



FLENNIKEN LANDING

A STORY OF HOPE AND REDEMPTION

KNOXVILLE LEADERSHIP FOUNDATION

CHRIS MARTIN
FOREWORD BY GOVERNOR BILL HASLAM

Flenniken Landing
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Every story in this book is an account of an actual event. No composite anecdotes or other fiction techniques have been used. However, details in some stories have been modified slightly to improve readability. The names of the individuals have not been changed and are used by permission where appropriate.

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Flenniken Cabin Photograph
Knox, Mark, "The Old Flenniken Place". www.knoxstalgia.blogspot.com. October 1, 2008.

Knox County Two Centuries Photograph Project, McClung Historical Collection.

200-024-044, Flenniken School, 1902. Students and teachers posing outside clapboard building.

200-024-045, Flenniken School group, taken when the school was on Sims Road, opposite A Avenue. Shows group posing near footbridge over small creek, horse in background.

200-024-055, Flenniken School group posing against clapboard wall.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This story has been a journey. My part has only been for the past four years, but the story has spanned for decades. It's important to realize that many have only carried the torch for a short period of time making this their story too. Also important, are those who have gone before us to ensure that all of our stories, collectively, have created Flenniken's journey. And the truth is that the journey will continue.

The obvious danger in trying to acknowledge people for their contribution is that someone is always left out, but I want to risk this by pointing out a few folks that made this story become a reality. First is Governor Bill Haslam, for his vision for permanent supportive housing, while Mayor of Knoxville. Jon Lawler invited Knoxville Leadership Foundation to be a partner with the Mayor's Office of the Ten Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness and took a lot of the heat that came with doing something as unfamiliar as finding places for formerly homeless folks to have a home. Others in the Mayor's Office like Larry Martin and Bill Lyons helped us be patient through all the ups and downs of a sometimes difficult political process and whose steady hands helped us all be better. I am grateful to Ginny Weatherstone and the staff at the Volunteer Ministry Center for their unwavering support and friendship throughout this journey as well.

Of course, David Arning has worked tirelessly on Flenniken Landing and is the reason the project got its start and he shepherded it along its winding road. The Knoxville Leadership Foundation's Board of Directors and the Southeastern Housing Foundation's Board of Directors demonstrated powerful wisdom and vision for me and our staff as we navigated through these uncertain waters.

The construction team at Allan Associates Architecture and Johnson & Galyon Construction were amazing in the execution of the redevelopment plan.

In writing this book I am indebted to Alan Shipley and the ADS Phoenix design team. Austin Church's creative writing ability made the book work. His hours of writing drafts and editing our work were huge. Jeremiah Harris took many of the noted pictures in the book, and his talent speaks for itself. You would not be reading this today without these three men.

Lastly, I feel very humbled to even tell this story, because it's really not mine to tell. I just showed up every day and tried to do the next right thing. This is God's story of how He weaves this servant's work into something that produces hope and brings His redemption. He has allowed me to be in His work and thankfully I am changed because of it.

FOREWORD

GOVERNOR BILL HASLAM

I have often said that being a mayor is the most “hands on” job in politics. I say that because, as a mayor, the community expects you to be personally involved in solving problems. Whether it’s bringing a new business to town or fixing a drainage problem that is causing a citizen’s back yard to flood, a mayor’s job is to make his or her community a better place to live. But, it is also a “hands on” job in that people can easily get their hands on the mayor! Whether it’s at a little league baseball game, church, the grocery store, or walking through downtown, citizens have a legitimate expectation that they can express their thoughts and opinions to their mayor. While national and state issues can often elicit a lot of passion on a variety of issues, the personal nature of local issues means that those concerns tend to awaken and inspire a lot more folks to let their opinions be heard.

