

# STREETzine



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**STREETzine** is a program of The Stewpot and a member of **International Network of Street Papers**

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## Combating Hunger and a Lack of Access to Food

By Bill McKenzie

The return of the annual Soup's On luncheon represents a triumph of sorts. Twenty-five months after the Covid-19 pandemic struck the world, supporters of The Stewpot are gathering together again on April 12 to break bread. Naturally, we all wish the ability to gather together continues across the nation.

Over the last two years, the pandemic has highlighted the conditions under which some Dallas County residents live. The lack of access to quality food, a theme in this year's luncheon, remains a daily challenge within Dallas and North Texas.

According to data presented by Healthy North Texas, a project of the Dallas-Fort Worth Health Council, 99.6 percent of residents in the 75237 zip code near Red Bird Mall qualify as the most food insecure community in Dallas — and all of North Texas. (The Conduent Healthy Communities Institute compiled the information for its 2021 Food Insecurity Index.)

Nationally, Feeding America reports, 38 million Americans were considered food insecure in 2019. Disturbingly, 12 million of those Americans were children. According to Feeding America, they lacked consistent access to foods that would allow them to live a healthy, active life.

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Those who suffer from a lack of consistent

access to foods are likely to face a number of effects. They may experience serious health problems. The adults may face the Hobbesian Choice of deciding between paying for rent or food, transportation or food, or health care or food. And the children lacking regular access to food may experience a diminished ability to learn and/or grow.

A serious problem in Dallas County is just the simple lack of access to grocery stores. "Food deserts," as they are known, are a

target of Dallas Mayor Eric Johnson, who has pushed for grocery stores to operate in food deserts. Early in his administration, he said that "Access to healthy food options should be available to all Dallas residents, regardless of their zip codes."

One encouraging sign is the purchase by H-E-B of an abandoned grocery store not far from Red Bird Mall, near the 75237 zip code. No facility has been built, but the site is near where major retail and commercial development is planned.

Also, the Dallas Morning News reported earlier this year how the Southpoint Community Market, a small food store in South Dallas, is making a small profit and attempting to lower the cost of produce. Launched by Cornerstone Baptist Church with support from The Real Estate Council, the store serves a neighborhood in need of healthy, accessible food.

### What more to do?

There are many national policies for lawmakers to debate, such as strategies to elevate Americans above the poverty line and determining eligibility requirements for initiatives like the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

Locally, though, organizations and individuals across the country step into the breach each day. In Dallas, The Bridge Homeless Recovery Center, The Stewpot, and the North Texas Food Bank are among the organizations providing daily meals and/or regular distribution of food to families and individuals.

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Since 2008, The Stewpot has contracted with The Bridge, the city of Dallas' homeless shelter, to provide food seven days a week. 365 days a year to clients experiencing homelessness. Thanks to devoted Stewpot employees and a vast network of volunteers across Dallas County, The Stewpot provided 165,626 meals in 2021.

The organization's feeding services includes a twice-monthly distribution of canned goods, pre-made meals, and other grocery items to families with a residence. In 2021, The Stewpot served 1,868 families through this initiative.

Thanks to hotels and restaurants across Dallas, The Stewpot also operates a robust food recovery program. In 2021, businesses donated 713,806 pounds of unused food. Rob Guild and The Stewpot food recovery team coordinate the pickup of the food each day. The donations supplement the feeding operations at The Bridge and food distribution efforts.

The Stewpot community garden across the street from The Stewpot offices offers another

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# STREETZine

**STREETZine** is a program of  
The Stewpot.



The **STREETZine** is a monthly newspaper published by The Stewpot, a ministry of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas. The Stewpot provides services and resources for people experiencing homelessness or who are at risk of being homeless. The organization also offers opportunities for a new life.

