.



Father and child in the clothing hall waiting room.



At the women's Bible Fellowship, time is spent in Bible study, prayer, and "bearing each other up."

Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. The worship service is at 7 p.m. every night, preceded by a half-hour children's playtime in the large room at the back of the building. A "women's Bible fellowship," of primarily older women from the Sangamon Towers highrise next door, meets at 10 a.m. the first and third Wednesday of each month. Mr. Beatty leads an adult Bible study on Friday evenings, and Christian films are shown the first and third Saturday evenings of each month.

Each morning the clothing hall resembles a busy department store at sale time, with the "customers" standing in the foyer impatiently waiting for the doors to open. Each one registers, then waits for her name to be called, and a few at a time go in to shop among the well-organized racks. Many are mothers looking for mittens and hats for their children; several are single men hunting for shoes and socks. Every person who comes in is given sixty points a month to "spend" on clothing, and each item in the store is assigned a point value comparable to the dollar price it might cost new in a store. Volunteers go over the clothing carefully at the checkout counter, meticulously recording on a card how much of her allowance the person has spent, sending back those who exceed the limit. The point system is designed both to help the clients learn to budget and to ensure that nobody takes too much.

At 6:30 each evening the mission bus arrives with its load of forty to fifty children from the Hay Homes public housing project, and for a half hour the room erupts in noise and energy, with some riding the plastic horses, some working on a craft project with a volunteer, some break-dancing as they stand

in line for their turn at the bean-bag toss. "They all kind of find their own little thing to do," said Mrs. Beatty. "They like the simple toys. We had a ring-toss game that lasted for years and years until it finally just gave out. Now it's the bean-bag toss that the Girl Scouts gave us."

The children range in age from about seven to fifteen; most come on their own, unaccompanied by an adult. There are a few cribs in the room because sometimes the older girls bring their baby sisters or cousins. "They walk in with these babies with their little necks kind of dangling over their arms," said Mrs. Beatty, smiling. "You wonder how they survive, but I guess they get pretty strong that way."

At 7 the children are called to sit down, boys on one side, girls on the other, and Mr. Beatty says a short prayer which "quiets them down." They march a few at a time into the chapel where the service begins with the singing of the doxology ("Praise God from whom all blessings flow. ..."), then the national anthem and the Pledge of Allegiance. "We try to put some structure into these little lives that don't have any structure," explains Mrs. Beatty. "And we find the children themselves don't want too many changes." The mission is unabashedly patriotic. "We tell the kids this country is still a free country. We can come here. We say there are so many countries where you kids couldn't even come to the mission."

Mr. Beatty picks a child from the audience who proudly helps him hold the book with words to the songs in big letters. Mrs. Beatty plays the piano and all sing enthusiastically. He has to

stop the proceedings several times to restore order, trying to sound gruff and stern but failing to impress two street-wise troublemakers. Finally he threatened to prohibit the boys from coming to the mission for a month, which seemed to work at least for awhile. Then he launched into a fifteen-minute sermon that wandered from the New Testament to the Old to the Christmas story and back to Adam and Eve. The basic message was that Christ came to fulfill God's promise to redeem the world. ("If you're familiar with what Billy Graham preaches," explained Mr. Beatty, "you'll know what we preach.") Soon the service is over for another night and the children are loaded back on the bus for home.

The evening service isn't intended to be just for children, though it works out that way because that's who the mission can get to come. There are a few adults in the back rows, and the Beattys would like to attract more. Several nights a week the sermon is given by someone other than Mr. Beatty, and more guest speakers, soloists, and pianists are welcome. "If you know anybody who wants to learn to preach, this is the place to start," Mrs. Beatty told a group of visitors. "And you know what? Here's the thing about the mission..." She looks around as though about to reveal a secret. "You don't have to be real good."

James and Lorraine Beatty, are a warm, personable, middle-aged couple who came to the mission 4^{1/2} years ago. Mr. Beatty, as he is called by almost everyone including his wife, is a former high school and college teacher. Together the Beattys ran their own independent Christian high school in Old Berlin, west of Springfield, until the late 1970s when its fuel bills got too high. They were looking for another ministry, a way to "serve the Lord," at the same time the mission's aging superintendent Mary Louise Miller's health was failing. They were hired as her assistants and became directors after her death in 1980.