Very few things seem to motivate people to engage in the political process as much as land use issues. Whenever I would walk into a City Council meeting and see a full audience, it meant a couple of things: there was probably a zoning issue of some type coming before council and we were probably going to be there a while! That is very understandable. After all, for most people, the largest investment they have is their home. It’s hard to get much more personal than your home, your street, or your neighborhood. People work hard to improve their neighborhood, and they become justifiably concerned when they think something might bring it harm. I can remember countless long discussions about the impact a new business or a new subdivision might have on existing neighborhoods.



So, when the idea of using the Flenniken School for permanent supportive housing was first raised, it is not at all surprising that concern was raised about the impact on the existing neighborhood.

Yet, there were many of us who desperately wanted to have a new way to address the problem of homelessness in our community. For too long, we felt like we had been offering only short term, “band-aid” solutions. While a hot bowl of soup and a warm place to sleep definitely offered much needed temporary relief, it was doing very little to address the root problem. The idea of permanent supportive housing had proven to work in other communities across the country. It is a more economical and more compassionate way to help those that Jesus called the “least of these.” This book is a story of a community working through some hard issues. It’s about a community where people who are understandably concerned about their neighborhoods met with people who were decisively committed to helping people change their lives. Often the discussion involved people who were committed to both preserving neighborhoods and helping people for whom life hasn’t seemed to work.

Ultimately, the book is about heroes. It is a story of some people who wouldn’t give up when they probably should have! Some people who were heavily criticized, even when their actions were inspired by pure motives. It was a privilege, and a challenge, to have a front row seat for this chapter of the Flenniken adventure. I think that Knoxville is a better community because of the discussions that were held. I know that Knoxville is a better home for the people who will now call Flenniken their home. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to be the Mayor of Knoxville. And, I am even more grateful to have had the opportunity to walk alongside some men and women who took seriously the prophet Micah’s exhortation to “do what is right, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

"The Flennikens were an illustrious family and their history should be preserved."
Mr. R. C. d'Armand, an East Tennessee historian

THE BEGINNING

HOPE FOR A FUTURE





THE FAMILY

The story of Flenniken Landing begins not with a building, or children, or a vision for a better community but with a Scotch-Irish family. The Flennikens, who sometimes spelled their name “Flennekin,” trace their lineage all the way back to colonial days. In fact, James Wallace Flenniken fought in the Revolutionary War and was rewarded for his faithful service with a 500-acre land grant.

James moved with his brother, John, from Pennsylvania to North Carolina and John was one of the signers of the Mecklenburg Declaration in 1775. Some people consider this the first declaration of independence made by the thirteen colonies and believe that Thomas Jefferson borrowed material from it for the Declaration of Independence.

The Flennikens were successful business owners and dedicated family men. They were active in their churches and their Freemason brotherhoods. Wherever the Flennikens lived, they were bound to make an appearance in civic and political circles.

FLENNIKENS BECOME TENNESSEANS

In 1792, James Wallace Flenniken either moved from North Carolina to Knoxville, or his land was annexed by the state of North Carolina and became a part of Tennessee. Regardless, his family's history shaped that of East Tennessee.

The Flennikens had dealings with some of Tennessee's most famous people, including the first Governor of Tennessee, John Sevier, who signed the Flenniken's land grant.

In 1793, in Knox County Court, Samuel Flenniken brought suit against Sevier and Adam Meek, executors for the estate of Isaac Taylor, for "non-performance of covenant." After the suit passed to several succeeding courts, Samuel won on January 27, 1795, and was awarded \$100.

As the 19th century progressed, the Flenniken family grew and spread throughout East Tennessee. Some of their children died young; some survived to adulthood and became hard-working and influential citizens. James's son, John, was born in August of 1792. John grew up, married, and had a son of his own, John Junior, in 1840.

Members of the family worked in construction and the insurance business. They served in public office and invested in the community. Sons of this family fought in every war that this country has ever waged, all the way up to famous battles in France during World War II. Their service deserves recognition, but let's not get ahead of ourselves.