As part of this ministry, the **STREETZine** seeks to raise awareness about the issues surrounding homelessness and poverty. The monthly publication also offers financial opportunity for Stewpot clients who sell the paper to Dallas residents. Vendors are able to move towards economic self-sufficiency by using the money they receive from selling copies to purchase bus passes, food, and necessary living expenses. Clients also receive stipends for contributing articles to **STREETZine**.

The content in **STREETZine** does not necessarily reflect the views or endorsement of its publisher, editors, contributors, sponsors or advertisers. To learn more about this publication, contact Betty Heckman, Director of Enrichment, 1835 Young Street, Dallas, Texas 75201 or [BettyH@thestewpot.org](mailto:BettyH@thestewpot.org). To read more about **STREETZine**, a member of the International Network of Street Papers, go to [www.thestewpot.org/streetzine](http://www.thestewpot.org/streetzine).

**STREETZine** is published by The Stewpot of First Presbyterian Church.

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## The Pastor's Letter: Bread and Restless Souls

By **The Rev. Amos Disasa**

*Editor's Note: The essay below is taken from a sermon Rev. Disasa gave to a Thanksgiving inter-faith service in 2021.*

I've been thinking a lot about bread lately. And what bread has to do with restless souls. Until I moved to Dallas a couple years ago, I lived about an hour from my parents. Each time I went home to see them, my mother offered me a piece of her homemade bread.

Two things to know about Ethiopians are: 1.) Our bread is the best in the world, and 2.) In our homes it is always available. Without exception, bread is eaten with every meal. So, what does homemade bread have to do with restless souls?

I think it was somewhere around the age of 12 that my soul began to get restless. Around that age, I began wondering if my backpack was the right color and if my shorts were in style. At about the same time, I also started trying to ditch my parents in public.

I don't know about your parents, but mine were amazingly gifted in the fine art of embarrassing their children. My father was especially talented in this respect. Between the ages of 12 and 21, I was convinced that he initiated an evil scheme to ruin my precious life.

This scheme was especially evident when he went to watch my soccer games. There, he would pull up his cotton tube socks as high as they would allow. He also wore a fern green corduroy ball cap, that he claimed kept his head warm but looked like it was big enough to hide our lunch in when he carefully perched it high on his head.

My three brothers and I are convinced the hat was custom made because we've looked for plain green corduroy ball caps in stores across the country for many years without any success.

Often, he would wear a short sleeve dress shirt with his soccer outfit and like the true professor he was, he man-

aged to squeeze two pens, a pencil, a wired notepad and one handkerchief in his chest pocket. At these same soccer games, he would yell in our native tongue across the field with a thick East African accent and utter things completely unintelligible to everyone except me.

As if he needed to draw any more attention to himself and by association me, he did this while running non-stop around the field for the duration of the game. Years later, I would meet people who I played against, who can't remember my name or whether I had any skills, but who can recall that I was the son of the crazy Ethiopian runner dad. After most games, I would beg him to just meet me in the car.

It's funny how we fool ourselves into believing that there is something else out there that is better than what we have at home.

I remember a time not too long ago when I stopped at my parents' house in Laurens County, South Carolina, on my way home from a work trip. My father was coming in from a run and his socks were a little shorter but still pulled up. As I walked to the den, I passed the hat rack and perched on top was the green corduroy hat.

As I passed through the kitchen, my mother asked if I wanted to eat some homemade bread and drink some hot tea or coffee. We spent the next hour talking about work and what was happening with my friends. Even as we were talking, I was struck by the freedom I found at home. I shared my anxieties without inhibition or any worry that they would think I was somehow weak. I shared my joys without feeling like I needed to emphasize my role in the success. I shared my love without any fear that they might not love me back. All the while we ate bread.