The Beattys are neither trained social workers nor students of economics; their observations about poverty come only from personal contact. "Over the years I have developed a good deal more compassion and respect for how people are coping," Mr. Beatty said. "I understand something of the sense of helplessness of some of these people. Some of them talk about getting work. Some of these young guys are really trying to get off 'township' [general assistance], and they look for a job but there aren't any, except at fast food places."

"A good part of these people's problems are caused by their own poor decisions, either dropping out of school or getting involved with alcohol. Alcohol causes a lot of problems. You see the old-line picture of mission work, where they deal with wins in their forties or fifties? Now we have people in their twenties and thirties who have signed up to be failures already. Now that's pathetic!"

"They get on the cycle of welfare, and I don't know how to break that. The government says 'Have a baby and we'll support you.' " These little girls come to our evening services with the other children, they learn the Bible verses and sing the songs, and you see them a few years later holding a baby in their arms. It's just heart-breaking."

I asked Beatty if the government providing assistance was any different in principle than the mission giving free help.

"No, I feel the tension there. Sometimes relief hurts them, but you can't not help. Somebody comes in and they need a coat and you have one. So what do you do? You give it to them, that's what."

The Beattys aren't ones to complain, but they'll tell you their problems and frustrations if you ask. Mr. Beatty: "Poor people are streetwise, they're subversive, most are on the make. A lot of them would rather be independent, and are not



The "neighborhood coffee hour."

trying to take advantage of you, but many of them will if you let them. And there are some days when it gets to you." He described an incident about two weeks ago in which "some raunchy people" stole some bundles of clothing from a woman as she was bringing them in to donate them to the mission. "That made me angry. Here we are trying to do something for them and this is what we get."

"The biggest problem is just the physical wear and tear on us. We've been here for 4 1/2 years and in that time we've had three days vacation and four days off when we went to a convention."

The motto "Everlastingly at it" unfortunately implies that the mission will always be there, just because it always has been. When the Beattys hear about people who have lived in Springfield for ten or twenty years who either never knew about the mission or have forgotten that there is such a place, they worry that the work is being taken for granted. To combat complacency, the mission is trying to get all the publicity mileage it can out of its seventy-fifth anniversary celebration this weekend, but in doing so it is emphasizing the present and the future more than the past.

"We're in a period of transition," Mr. Beatty said. "The future isn't all that clear to us. I'm sure the spiritual emphasis will remain. The social service will remain too, but I'm not sure what kind of form that will take. We may be looking for more ways to reach out to the elderly and the handicapped." The key to the future, both said, is more volunteers.