THE FLENNIKEN SCHOOL HOUSE

The Flennikens saw a need for a school in their community so they decided to meet that need. Before the Civil War and the Industrial Revolution, the land several miles south of downtown Knoxville and the Tennessee River was a patchwork of farms. The farmers needed a place to educate their children.

In 1850 the Flennikens set aside some of their land on the corner of Maryville Pike and an unpaved track, which would become Sims Road. The Flenniken School House, a private school for children, soon opened its doors. The family probably had no clue that they were creating a legacy that would span the next 161 years.

Families of quarry men began moving into the area, as well as people working for the lumber and textile mills. The school educated their children for the next three decades. It employed one teacher.





THE SCHOOL CHANGES “OWNERS”

In February of 1880, the directors of Knoxville’s Circuit District bought the lot and the building, and The Flenniken School House became a Knox County school.

By 1905, thirty-five students were attending the school, and they had outgrown the space so the Circuit District purchased additional property on Maryville Pike. In 1917, the City of Knoxville annexed the area around the school, and it moved from the county to the city system. Construction took awhile. Imagine that!

The new school with seven rooms opened in September, 1919.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE BACK THEN?

Times were different. Everything moved slower. Most of the children walked to school, and women in the community prepared the students' lunches.

The students used McGuffey Readers and Blue Book Spellers. They practiced good penmanship and learned arithmetic.

At recess the girls played "Go In-and-Out the Window," "Drop the Handkerchief," and "Hop Scotch." The boys shot marbles. They probably also pulled the girls' hair, got into scuffles and had schoolyard crushes. Some things never change.



FORTY YEARS OF GROWTH

The school's first Parent Teacher Association organized in 1923, and more additions to the building were made in 1926. The next round of growth, however, didn't happen until after the Great Depression and World War II in 1955. That's when Flenniken Elementary School expanded to its current footprint of three stories and 40,000 square feet on 2.66 acres.

Over the next thirty-five years, the student body swelled to fill the space with 200 students and 14 teachers, who taught kindergarten through fifth grade and special education.



TRUE THEN, TRUE NOW

On April 22, 1980, Principal Robert C. Matthews told Knoxville Journal, “We would like every citizen in Knoxville to know that Flenniken is not decrepit.”

Fourteen years later, on December 28, 1994, the school closed for Christmas break and never reopened. That day also happened to be the birthday of Elijah H. Flenniken, who was born in 1832.

All the former Flenniken Elementary students moved to Dogwood School.

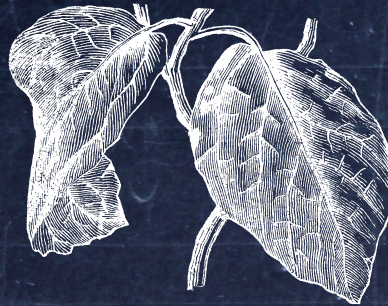
After 144 years of service, just think how many children learned to read and write at Flenniken! Just think how many of them grew up and had opportunities that they never would have had otherwise.

Think how much hope for a better tomorrow began at Flenniken Elementary School.

STRANGELY PROPHETIC

In an interview for a Knoxville News Sentinel article about the school closing, a former Knox County commissioner named Fred Flenniken expressed his hopes for the vacant building that bore his surname: “I’d like to see the building maintained. There’s probably some use either in the private sector or the public sector.”

The article’s title, “Building the Future on Namesakes’ Past,” would prove strangely prophetic.



WHAT NEXT?

THE FUTURE OF FLENNIKEN SCHOOL

Public officials talked about using the building for office space, businesses, or a museum, but it eventually passed into the holdings of a private real estate investment firm. No one could work out the financing for redevelopment.

In 2009, the school was still empty and made the Knox Heritage “Fragile 15” List of Endangered Historical Places. It was in terrible shape.

Empty buildings are sick buildings. Buildings need a community to stay healthy.

