



Unsung Heroes: In Praise of Blanchet House Moms

An oral history of the behind-the-scenes work of mothers to sustain the Blanchet House mission.

Mother's Day is a time to honor and thank the women who made us who we are. It's an opportunity to shine a light on the many women past and present who gave their labor and love so that others can be lifted up.

Blanchet House of Hospitality opened its doors in 1952, founded by nine alumni from the University of Portland. They followed a template of charity created by Dorothy Day, the mother of the Catholic Worker Movement. Day created the concept of Houses of Hospitality, as places that offer food, clothing, and shelter to people on the margins of society. Without question.

Much has been written about the founders but little of the women in their lives, behind the scenes, raising big families, making food, and modeling acts of kindness.

There's nothing better than getting the story straight from the mouths of those who lived it.

Terry O'Hanlon, 92, mother of seven, wife of BH founder Jim O'Hanlon: "I was actually very interested in Dorothy Day's work. It was a great movement that people were willing to sincerely get involved with those that needed help. I was very pleased when Jim said they were going to do this. I never thought as an individual that I would be able to do anything but as a House of Hospitality, we could."

The kids went down to Blanchet every week with their dads. I thought it was important for them to see that there are people who don't have anything and that they should help them. Our kids got pretty indoctrinated into helping others."

I really enjoyed going down to the house in the old days and just being there and welcoming people in. I had white hair really young and had a motherly look. One time I was there saying good morning as the guests came in the door. One guy picked me right up in the air and put me right down!

"I made 10 pumpkin pies one Thanksgiving. I used the pumpkins from Hal-

loween and cut them all up and made all of these pies. I had to cook them until 2 a.m. because I didn't know you couldn't freeze custard!"

I just liked to go and say 'hello' to people at the door. I think somehow they liked it too. I didn't think I was doing anything special."

Sally Anne Christianson (d. 2006), mother of 11, wife of founder Danny Christianson. A memory shared by son Jim Christianson: "The mission was a bootstrap operation as they were getting it up and going. They brought in a lot of the food from home. The dads relied on the moms to make sandwiches, soup, cookies, and baked goods. In our house, mom would make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for the people down at Blanchet. The moms were making food while at the same time they had 2-4 kids at home."

Valerie Harrington, mother-in-law to Emily Harrington, Blanchet's first female board president: "We always wanted to model community service for our kids. There shouldn't be strings attached to being a compassionate human being. To say hello and to ask how your day has been. See them perk up because someone cared to ask. Blanchet House is a place that the unhoused come to be nourished emotionally and spiritually."



Terry and Jim O'Hanlon Sr, with their firstborn in 1952.

Read the full oral history on our website at BlanchetHouse.org/OurMothers. You can also honor a mom with a meaningful gift in her name to Blanchet House this Mother's Day.



Some Guests' Names Will Never Be Known to Us

There is an older woman who eats at Blanchet House downtown almost every day. She's been coming for at least two years maybe longer. We assume that she is homeless because she carries a sleeping mat and clothing with her.

We do not know her name, where she sleeps at night, or her story because she doesn't speak. Volunteers give her the items she points to like coffee or water or care kits. And she nods thank you.

We often wonder what leads someone to become homeless. For many people, homelessness can be caused by trauma. For example, 34% of people living homeless in Portland self-reported as having experienced domestic violence according to 2019's Point-in-Time Count.

We're so glad this guest feels safe and welcome at Blanchet House and we will continue to be here for her and others in need of aid without question.

Planned Giving at Blanchet House

Your gifts are the foundation on which Blanchet House is built. Whether you have responded generously to our newsletter, donated to a Facebook fundraiser, or joined us for our first virtual event, your support makes our work possible.



Did you know that there are other ways of supporting Blanchet House? We have a new planned giving website where you can explore for yourself about types of planned gifts. For example, you can learn about wills and create an account to utilize the Wills Planner. You can learn about other ways to give such as Gifts of Stock or Qualified Charitable Distributions from your IRA. On that same site, you can sign up for our donor newsletter. You can find that website at BlanchetHouseGiving.org.

I encourage you to explore the options for making a planned gift to join the legacy of giving that ensures that Blanchet House will have the resources it needs to reach those who need us most.

I welcome the opportunity to learn more about your passion for Blanchet House and to speak with you personally about options for supporting our work.

Reach me by phone at 503-241-4340 x103 or by email brscott@blanchethouse.org.

With gratitude,

Brenda Ray Scott, CFRE
Development Director



Lend a Helping Hand Brunch



\$216,000 raised for meals & shelter

Thank you to all of our generous sponsors and donors for helping us raise funds to continue our services.

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- Lan Su Chinese Garden
- Jim and Terry O'Hanlon
- John and Sheri Petrusich
- Mary Anne and Rich Ullring and State Farm Companies Foundation
- Susan Matlack Jones and Associates

Watch a recording of the live event at BlanchetHouse.org/Brunch2021





Ryan in between Mac and Miko at Blanchet Farm.

Relief from the Pain of Addiction Found at Blanchet Farm

It hasn't been easy to secure a bed at Blanchet Farm in the past year. The need is high and staff have to be more cautious because of COVID-19. Ryan, who's been living at the farm since Sept., is one of the lucky ones.