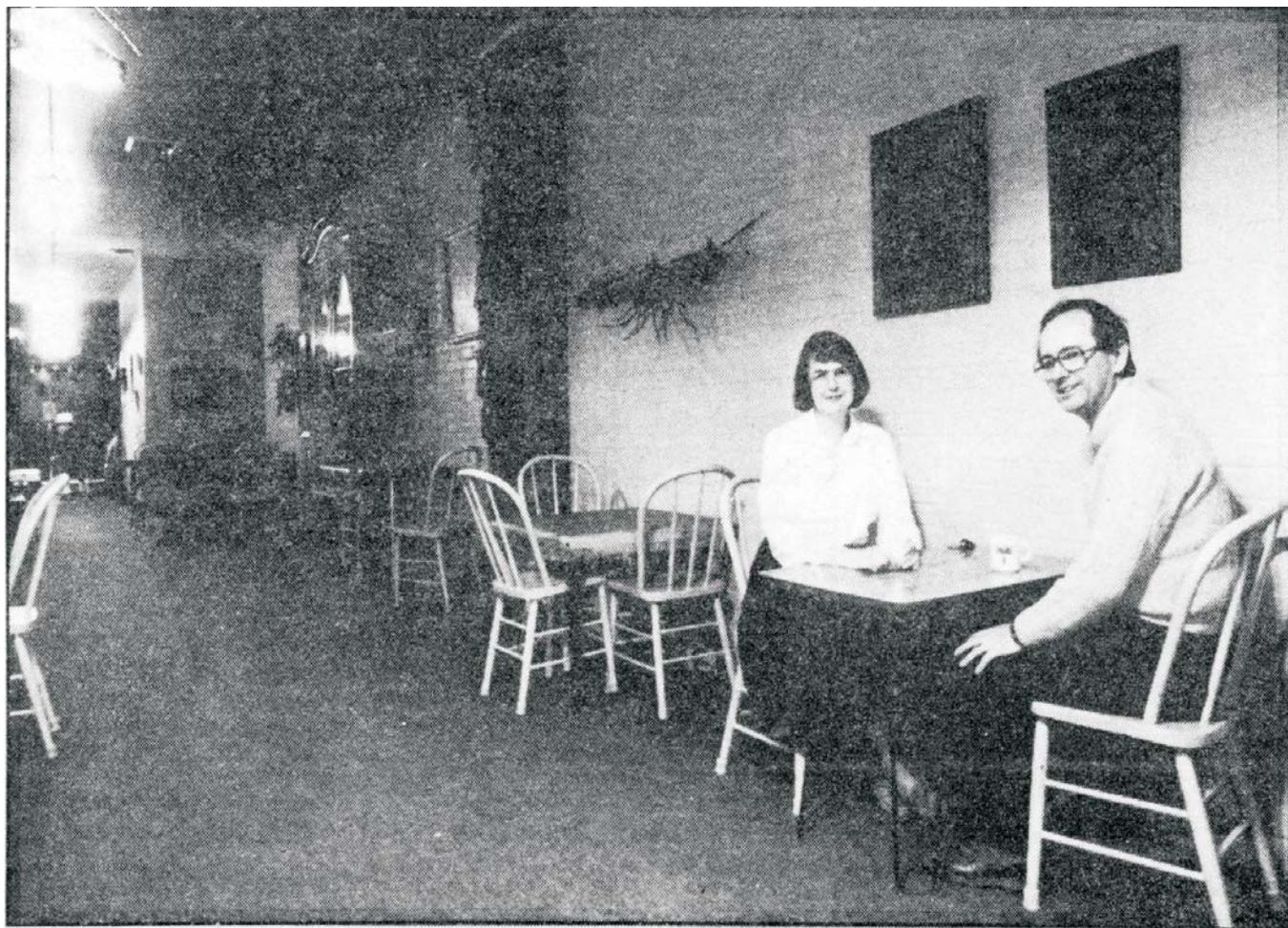
The mission volunteers meet once a month. Organized and led by Brenda Edgar, wife of Illinois Secretary of State Jim Edgar, their stated first purpose is to pray for the work of the mission and, secondly, to work for it, at least two hours a month. Of the twenty or so who came to the December meeting, all were white women, most were middle-aged, and almost all were affiliated with a church, though there were nearly as many churches represented as there were women.

The meeting began with the women "sharing joys." Several mentioned special moments from the day the mission took its children to participate in the Thanksgiving parade. "I was inspired by this little boy on the bus who was giving his full, undivided attention to that little doll we gave him," one said. Another: "It brought joy and peace to my heart to see the way Lorraine loves the children and cares for them." Another: "The mission cares for the unlovely. It takes Christ in your heart to love the unlovely."

After a business session, prayer requests were announced. "Pray for Mary," Mrs. Beatty said. "We've prayed for her before. She comes in for coffee in the mornings and you can tell she's going downhill. It seems that her mind isn't accepting much these days, and she looks like a skeleton.... Pray for Elizabeth. You remember she's the one we moved to a small town where nobody would bother her, and the Christians in that town just took over and helped her so much.... And pray for our seventy-fifth anniversary in January. Praise God for what he's done for the past seventy-five years in the mission. We're a social service agency, but not just a social service agency. We're here to serve God."

The women broke up into several small groups, and soon a hum of prayer was going up all over the room.

The Washington Street Mission, 408-410 North Fourth Street in Springfield, will observe its seventy-fifth anniversary Saturday and Sunday, January 12 and 13. At 7:30 p.m. Saturday, featured speakers will be Secretary of State Jim Edgar and Henry Soles, president of the In-ter sports Association and chaplain to professional athletes. On Sunday from 2 to 5 p.m. several religious musical groups will perform during an open house. On both occasions volunteers will conduct tours and serve refreshments.