People need a community to stay healthy.



A NEW CHAMPION

Most people would have seen grounds choked with trash and weeds and a building scarred with broken windows, graffiti, and peeling paint, but native Knoxvilleian David Arning saw something else entirely. He saw a historic property reinvented. He imagined an elegant edifice with early twentieth century charm and modern amenities.

David had always loved the architecture and craftsmanship of historic buildings, so after graduating college and serving in the Navy, he earned a Masters of Historic Preservation from the University of Georgia. The program focuses on architectural history, preservation policy and community development.

Flenniken had a new champion.

COULD IT HAPPEN IN KNOXVILLE?

In 2005, David was working in real estate development and considered putting condos in the space, but the real estate market in the neighborhood wouldn't support the sales prices necessary to pay for the renovation.

The idea of renovating the old Flenniken Elementary School and converting it into permanent supportive housing first emerged in 2008 after David joined Southeastern Housing Foundation, a subsidiary of Knoxville Leadership Foundation (KLF). What he saw was a solid, well-designed building that lent itself well to multifamily housing. The gym, office space and common areas were a particularly good fit for supportive housing.

He went to visit a historic school in Chattanooga that was successfully redeveloped into elderly housing using low-income and historic tax credits. A blighted, historic school and its redevelopment had helped to revitalize the St. Elmo neighborhood.

Could something similar happen in Knoxville?

BAD ODDS MEAN NOTHING TO GOD

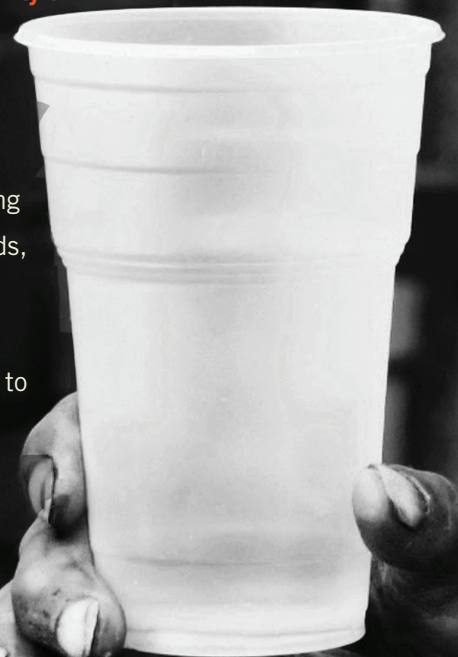
A lot had happened on those two acres since The Flenniken School House was built in 1850, but the original mission to serve the community was re-emerging.

David believed that rehabilitating a historic building could mean more than the removal of an eyesore. It could mean transformation. It could mean a new life for people living within its walls. It could mean a more vibrant community. It could mean the world.

Together with Chris Martin, KLF's President, David hoped to develop 48 units of permanent supportive housing as a part of the city and county's Ten Year Plan To End Chronic Homelessness.

In order to happen, the project would require several sources of funding, including a grant from the Federal Home Loan Bank, and affordable housing tax credits from the Tennessee Housing Development Agency. In other words, the project was a long shot.

If the project was to be successful, then its success would have everything to do with God's heart for the down and out, for "the least of these."





A MODEL TO FOLLOW

When Chris presented the idea, KLF's Board of Directors responded with cautious optimism. The project aligned perfectly with the foundation's mission to connect resources with Knoxville's greatest needs, especially the needs of the poor, the broken, and the vulnerable.

As a faith-based organization, KLF tries to follow the leadership and servanthood of Jesus, who spent His life caring for people on the margins. The homeless certainly qualify. Chris wanted the project to bring unity, not division, and hope, not cynicism, to Knoxville's faith community.

If Flenniken didn't truly help people, then it would fail. The discussions at KLF came down to this: let's do something that will succeed only if God wants it to. Flenniken was a long shot with a big heart.