The gospels include repeated instructions from Jesus to pay attention during bread breaking occasions. For around those tables we are reminded of God's faithfulness — that God is in the bread. God is in the bread; not concealed behind doors guarded by extra-educated priests, or inscrutable traditions, or the mysteries of meritocracy, or the

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## A Letter from the Executive Director: The Stewpot Alliance's Impact

By **Brenda Snitzer**

Members of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas and Stewpot volunteers started The Stewpot Alliance in 2007 to support and promote The Stewpot and to serve as a resource for volunteer events and development opportunities. Membership in the Alliance provides opportunities for individuals to connect with and contribute to The Stewpot in ways that impact the lives of people experiencing homelessness.

Each year, The Alliance's board of directors and members host Soup's On, a fundraising event that The Alliance started on its own. Throughout the year, The Stewpot Alliance also hosts events for Stewpot clients, such as the Women's Tea, The Stewpot Talent Show, and a reception for The Stewpot Art Show at the Dallas Public Library.

Soup's On helps The Stewpot's work in two ways: 1) The luncheon gets the message out about our programs and services and how the public can support The Stewpot; and 2) Soup's On raises important funds for us to continue serving those most vulnerable in our community. Since 2008, Soup's On and The Alliance have raised over **\$3.5 million** for our programs.

Over the last 14 years, celebrity chef Brian C. Luscher has led the luncheon. The former owner/chef of The Grape, Luscher is now Director of Culinary Operations for 33 Restaurant Group. In that role, he oversees, assists, and further develops all aspects of culinary operations for current restaurants and the future growth of the restaurant group.

Soup's On has **12** different celebrity chefs that Brian invites from around the metroplex. Along with Brian, they create their signature soups for the guests, while our host hotel provides a fabulous meal. This year's host is The Anatole.

The emotionally moving events feature inspirational speakers who share their personal stories. Their journeys often relate closely to some of the stories of Stewpot clients. Previous speakers include Chef Jose Andres of World Central Kitchen; Judge Craig Mitchell, founder of Skid Row Running Club in Los Angeles; and author and speaker Regina Calcaterra.

This year's featured speaker is Instagram and You Tube fitness guru Kevin Curry. He has his own unique story about the importance of good food and nutrition -- no matter your income. Stewpot clients certainly know this challenge. They deal with food scarcity and food insecurity each day. Articles in this STREETZine edition, including Kevin's interview, point to the importance of nutritious food for one's mental and physical health.

This year, Soup's On will spotlight The Stewpot's new housing program and the impact it has made on several clients' lives. That includes the effect our Rapid Rehousing Program has had on clients' physical and mental health. Our Homelessness Prevention-Rent & Utilities Program also has been critical during the pandemic to keep individuals

We are grateful to the more than 500 people supporting us through this year's event. Sisters Thella Bowens and Carolyn Jefferson, who are First Presbyterian Church members, are our chairs. And the honorary chairs are Venise and Larry Stuart. Jenny Anchondo of CW-33, an Emmy Award-winning news anchor, will host the event for the second straight year.

The special day is always punctuated with an art show that presents work by Stewpot artists as well as specially designed soup bowls that feature the work of Stewpot artists. Each guest receives a bowl, while sponsors take home one-of-a-kind soup spoons that internationally known sculptors Brad and Christy Oldham have designed.

Soup's On 2022 will be another event to remember!

**Brenda Snitzer is the executive director of The Stewpot.**



**Left to Right; Carolyn Jefferson, Brenda Snitzer, Thella Bowens, and Amos Disasa. Photo courtesy of John Strange.**



## Writer’s Workshop Essays

*Editor’s Note: The Stewpot launched a Writer’s Workshop in January. Vivienne Johnson, QtheGreo, and Gershon Trunnell wrote these pieces for the Workshop, which meets each Friday at 10 a.m. at The Stewpot.*

### **Art’s Impact on My Life** *By Gershon Trunnell*

Art has always had a positive impact on my life.

I first started doing creative writing. I wrote poems, plays, and short scripts. I always loved music, so I started writing lyrics to songs. In junior high, I learned how to play and write sheet music.