Lorraine and James Beatty, co-directors, in the hall where free coffee is served every weekday morning.

“Let’s do something spriritual for Springfield”

For sixty-five years the Washington Street Mission was housed in this building at 111 South Eight, just south of Washington. It moved to its present location in 1974, and this building was demolished to make way for the Prairie Capital Convention Center.



The Rev. Billy Sunday was rough on old Springfield during his 1909 revival. "If the fires of prostitution and dishonor and Hell that have made her name synonymous with immorality from one end of the country to the other are not trampled," he preached, "then I am forced to tell you that Springfield is a fine town to move out of." [See "Billy Sunday's crusade against evil in Springfield," IT, April 15-21, 1982.] Nevertheless he "converted" 4,721 people during the six-week event. One of these was Robert T. Brown, then secretary-treasurer of the Vredenburgh Lumber Company.

Though his company had sold the lumber for the giant tabernacle that housed the crusade, Brown resisted attending until the very last night, but that was enough for him to be "saved." After Billy Sunday left town, Brown met during noon hours for Bible study and discussion with George E. Coe, the city commissioner who had been finance chairman for the construction of the tabernacle, and several other Christian businessmen. At one of these meetings, Coe is said to have announced, "We have been praying for something spiritual for Springfield. Here is \$500. Now let's DO something about it."

What they did was establish a mission, which opened its doors January 10, 1910 at 819 East Washington Street, land now occupied by the Horace Mann Insurance building. Over the next few years it moved to other buildings on Washington Street, then in 1918 to 111 South Eighth Street, where it remained until 1974 when it was forced to relocate because of the Prairie Capital Convention Center development. When it moved to its present building on North Fourth the question of a name

change didn't even come up. After all, the mission hadn't been on Washington Street for sixty-five years.

Robert Brown was a member of the mission's first board of directors, then became its president, and when the superintendent resigned in 1919 he left his job at Vredenburgh's to work for the mission full time. He did so until his death in 1940, when his son-in-law, Robert O. Miller, and daughter Mary Louise took over. When Miller died in 1970, Mrs. Miller became superintendent until her death in 1980.

One of the mission's early tasks was to care for Italian immigrants who flooded into Springfield during World War I, having been thrown out of work by the closing of Grundy County coal mines. An early history of the mission says the Italians were "fed, clothed, and tutored in English and citizenship." And when the time came, "not one failed in his citizenship examinations, so well had they been prepared."

In the early 1920s the mission opened a home for delinquent girls on Clear Lake Avenue, in the building now occupied by the Southern Air restaurant. It was to be "a place of refuge for the many young girls who had come to Springfield along with the criminals and loose women driven from other Illinois cities by drives against vice."

For a long time the mission operated a woodyard to provide work for men and fuel for needy families. In the thirties and forties, hundreds of children were taken to summer camp near

Rochester. During the Depression the mission provided temporary housing for some 20,000 homeless men in a single year. But then as now the mission has been best at little deeds of kindness rather than major social programs. For example, a notation from the mission's files from the late 1950s reads, "Shelter, food, and medical treatment were provided for a family stranded here with four small children, one of whom was gravely ill, and they were returned to their home in Southern Illinois." And this: "A thirteen-year-old boy who had run away from his home in Texas was sheltered, clothed, and cared for until his home could be located and he could be returned there."

—F.F., Jr

About the photographs

When we asked Bill Foreman to give us five or six photographs to go with our story on the Washington Street Mission, we had a hunch he might get involved in the story. He spent many hours there over several weeks and brought us about fifty prints, of which we used as many as we had space for. Foreman is a photographer for the Senate Democratic staff and operates his own business as Silver Images Photography.

We asked Bill for his thoughts about the photographs. He wrote: "For me, the Washington Street Mission was an interesting story of two people, Jim and Lorraine Beatty, and the concern and dedication they show in helping other people. The mission, though, is much more than a story of Jim and Lorraine. It is a story of the people who use the mission.

"If you ever visit the mission, be sure to pay particular attention to the children. In my opinion, they receive the most important part of Jim and Lorraine's work. To see them, as I hope I have shown, is to sense love and compassion. They are the future and the purpose of the Mission, as children are for both society and our individual lives."