A CURVY APPALACHIAN ROAD

Real estate development is slow work. It is like a curvy road in the Appalachian Mountains with many switchbacks and nerve-racking drop-offs. The KLF team began writing grants, securing the purchase of the property, and figuring out how to turn an old school into 48 apartments.

In March 2008, KLF paid \$10,000 for the option to purchase the property for \$225,000. After three amendments over the next two and a half years, funding and zoning delays, and several extensions, the financing was complete. The property finally changed hands on October 29, 2010.

ADDRESSING THE COMMUNITY



The financing and purchase was only half the story though. To be successful, the project needed the buy-in of political leaders and the support of the community at large.

Addressing a host of assumptions, fears, and hypothetical situations and trying to facilitate fair, honest conversations about homelessness was an equally demanding project. The prospect of moving people in transition out of homelessness into a neighborhood in South Knoxville made some people uncomfortable.

Would the residents be violent? Would they be deranged junkies or would they be people a whole lot like us who need a second chance?

KNOXVILLE'S TEN YEAR PLAN TO END CHRONIC HOMELESSNESS

Along with a number of other partners experienced in working with Knoxville's homeless, the Mayor of Knoxville's Office invited KLF to be a partner in the Ten Year Plan To End Chronic Homelessness in 2007.

To help the Plan's "housing first" approach, KLF would identify, develop and operate permanent supportive housing complexes. This approach would provide a safe, stable environment for homeless individuals so that the underlying causes of their homelessness, such as economics, health and substance abuse, could be treated more effectively.

Many people of faith and goodwill worked together, and this collaboration never could have developed without the commitment of Governor Bill Haslam, then Mayor of Knoxville, and Jon Lawler, who oversaw the Ten Year Plan. Dr. Roger Nooe also contributed years of research and did a brilliant job of shaping the plan and committing it to paper.

The plan helped to build awareness about the need for permanent supportive housing. Now many people who might still be on the streets have homes and hope for a brighter future.

WHAT IS TRUE POVERTY?

“We think sometimes that poverty is only being hungry, naked and homeless. The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty. We must start in our own homes to remedy this kind of poverty.”

- MOTHER TERESA





PEOPLE A LOT LIKE YOU

The pages that follow contain the stories of people who once lived on the streets of Knoxville. Those fortunate enough to have never endured this experience often overlook what they have in common with the people who have.

They are people a lot like you and me. Ronnie worries about his cholesterol, and Gary worries about his weight. Betty feels proud of her kids, and John wants to do more traveling. William enjoys fishing, and Emmett likes watching baseball.

Does any of that sound familiar? Providing long-term supportive housing means giving someone like Charles a place to cook for his friends. If home is where the heart is, then Willy, Tommy, and Matt have reclaimed theirs.

It's these stories of redemption that set the stage for the future of Flenniken.

GARY describes himself as “Heinz 57” because his ancestors came from all over Europe. He is also one-eighth Lakota Sioux and likes the thought of a nickname that would honor this heritage, something like “Thunder Wolf.”

Gary enjoys reading, and has recently been studying nutrition, because he wants to lose some weight. He is having to teach himself because his family didn’t emphasize a healthy diet. When he’s not learning about plants and herbs, Gary spends time on Facebook and reads sci-fi and fantasy novels. “I like it when the good guys win,” he says with a grin.

When asked to sum up his former life on the streets with one word, he got misty-eyed. After a few quiet moments of thought, he chose the word “Grief.”

He offers the following words of advice: “Be grateful for what you have because you don’t know what tomorrow holds.”

GARY



JOHN is easy to talk to and has a wide range of interests and hobbies. If he could travel anywhere in the world, John would go to Japan because the culture, architecture, people, and cuisine fascinate him. John excels at math, but struggles with English. To improve his writing skills, he signed up for a creative writing class offered at Redeemer Church in Fort Sanders.

