Back Bay Mission
Established in 1922

BACK BAY MISSION
strengthening neighborhoods, seeking justice, transforming lives

THE CHANGING TIDES

The Magazine of Back Bay Mission

CHANGING LIVES

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Reflections STORY

Executive Director
Pastor James Pennington

It is Spring! We just celebrated Easter! A time of recognizing the appearance of new life, resurrection, magnolia blooms, and other flora and fauna popping forth from our warming soil. It is a time of hope. Michelle Obama once said: "History has shown us that courage can be contagious, and hope can take on a life of its own."

I hear a lot of negative talk lately. It seems many people are feeling hopeless about the many challenges that currently face our country and our world. Back Bay Mission continues to be hopeful and has been a source of encouragement and help for the poor and those experiencing homelessness for 100 years. Quite an accomplishment!

We continue to advocate for persons in the margins. Loaves and Fishes, a program that feeds those without shelter and those who are hungry, lost their space 13 months ago and has been sharing space with Back Bay Mission. Loaves and Fishes was given a building approximately five blocks from Back Bay Mission. A perfect location as many of our social service agencies are located within a five block area in East Biloxi. The neighborhood surrounding the new location expressed concern to the planning commission and was clear that "they did not want Loaves and Fishes in their back yard". I attended the Planning Commission Meeting in April advocating for Loaves and Fishes as a necessary support to those who were homeless. Loaves and Fishes not only provides hot, home cooked meals, for those who are without a home, but also for the housed so that the money they would spend on groceries can be used for utilities and rent. There was much neighborhood opposition, but those of us who spoke passionately were heard and the planning commission approved the location 7 votes to 4 votes.

We are also advocating on behalf of those who are poor and unsheltered by hosting a quarterly "Townhall on Homelessness" in Biloxi. The first townhall was held at the Micah Day Center and the second and third townhalls were held at Ground Zero Blue's Club which has become a strong partner of Back Bay Mission. It is exciting to see many of our community members coming together to air their grievances about the homeless and begin the process of understanding homelessness in a new way. Individual hearts and minds have been transformed as the participants can identify the barriers and challenges of getting off the streets for those who are unsheltered or living in poverty. We see a tangible shift in our community from animosity to advocacy.

The work of Back Bay Mission is to be a voice for the voiceless. May the words of the young Pakistani Climate Activist Malala Yousafzai inspire each one of us to realize that even one voice can be an instrument of change and transformation. "When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful." - Malala Yousafzai

My friends, use your voice as a tool to transform the hearts and minds of those around you. Always speak out of love and compassion. Courage and hope are contagious and can change our world one person at a time!

Executive Director

Pastor James Pennington

find us online

IN MEMORY OF
MARY SUE WILSON FAIRCHILD
WALKWAY

A beautiful brick walkway was started at Back Bay Mission with the first placed bricks to be in memory of Mary Sue Wilson Fairchild, past Back Bay Mission board member. The First Congregational Church of Houston worked with Back Bay Mission to find a way to honor Mary's generous spirit for helping others. The bricks are proudly displayed in a walkway starting in front of the Mission House and then will be expanded down the sidewalk. You can participate and support Back Bay Mission by buying a brick or two or three to honor someone, commemorate a mission trip, leave an inspiring note, and so on. Help us pave a way to a stronger future and provide opportunities for those we serve. Brick orders will be taken until Saturday, August 5,2023. To place a brick order please go to our dedicated webpage at www.bricksrus.com/donorsite/backbaymission.

Thank you again Mary Sue Wilson Fairchild for your generous spirit and dedication to supporting causes that improved the lives of others.