Later, I gravitated toward making my own clothes and cutting my own hair. And in high school, I did a Dorito’s TV commercial at North Dallas High School and took classes in Radio and TV as well as journalism. My English teacher and my Radio and TV teachers encouraged me to practice developing my writing skills, so I stuck with them.

I always liked drawing and painting, too. I practiced by painting houses and buildings. I even painted my clothes. As I did, friends asked me to paint their clothes — and I got paid for doing so! And I learned from my family how to make clothes since they were into sewing.

When I went to state jail, I was the barber and used my art and writing skills to occupy my time. I still practice all these skills and have added canvas painting and jewelry making to my arsenal.

This keeps me occupied doing good things and provides different ways to express myself and help others.

***Gershon Trunnell is a Stewpot client and artist.***

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### **QtheGreo**

From bEast Texas to the wastelands of South Oak Cliff. This is a snippet into a song that sounds like glass hitting the ground. My name is Q or “QtheGreo” and the last five to six years have been a crucible of a biblical caliber. I lived in a 13-footstep long Motel 6 room throughout high school up until I left for college and came back.

Living in that room was nasty, depressing, and soul draining. That box gave me scars that have tattooed my spirit, but who’s to say tattoos can’t be beautiful. Before they become artwork of ink on my temple, my temple was burning down like the Book of Revelation was my bedtime story.

As a teenager becoming a young man there is no word in any language to describe how broken you feel seeing your mother cry. The image of her laying over the bed crying out to God or anybody that will listen help me understand why hearts turn cold, and men with nothing want the world in their palms. Between her tears she said, “Why is this so hard?” Hearing that come from a woman who you grew up believing could move mountains and swallow the sun whole does something to your spirit. It plucks the last petal from an adolescent flower and turns to fangs on a wolf.

In that 13-footstep long box, it was me, my mother, and my sister. I was the only man around and I felt like a boy because I couldn’t help make ends meet because my mother wanted me to focus on school. She said, “It is not your job to take care of me but for me to take care of you.” She wanted me to go to school so I would not end up in a box like this ever again.

The three of us in that box reminded me of the story in the Bible about that story of the three men who were thrown into the fiery furnace because they would not bow to the king, only to God. My Sunday school teacher said they walked through the fiery furnace cool as ice cubes from heaven because Jesus walked with them, and they got out the furnace unburnt. My sister, mother, and I were in the furnace for five years and it felt like he was not even on the outside looking in regulating the temperature. We just burned.

Though we have since gotten out of the furnace, our path is still one of hot coals. That part of the song is for another day. Even to say this is a snippet of my life is like saying a spoonful of water is the ocean. But hear me now: This song of shattered glass will be pieced back together in a cracked but beautiful vase that will house a bouquet of mud roses that is me.

***QtheGreo is a participant in The Stewpot’s Writer’s Workshop.***

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## Soup’s On 2020 Lookback



***Photo courtesy of Timothy Smith.***

prerogatives of colonialist empires that sent my family away from our home thirty-nine years ago.

***The gospels include repeated instructions from Jesus to pay attention during bread breaking occasions. For around those tables we are reminded of God’s faithfulness — that God is in the bread.***

The broken bread belongs to no one. I think it is telling that Jesus chose the most common and consistent part of every meal to reveal his identity.

My father wrote me once to reflect on the significance of bread in our culture. He said, “Because of its compact texture and its natural contents, bread fills the stomach more than any other food and stays longer in the system. Bread is meant to be shared, while still retaining its identity with the parent bread from which it was broken. It is carried for long-distance traveling. It lasts longer than any type of food without getting spoiled. Bread is a respectable gift to neighbors and friends. But it should be unbroken, whole bread, yet to be broken and divided up among the family to whom it is given.

“When the bread is unwrapped and placed on a round basket, it is ready for the blessing of the eldest in the family. When it is blessed and thanksgiving is offered, the bread is then cut into smaller portions to be divided among members of the family, or among those present. The significance of this lies in the fact that we all eat from the same one bread and thus we express our oneness and our commitment to one another; betrayal is discouraged through this sharing of the same bread.”