Having a home has made all the difference. He has a place to cook his specialty, lasagna, and to bake cakes. He has a place to work on pencil sketches and to relax after a day of selling The Amplifier, Knoxville's "street paper".

"It feels good to have a home," he says plainly.

MYTH: PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING IS EXPENSIVE

FACT: COMPASSION COSTS LESS

"Chronically homeless" describes individuals who have been on the street for a year or more, or who have experienced four or more episodes of homelessness within a three-year period. The goal of Knoxville's Ten Year Plan is to provide housing for Knoxville's chronically homeless population.

Though that might sound like an expensive and ambitious endeavor, the truth is, permanent supportive housing is LESS expensive.

On average, each chronically homeless individual who stays on the streets costs approximately \$37,000 a year in public services, such as law enforcement and emergency room care. By contrast, providing housing is economical.

In other words, showing more compassion costs less money!



JOHN

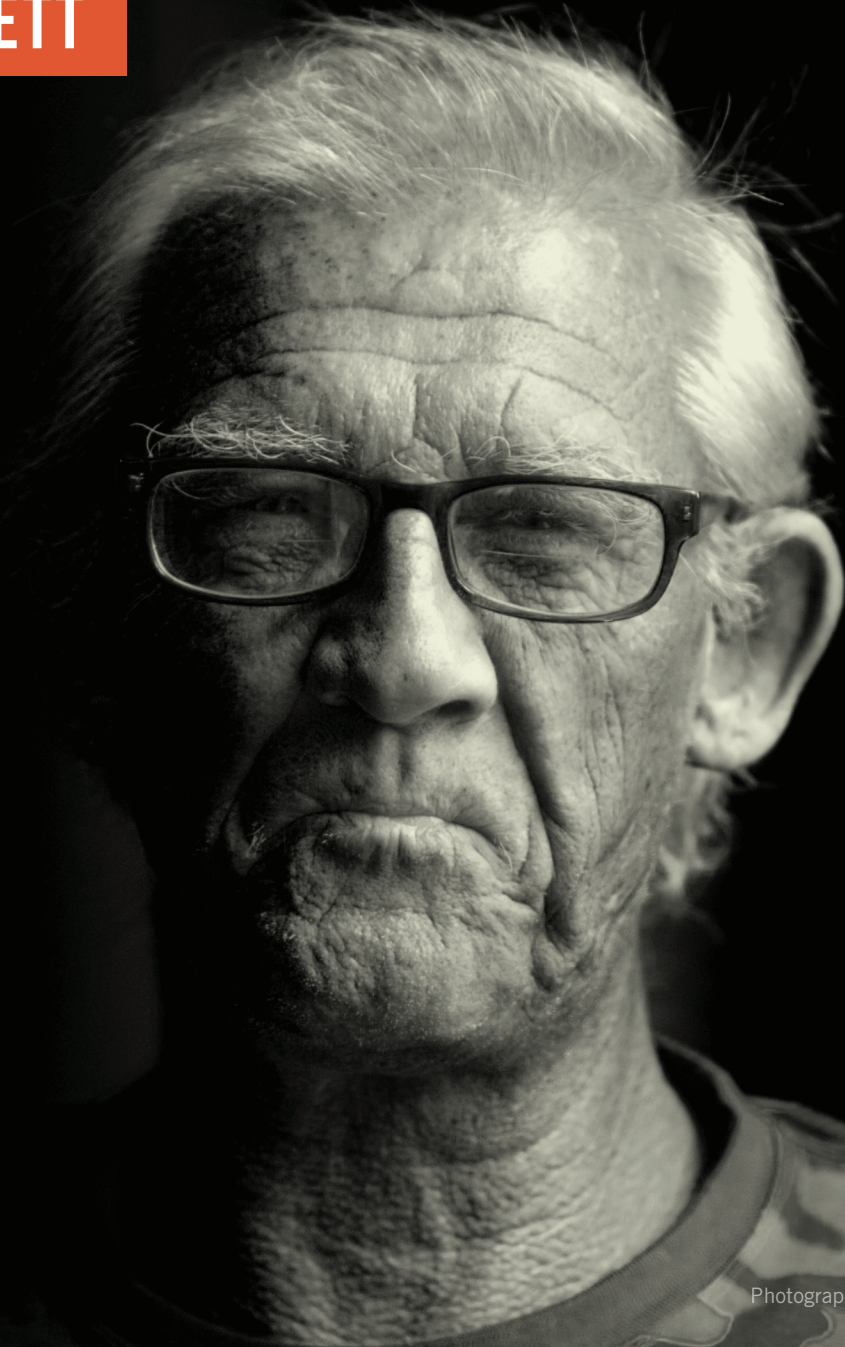
EMMETT is 53 years old, and before he got a permanent supportive apartment in October 2009, he had been on the streets for 15 years. All those years without a home have taught him to appreciate life's simple gifts: heating and air conditioning, furniture and a good bed. He also likes watching baseball on television or at the Smokies' field in Sevierville, especially if it's a Wednesday when he can buy \$1 hot dogs.