2023 DONATION TRIBUTES THROUGH APRIL 13, 2023

IN HONOR OF

Gulfport United Methodist Church
Bob and Barbara Peterson
Mary Ruth
Hank and Martha Seward
John and Pam Small
Sarah A. Winters

IN MEMORY OF

Nancy Swetman Breeland
Jimmy Cooper
Bob Digiacomo
Rev. D. Clifford Farmer
Fr. Bruce Farmer
Chris Farmer
Nadine Gantt
Kyle Higginbotham
David and Jeanette Knaup
Keith W. Lenhart
Dennis Murphy
James "Jimmy" Stablier

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INTERVIEW WITH GROUND ZERO BLUES CLUB

Back Bay Mission, We Support 100%

Recently our executive director, Rev. James Pennington, got to sit-down for a conversation with the co-owner, Lee Young, and the general manager, Daniel Givens, of Ground Zero Blues Club & Restaurant Biloxi which is located right down the street from Back Bay Mission in the heart of historic downtown Biloxi. Ground Zero Blues Club has developed into an amazing community partner for Back Bay Mission; including hosting multiple of our open-to-the-public "Townhalls on Homelessness" to even having Back Bay Mission be their nonprofit partner for their first ever "Oscars Party" which was a big hit! It was an engaging conversation that covered some of both men's journey to Biloxi, some backstory on Ground Zero and why partner with Back Bay Mission to help in the fight against homelessness.

Rev. James Pennington: *What kind of created the partnership with Back Bay Mission? How did that all happen? I kind of know the story but I'd like for you to explain.*

Lee: Young: *I actually have to give Daniel credit for that because as we were putting together... We've worked with charities, like the Carter Foundation. Starting out, we were trying to get our feet under us. You know, we were a year out of the box. Week to week was challenging, a different challenge (because) you've production staff, you've got restaurant and bar staff, (and) administrative to pull off this operation. So each week was a challenge but as we got a little bit better each week, and a little more knowledge, we started saying, "Ok, we can pull this off." Once we got our first few concerts out of the way, or "big shows" as we say. You know, we're like "We actually did it!" You know? It was pretty successful. Then we said, "Why don't we start doing work with charities?" And Daniel has helped spearhead that whole effort and it's been pretty successful so far.*

Rev. James Pennington: *Oh yeah. How did you kind of locate Back Bay? Or what was the catalyst?*

Daniel Givens: *Just seeing what was local, and the mission statement. And wanting to be apart of giving back to Biloxi. There are so many charities and there are so many wonderful organizations to work with, that we are working with, but Back Bay Mission, we support one hundred percent.*

Lee Young: *It's intriguing– Not just the wonderful work you guys do, it's (homelessness) is an intriguing issue to me. As you look for things to do and direct your energies, because no one, as I told you earlier, no city, no one government, no one person has been able to solve some of the issues that are here. When we first took over this building, it was obviously vacant. We had a lot of homeless people that had moved into downtown and the downtown area because they wouldn't be bothered. There was nobody to bother them. It sort of became "their place" and as businesses move in, you're having to relocate these homeless people. Then you feel bad on one had but then as a business owner you feel like, "Well the only way I can help you is to try to open a business and then I can start paying taxes and putting people to work in the community." So it's a very, very complex problem and we want to be part of the solution.*

Rev. James Pennington: *That's amazing. We were having some conversation before this (filming) and actually, beautiful thing is Ground Zero has hosted two of our Townhalls on Homelessness here to give people a voice in the community. And we're finding that people really want to move towards to (being) solution focused.*

To hear the entire conversation with Rev. James Pennington, Daniel Givens & Lee Young please check out the video on Back Bay Misson's Facebook, YouTube, or our official website: TheBackBayMission.org/Happening