It was Augustine who said our souls are restless until they find their rest in God. Restless soul, what are you chasing after?

***The Rev. Amos Disasa is the senior pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas.***



***Left to Right; Thella Bowens, Chef Brian Luscher, Carolyn Jerrerson. Photo courtesy of John Strange.***



# When Money Gets Tight, Families Get Hungry

By Poppy Sundeen

A good job is no guarantee against hunger. Noemi Alvarado can attest to that. Her husband, Javier, is a hard-working firefighter and paramedic. But with seven children, even the most careful budgeting couldn't keep the cupboards well stocked.

When she ran out of staples, Noemi would get creative. "I'd do things like making pancakes for dinner and tell the kids we were eating like kings and queens." Her creativity made make-do meals special and kept the children from feeling deprived. "I didn't want them to feel insecure or worry about grownup things."

As things got tighter at home, the couple considered their options. Javier was already working a full schedule. Over-time would mean Noemi and the kids would hardly ever see him. Noemi also had a fulltime job as mother, with four of the children still under age 10. "My husband and I knew we'd have to sacrifice, but the kids were our priority. It's important for me to be there for them."

## A middle-class dilemma

With their budget already trimmed to the bone, they decided to apply for a government aid program. The effort proved fruitless when they learned that the family didn't qualify.

Javier's income was too high, but not high enough to make ends meet for a family of nine. "What you see on paper is all they see," says Noemi, and the paperwork just didn't tell the family's whole story.

"With things getting tighter and tighter at home, you wonder how you're going to make it. You can tell that you're struggling to buy milk, eggs, the basics."

## Advice from a friend puts food on the table

Noemi and Javier were both feeling the stress when a friend came up with a helpful suggestion. "She told me to

call The Stewpot and make an appointment. We filled out the paperwork, and they said they were more than happy to help."

Soon the family was making regular trips to pick up food on distribution days. "The volunteers at The Stewpot fill up the van with all kinds of foods — proteins, dairy products. Sometimes, there are treats for the kids."

The children like to go along, excited to see what's in the bags. Noemi, who loves to cook, shares in the excitement and draws inspiration from the ingredients. "I can make so much with this for my family. Like, oh there's chicken? I have recipes for that."

Among the family favorites is pasta with drumsticks. "I use cherry tomatoes and garlic to make a sauce." She entices the kids to eat their vegetables by adding cheese to broccoli and baking zucchini with bread crumbs for crunch. "There's always an opportunity to try something different."

## Baking, a family activity

Now that there's a steady supply of flour in the pantry, the Alvarado children share in Noemi's love of baking. They started with classic chocolate chip cookies and branched out to more ambitious fare. "My son Javier has mastered the art of the snickerdoodle," laughs Noemi. Eighteen-year-old Francesca has developed her own signature heart-shaped concha (Mexican sweet bread).

During the pandemic, when people didn't want to go out to eat or shop, the kids sold their home-baked goodies to friends in the neighborhood and at church.

## The difference between wants and needs

Noemi grew up in Oak Cliff, not far from the house where she lives today. With just one sister, her parents didn't have as many mouths to feed. "We didn't worry about food. Every Friday night, we'd eat out someplace nice."

The Alvarados opt for homemade meals instead. "I didn't appreciate the things we had as a child. I think our kids appreciate food more than I did."

When the bags they pick up at The Stewpot include the children's favorite cookies or cereal, she tells them, "Look how much God loves you!"

That's how Noemi sees the food her family receives: as a gift from God. When she and Javier first discussed signing up for The Stewpot's food program, he was hesitant. She eased his concerns by telling him this: "God wouldn't have opened the door for us if we weren't supposed to go through. It's a green light. It's okay to ask for help."