Emmett loves the many generous people who live at his new apartment complex. Several kind souls made sure that he got a haircut, dentures and a pair of glasses, which come in handy when he's painting model cars. His favorite? A '57 Chevy.

Emmett is full of gratitude: "Everybody deserves a second chance. Yeah, I'm blessed with a home. This is a miracle from God."

When asked about his thoughts on being homeless, "Don't call 'em homeless," he advises. "Call 'em people who live on the street. Without enough jobs to go around, somebody's going to be on the street."

EMMETT



TOMMY has one of the most impressive beards that you'll ever see. He's been growing it for three years, and he could definitely get seasonal work playing Santa Claus. He's about the nicest man you'll ever meet too. A veteran with an honorable discharge, Tommy spends some of his free time watching *The Andy Griffith Show* and Westerns, like the Clint Eastwood classic, *The Outlaw Josey Wales*. He would take some fresh corn-on-the-cob over any other food, but he might surprise you by putting on some opera music during dinner.

This much is certainly true: they just don't make them like Tommy anymore.

MYTH: HOMELESSNESS IS A CHOICE

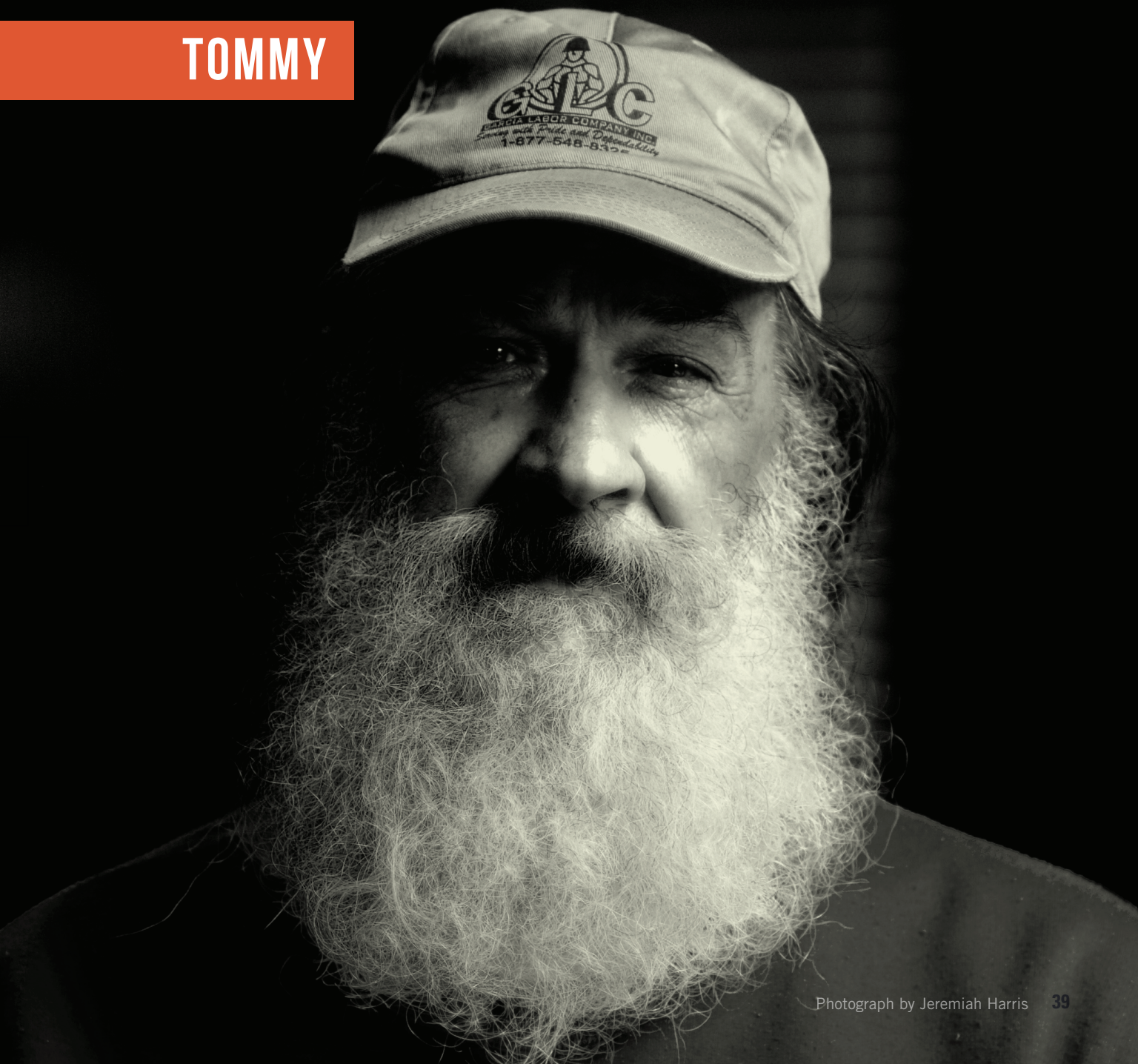
FACT: HOMELESSNESS ISN'T ALWAYS A CHOICE

In truth, people live on the streets for many different reasons: a lost job, a wrecked car, a house fire, domestic violence, illness or a death in the family.

People who have never lived on the street have a tendency to oversimplify homelessness and thus justify their own callousness.