Decades of alcohol and drug abuse with bouts of homelessness, jails, rehabs, and relapses led Ryan to a cheap motel room in Salem. He used the money he had won from video poker to pay for the room along with a pile of drugs. All alone, using until he hurt, he was certain that he was going to die there. He'd already visited an emergency room because of kidney failure and he was sure that his heart was going to cease working.

But he couldn't stop using.

"We addicts break a lot of hearts. I've missed so many things in life because of my addiction. I lost my friends. Like my real friends. I got super involved in crime," Ryan recalls. "I broke my parents' hearts."

Men who find their way to the farm are often in a hopeless state. Even when faced with negative consequences, the chemically dependent brain is consumed by the goal of getting more drugs or alcohol.

"The drug becomes most important. Like, I literally would get \$60 in my pocket and go use again," Ryan recalls. "If I were using I wouldn't be commu-

nicating with you right now. I probably couldn't talk. I'd be super paranoid. I would probably have my fists clenched. And I'd look like a really scary person."

It all began, when Ryan landed a well-paying high pressure job at a tech company just out of business school. He lived with friends and his family was

"There's been a few mornings where I'm crying here. I'm just so thankful." -Ryan

nearby. Within a year Ryan was unemployed, addicted to meth, and living on the streets in Orange County, CA.

"Me using usually looks like me getting arrested, maybe resisting arrest because I think they want to hurt me, then they take me to the hospital, stabilize, and then I go to jail," Ryan says.

This cycle continued for years and exhausted everyone in his life. His parents eventually moved to Oregon and asked if he wanted to come escape the environment he was in. So, he did.

"You know, they say that your addiction always follows you," Ryan says. "I'm living with my parents. Staying sober. And then next thing I'm down at the river using with people I never met in my life."

A friend he met in an AA meeting told him about the farm. He remembered it when he was waiting for death in that hotel room.

There was a wait list, so he called every Tuesday for nearly two months until a bed opened. One day his phone rang, it was Debra, the Case Manager at the farm. There was a spot for him but he would first need to go to detox.

Bridgeway Detox in Salem, who had helped in the past sent an ambulance. He flushed his bag of drugs down the toilet and left the hotel for detox.

When he arrived at the farm Ryan was greeted by Miko, a large barking Pyrenees dog who can be intimidating to those who haven't met him. But Miko put Ryan at ease right away.

"Miko is my best friend now. It's just like a super connection for me and very therapeutic," he says. "When I arrived, Ross [Farm Manager] said, 'there's no hurry, we're on farm time.'"

Research shows that a compassionate approach to helping people recover is more effective than punishments. Showing empathy over anger gets a better response from people in the grip of addiction. The farm offers empathy, accountability, and a place to heal.

"It's like you can breathe here, you know what I mean?" Ryan says. "There's been a few mornings where I'm crying here. I'm just so thankful. I just want to say thanks to the donors."

In Ryan's experience fear has never been enough to stay sober.

"They talk about being spiritually bankrupt. I mean, literally, I can recall a time where I'm in a sleeping bag and homeless knowing my dad is dying of cancer. I was literally hopeless," he says.

Ryan believes the farm is a once in a lifetime opportunity. Now rested and sober he's getting his driver's license back, working a part-time job at a farm down the road, and continuing studies to become a certified Peer Support Specialist. Last Thanksgiving, his family invited him to dinner. He got to spend time with his dad who is sick.

"I think my parents haven't given up on me. I like to believe that I'm going to make it," he says.

Give someone the chance to live without the pain of addiction by supporting the farm with a [donation](#).



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Unsung Heroes: Blanchet House Moms

We shine a light on mothers past and present who gave their labor and love so that others can be lifted up. **INSIDE >>**

Rents and Tents Rise

The average monthly rent of a studio apartment in Portland is now \$1,100 according to research by Zumper. Now compare that to the average disability check at \$733 per month. High housing prices push people into homelessness, and make it harder to regain it. That means it takes longer to move out of a temporary shelter.

All around us we see people pushed to the margins of our city. Trying to survive. Making ad hoc shelters out of our way. It isn't pretty. Many are suffering with mental health and addiction issues. These are people who have suffered so much trauma in their lives and we cannot ignore the suffering.

This is why Blanchet House of Hospitality was started. Come as you are. We will help in whatever ways we can.



Shoes For Our Fellow Man

"Needless to say I got this man a new pair of shoes," said Jennifer Coon, a Peer Support Specialist, who tends to our guests in line during meal services.

CLOTHING FOR ALL Word spreads amongst those suffering on our streets that Blanchet House is a place of refuge, aid, friendship, and shoes. Many people living homeless walk miles every day to access basic services in order to survive. This leaves their socks threadbare and shoes worn.

Six days a week we are able to offer food and clothing to anyone who comes to our doors thanks to your donations and support. Adult-sized clothing appropriate for outdoor wear can be dropped of Mon-Sat, 8-10:30 a.m. or 1:30-4 p.m. at 310 NW Glisan.