**Poppy Sundeen, a Dallas writer, is a member of the STREETZine editorial board.**

*Photo courtesy of Noemi Alvarado.*



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way for clients to meet their needs. They can grow vegetables there, while benefiting from the restorative power of working in a garden.

The Stewpot is hardly the only organization addressing these realities. Organizations like Catholic Charities of Dallas similarly distribute food weekly to families in need. During a one-day event after the 2021 ice storm devastated North Texas, the nonprofit provided food to 1,000 families.

In Pleasant Grove, the Inspired Vision Compassion Center receives donations for its food bank, which neighbors access for foods they may otherwise lack. The needs particularly have been acute during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, for example, the operation served 427,000 families.

In South Dallas, Bonton Farms has become noted for providing healthy foods through its urban farming operation. Residents in the surrounding community grow produce they otherwise might not find in their food desert. At the same time, community residents can purchase organic products in Bonton Farm's market.

Beyond these and numerous other local organizations, individuals are stepping into the breach, too. This year's Soup's On! keynote speaker, Kevin Curry, founded Fitmen Cook after experiencing a bout with depression and his own unhealthy eating habits.

Today, the organization he leads offers inexpensive, healthy recipes for families and individuals alike to use. His motto is: "Our bodies are built in the kitchen, sculpted in the gym."

***His motto is: "Our bodies are built in the kitchen, sculpted in the gym."***

Organizations and individuals alone cannot solve the problem of hunger in America in general and Dallas in particular. But they are instrumental in combating its causes and impact — one person at a time.

***Bill McKenzie is a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Dallas and the STREETZine Editorial Advisory Board.***

## What to Know about Food Security and Insecurity

Food availability: sufficient quantity on a consistent basis

Food access: sufficient resources for a nutritious diet

Food use: appropriate use to sustain nutrition and care (includes access to fresh water and sanitary conditions)

*Source: Green Dallas, City of Dallas*

Facts about food insecurity:

Food insecurity is defined as a lack of consistent access to enough food for every person in a household to live an active, healthy life.

*Source: Feeding America*

99.6 percent of residents in the 75237 zip code near Red Bird Mall in the city of Dallas qualify as food insecure.

The neighborhood is the most at-risk of any in Dallas — and North Texas — for lack of access to food.

*Source: Healthy North Texas, 2021 Food Insecurity Index  
Data compiled by Conduent Healthy Communities Institute*

More than 38 million Americans qualify as food insecure. Twelve million of those Americans are children.

10.5 percent (13.8 million) of U.S. households were food insecure at some time during 2020.

*Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture*

Effects of food insecurity include: Serious health complications. Damage to a child's ability to learn and grow. Difficult decisions such as choosing between paying for food and heat, electricity, rent, and transportation.

*Source: Feeding America*

In 2019, 50 percent of Americans who qualify as food insecure were eligible for the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP).

That meant they lived within 130 percent of the poverty threshold, which the federal government defines as \$26,500 a year for a family of four or \$12,880 for an individual.

Nineteen percent of Americans who qualified as food insecure that year lived between 130-185 percent of the poverty threshold, or between \$34,450 and \$49,025 a year in income for a family of four. For individuals, that would translate into between \$16,744 to \$23,826 a year in income.

Thirty-one percent lived above 185 percent of poverty, which made them ineligible for SNAP benefits. For a family of four, that means earning 49,025 a year or more. For individuals, that means earning \$23,826 a year or more.