Pictured: Left to Right: Daniel Givens, James Pennington, Lee Young

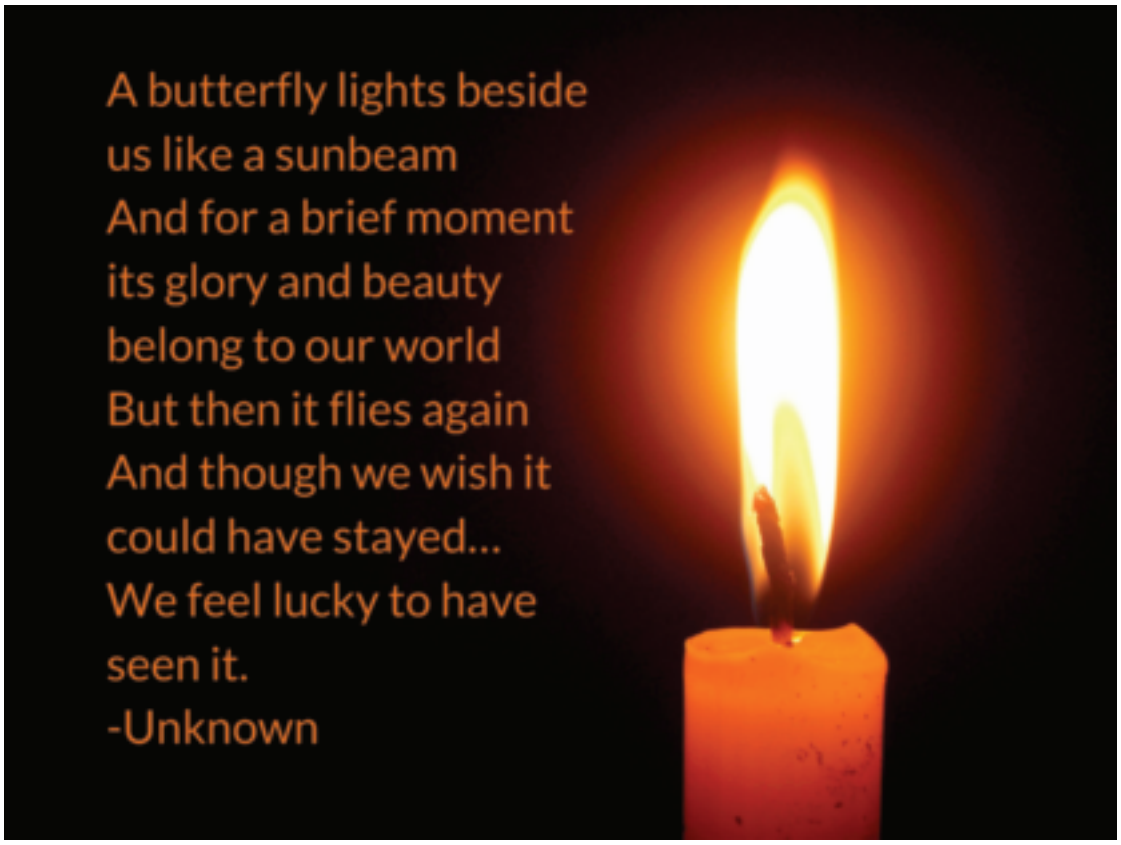
BACK BAY MISSION IS ONE OF HOPE, UNDERSTANDING, & COMMUNITY

By Elizabeth Sandoval, ESG Case Manager

It was stated that the people who lavish in homelessness tend to receive services from Back Bay Mission, because we may be creating an environment that is too comfortable for our unsheltered guests. Today, when we arrived at work, we found that one of our guests had passed away on the property. I challenge this statement. I refuse to accept or believe that it is possible that the 40-hour business week at Back Bay Mission can create a comfort level that allows our guests to decide to remain unsheltered.

Back Bay Mission offers our unsheltered guests a safe place to get their basic needs met while we work towards helping them gain stainability. We provide these services while treating each person who walks through our doors with dignity and respect. We offer a small speck of comfort to many people who walk the streets daily feeling dehumanized. Our guests live in the "tyranny of the moment" where all available time and resources are focused on survival (Ruby Payne, Bridges out of Poverty pg. 34). They often face challenges and have barriers that influence their ability to become/remain self-sufficient. Building relationships and showing empathy to our guests allows them to trust us with their pain, fears, and even their desires. Sometimes it takes a very long time to break though walls that have been put in place by our guests and while we wait for the day for this to happen, we share in their laughter, tears, and frustration. We call them our guests because all are welcome at Back Bay Mission.

Thinking back to the day we had a guest pass away on our property. I witnessed our staff and guests coming together once again to mourn the loss of our friend. Having conversations with guests about their battles and the reality of just how precious every moment truly is. Our friend made his way to Back Bay Mission and laid his head down on our back porch because he knew he was safe here and that we cared about him. The environment that we create at Back Bay Mission is one of hope, understanding, and community. A hope that we can provide some level of trust and confidence to our guests that they rarely receive from others. An understanding that everyone encounters hardships in life and help should be available for those in need from a community that offers support, comradery, and acceptance.