*Source: Feeding America*



## Eating Healthy Doesn't Require a Big Budget

*Kevin Curry is the founder of Fit Men Cook, an organization devoted to creating a community that emphasizes meals that are affordable as well as nutritious. The Dallas resident began Fit Men Cook after discovering how healthy foods helped him come out of a period of depression. The University of Texas at Austin graduate, who also holds a graduate degree from Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government, drew upon his background working for Dell as a social media manager to expand Fit Men Cook through online platforms. The author of Fit Men Cook: 100+ Meal Prep Recipes for Men and Women—Always #HealthyAF, Never Boring, he has appeared on television programs such as Today and Live! With Kelly and Ryan and has been profiled in Men's Health and Forbes, among other places..*

*Curry is the keynote speaker at the 2022 Soup's On Luncheon, which benefits The Stewpot's work serving people experiencing homelessness. He spoke with STREETZine in March about weaving healthy eating into our daily lives. His motto is: "Our bodies are built in the kitchen, sculpted in the gym."*

### How can people use recipes in their kitchens, particularly people who might be food insecure?

They can use my recipes and others that are heart-healthier to get more organized. The benefit of what I try to put together is that I am not an absolutist when it comes to food. Food should be enjoyed. You shouldn't have to have all the organic groceries or the most expensive ingredients to make a meal that is nutritious. People can get ideas following my recipes about how to prepare foods in a much more calorie-conscious way. We want them to be nutrient-dense, but they don't have to be calorie-dense.

We can ramp up calories through the fats we put in there, whether those are the meats or oils or things that we traditionally use to make things taste good, like cheese. Instead, you can add a bit of spice to a dish, like a leftover pizza packet of seasoning. Put those on some vegetables and roast them.

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It's the small things that make a difference. My recipes give people ideas.

### Why were you compelled during last year's ice storm to get involved with people experiencing homelessness, including here at The Stewpot?

It was personal for me. I could only get electric power at my studio, so I could go there. I recognized my privilege of being able to get in my car and drive to a place where I could get some comfort. When I was driving there, I saw mounds of blankets with snow piled on top of them. When I saw one move, I realized they were people out there.

It hit me that I am driving to my own spot but they have no place to go. So when I was researching places where I could help, including using my platform, I saw that Stewpot was in the mix — and in walking distance of my condo.

### What would you say to people living in poverty or near poverty about why it's important to weaving healthy foods into their diets?

Whenever we eat better, we feel better. Life comes with a lot of stressors, even more so when you don't have a lot of resources around you, whether economic or otherwise. When we feel better, we make better decisions.

*Whenever we eat better, we feel better. Life comes with a lot of stressors, even more so when you don't have a lot of resources around you, whether economic or otherwise. When we feel better, we make better decisions.*

If you are not feeling at your best, you can medicate with foods, thinking that will help. But that comfort doesn't last too long. You start feeling lethargic.

Serotonin makes us feel good, and the highest concentration of serotonin is in our gut. It's important that what we put in our bodies makes us feel good. That way, we feel energized to go to work and keep on fighting every day.

I say that from a place of privilege but also from a place of experience. My origin story is one where I was severely depressed and medicating myself through food. I was on food stamps at that time. It wasn't until I chose better foods that I felt better and became more energized. I look back and see my life started to change with what I was putting into my body.

### Some people live in "food deserts," where they lack access to healthy foods. What would you say to them about accessing healthy foods?

Food scarcity is a huge issue, period. But when people do make it to areas with better grocery stores, I would say stock up on foods that will help you out and don't require you to go back-and-forth to the grocery store.

A lot of people say frozen meals or canned goods can't be good for you. But they can be. I look for ones that are low in sodium. And I love getting frozen ingredients, even grains and rice. They don't have a time-stamp on them like fresh foods, which may become a science experiment in your refrigerator if you don't eat them quickly. If you want to pay a little extra premium, you can get the frozen foods that are seasoned.

Another tip I discovered when I lived on a tight budget was to go to the grocery store during the middle of the week. Stores usually restock at the first of the week. Later in the week, items that are more expensive, like seafoods, go on sale. You can buy them on sale. I would go home and immediately freeze them.

### Thinking about your use of social media, how do you build a sense of community around healthy foods?

Not being prescriptive. A lot of people get caught up guaranteeing results. I just share my own journey of discovery about healthy foods. People can see themselves in you. They can see the exploration, the curiosity. They may say, "I will try this, but do it a bit differently." People want ideas. Yes, some want meal plans. That's fine, but people eventually have to learn how to eat for themselves and what works for them.