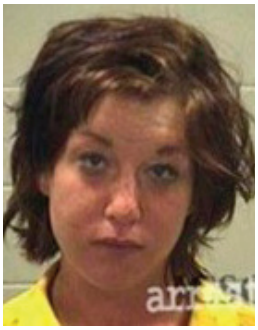
MY ADDICTION STORY

By Nicole, Former Micah Day Center Guest

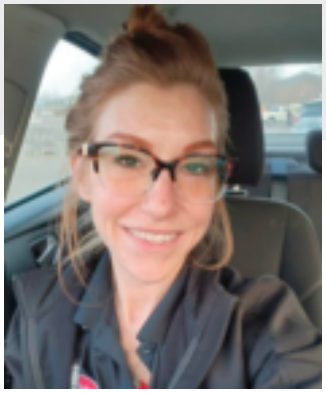
"Hail Mary, Full of Grace. The Lord is with Thee. Blessed art thou amongst women, and blessed is the fruit of the whom Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, Pray for us sinners now, and at the hour of our death. Amen."

These are the exact words I prayed every night. As soon as the sun went down, I prayed to God, "I hope to see another sunrise." This phrase hangs heavy in my memories as I look over my small little patio, sipping my coffee, watching the sunrise, knowing now, I'll never have to hope and pray again to see the sunrise in the horrific ways and the environment I was in.

My name is Nicole. And I am a recovering addict, 3 years sober, as well as was a homeless young woman on the streets of Biloxi from 2017 to 2020. My story is filled with absolute heartbreak, pain, loss, and fear. Lots and Lots of fear. You see, being a girl from the north in the land of side tricks and hustles, I stick out. As soon as I opened my mouth people knew I wasn't from there. So how did I end up homeless and addicted living in Biloxi? I need to take you back a little bit. I reconnected with my birth father after 20 years. I decided to make the life-changing decision to uproot everything I knew back in 2017 and move from Minnesota down to Mississippi to live with my dad and get to know the man I always wanted to know. Unfortunately, this is not a happy ending. I had no idea how bad addiction was involved in a part of my family. My dad was an alcoholic and the house I moved into was filled with people addicted to heroin and meth and other substances. I had no idea that this was going on until I moved into that house and by that time it was too late to go back as I had sold everything I had and left with hardly any money in hopes of starting this new life with my birth dad. I lived there for the best of a year and over the course of that year so many things happened. I called that house the little house of horrors as I experienced things on such a dark and evil, supernatural level, it was as though the lair of Satan himself resided in that house on Sunnyside. And while in this house my dad ended up going to the VA on suicide watch for months, and I was left alone. Sad, scared, confused, and wondering what I did so wrong my dad wanted to kill himself. I too ended up using heroin and meth while living in that house. I was sad. I had nowhere to go. And eventually, this led me to be kicked out of my grandpa's house eventually (perhaps a blessing in some way) but homeless on the streets in Biloxi Mississippi. I remember the first time arriving at Back Bay Mission. I had nowhere to go. I didn't know where to go as I was from Minnesota, and I didn't know the way of life down south. I remember like it was yesterday showing up at the mission just sobbing and scared. The Back Bay Mission saved my life. For years after, I was a regular that came to the Back Bay Mission for all their support. While on the streets, I was horribly addicted. Living under the bridge, in a very abusive relationship, and surrounded by some of the evilest people you can ever imagine. Horrible. Unspeakable things happened to me over the course of those few years on the streets. I was very vulnerable and there are not too many women on the streets, so I was objectified by many. I don't think I've been through anything as hard as homelessness. I lived under a bridge in a tent. Showered once a day…maybe. Ate maybe one meal a day. Maybe. Usually, I was too high to eat. And well by the end of my spree, I was an exhausted, bone-skinny girl. Mrs. Sarah Smith did her absolute best to try to get me the help I needed for years. That is more than a remarkable woman. She was my guardian angel. So anyways, as you can imagine, life on the streets isn't for the weak, and most don't make it out alive. I have been everything from beat up, to raped, to honestly anything you can think of. And yes I know it's horrible, but it's true. I didn't say this story was going to be easy to read. There were many nights I had nowhere to go. I was scared to walk the dark streets in case of being kidnapped or worse, so I would take my little bag of clothes that I had and curl up under the back porch of the Back Bay Mission. And I would sleep under the porch lights until the sun started coming up because that is where I knew I was safe. And I'm sorry if that wasn't allowed but like I said, this mission saved my life literally in the darkest of nights.



I was scared to get help. I was scared to face the pain in my life. And by now it's 2019, and I had lost everything. I was a frequent visitor to the jail systems. Constantly finding myself in and out of jail. In a severely abusive relationship physically and mentally, and addicted now to anything, and doing more heroin and fentanyl was becoming more and more common around that time. Now not I stopped caring if or what I do if I don't have to feel, and I didn't care if it killed me. Well. It did. And when I say there is a God. and when I took that fatal shot, I came to, to what appeared to me standing before the sun.



The most beautiful light emits from it. And only the sun wasn't hot. But I was a minuscule size compared to it. And I see flashes of images, like a slideshow, flashing images so fast I couldn't make out what they were. Only I knew. I knew I was looking at a flash of my life to this point. I knew I was here at the end. I had died. The only thing is it wasn't the end. Because I came back into my body dazed and confused. That day I went into rehab. That day I came back to life I gave my life and my will to God. That day I wanted to live. So my case worker Mrs. Black sat on the phone with me for what seemed like hours and I found a rehab that would take me asap. One in Louisiana. Now at this point, I was known for running. I would always get to the point of going to rehab in the past but at the last minute, I would not go. So, they said they could take me as soon as the next day. Mrs. Black bought a bus ticket and said just be on that bus tomorrow. And that was a huge request considering I ran every opportunity before this. I never looked back. Today I am 3 years sober, happily married to a man that loves me so incredibly much. I reconnected with my adopted family when I went to rehab and after living in a sober living for a year, I moved back home to them after almost a decade of being away. I am a shift manager at a grocery store and have achieved several management certificates within the past year! Life is beautiful but none of it would be possible without God. and I have been given a second chance to do things right. Do I deserve it? No, but by God's grace and mercy and his ultimate sacrifice does he think I deserve it? I want to thank Back Bay Mission as well as Seashore Mission and Loaves and Fishes for providing food, shelter, clothes, and safety to all of those afflicted with homelessness and addiction. For your heart and lack of judgment and your ability to see those afflicted as human beings. Thank you for seeing us. Thank you for seeing me. Thank you to my husband, family, and God without them I would not be where I am today. Thank you to Back Bay for seeing me, for never giving up, and for always believing in me.

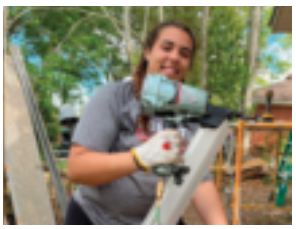
ENRICHING EXPERIENCE

By Jaye Herrick, BBM Long-term Volunteer

In March, Back Bay Mission hosted some college groups who came during their spring break. I had the great joy to be volunteering at the construction site during this time. My favorite experience was when we had a group from Olivet College at the same time as two groups of older volunteers from Wisconsin. I was aware that there was some concern about how these divergent groups would do working together. We were replacing rotten support beams, putting up osb (plywood) on the sides of the house, adding studs where they were too sparse, and generally getting ready to put new siding on the house. This was work that required a certain amount of skill. The older groups were highly skilled. The college students were unskilled.

During the week I watched as older adults and younger adults paired off and worked together. The older adults were teaching the younger adults. It was such a beautiful exchange of wisdom and experience. One young man referred to the older man he was working with as his manager. The older man referred to himself as a mentor. There was a whole lot of mentoring going on. The college students learned how to measure, mark, and cut wood. They learned how to use the circular saw, how to snap a chalk line, how to jack up a house, and how to use a nail gun. The older adults learned how to slow down enough to teach others a new skill. They learned how to be flexible. And they learned how to let the younger adults take the lead. By mid-week the groups were well and truly intertwined.

I had two young women helping me in the tool trailer. They called me "tool mama". I taught one of them how to repair an air hose. She did one on her own and had a great sense of pride and accomplishment. My takeaway from that week was that inter-generational work camp experiences can be a blessed and enriching experience for all involved. We have a lot to learn from each other.



STRENGTHENING NEIGHBORHOODS, SEEKING JUSTICE, TRANSFORMING LIVES

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strengthening neighborhoods, seeking justice, transforming lives
100 YEARS — SINCE 1922

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