I use social media to be more inclusive. I try all sorts of foods and diets so I can understand them. I rarely label foods good or bad. I don't want to typecast food that people may not be able to afford.

A single mother working two jobs doesn't have a lot of time to cook. She may be able to only get a McDonald's Happy Meal for her kids. And you have a person with copious amounts of money making fancy meals. Who am I to say one is nutritious and the other is not? It's a value judgment. Hers came from a lack of money and time but she is giving her children nourishment to go one more day. I can't call that meal non-nutritious.

Of course, some foods aren't the best for your health. But, at the end of the day, people are trying to do all they can



*Photo courtesy of Fit Man Cook.*



# Stewpot Artists



Cornelious Brackens, Jr.



Teresa Zacarias



Fernando Segovia



Flying B



## Writer's Workshop Essays

*Editor's Note: The Stewpot launched a Writer's Workshop in January. Vivienne Johnson, QtheGreo, and Gershon Trunnell wrote these pieces for the Workshop, which meets each Friday at 10 a.m. at The Stewpot.*

### Vivienne Johnson

I was born 50 years ago and raised in Garland, Texas, in a two-parent household by my father, Johnny Johnson, and my mother, Iva Johnson. I am the oldest of four kids.

After graduating from Garland High School, I got married and gave birth to four children. I have 10 grandkids that call me "G.G." I adore them and am so grateful to have my life.

My father worked at Dallas County for [Commissioner] John Wiley Price for 31 years. My mother worked as a school teacher and in the nursing field. I too started my career in the nursing field but later worked at Verizon. I am now retired.

In 2008, my first husband and I divorced. I remarried in 2017 after I got out of prison for the second time.

I had started drinking and clubbing when I turned 32 after a traumatic event in my life. I was introduced to crack cocaine and my life started going downhill after a fight with my father. I went back and forth between jail, prison, and a mental health hospital.

In January of this year, on my youngest daughter's birthday, I desired to get clean and sober in order to get my life on track. I reached out to Adapt Mobil to come pick me up from a Taco Bell so I could get assistance. I was feeling hopeless and suicidal due to being homeless.

A few days later, I checked myself into Nexus Recovery Center, where I turned my life and will over to God to conquer this alcohol and drug addiction. Now, I am living my life, staying humble and grateful in my second-by-second journey in recovery. I feel wholesome from the inside out, healed, restored, and delivered by my Father God. I am in a sober-living house with five other ladies who also are in recovery.

Now, I am starting my life over and feel in love with myself and each day am trying to become a better woman of God than I was the day before. I never would have made it if it wasn't for God. I would have lost my mind, body, soul, and spirit to drugs and alcohol and being homeless and raped. I was selling my body for drugs and alcohol.

If I can make it, anyone can make it if they surrender to a power greater than themselves. I pray every day to God to not give me strength, but how to use my own strength.

I share this part of my life to give courage to someone else out there who suffers from addiction and mental health challenges. Give yourself the chance!

*Vivienne Johnson is a participant in The Stewpot's Writer's Workshop.*

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Learn about more ways to connect at [fpcdallas.org/starthere](http://fpcdallas.org/starthere).



# Street Newspapers - A Voice for the Homeless & Impoverished

## What is **STREETZine**?

**STREETZine** is a nonprofit newspaper published by The Stewpot of First Presbyterian Church for the benefit of people living in poverty. It includes news, particularly about issues important to those experiencing homelessness. **STREETZine** creates direct economic opportunity. Vendors receive papers to be distributed for a one-dollar or more donation.

## Distributing **STREETZine** is protected by the First Amendment.

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If at any time you feel a vendor is in violation of any Dallas City Ordinance please contact us immediately with the vendor name or number at [streetzine@thestewpot.org](mailto:streetzine@thestewpot.org)

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