Walk a mile in another man's shoes and you may come to understand him. Sleep in his cardboard lean-to, and you may come to understand yourself.

TOMMY



A Knoxville native, **RONNIE** loves music. Listening to jazz, blues, country and rock 'n roll is one of the ways he likes to unwind after a long day at Old Gray Cemetery, where he works as one of the grounds keepers. After all, who knows a good time like James Brown?

Ronnie is honest about where he has come from, but those low points have brought him humility and an appreciation for what he now has: good neighbors, consistency, and a safe place to sleep, live and eat. If he weren't watching his cholesterol, he'd cook more fried chicken and bacon.

All of his scars have stories, but the over arching theme is hope: "I prayed not to die homeless," he admitted. "It means a lot to have a place to live. Being homeless is a strong state of depression."

RONNIE

Photograph by Jeremiah Harris

WILLY was born in the Lonsdale community and has lived in Knoxville his entire life. On his perfect day, he would visit Milwaukee, which he enjoyed visiting a few years back, and he would eat a big plate of ribs, greens, and mac & cheese. He loves to go for long car rides, and his vehicle of choice might surprise you: a Dodge Neon.

His preference is part nostalgia because his first car was a Dodge.

Willy gets along with everybody. This may have something to do with his easygoing nature and his self-proclaimed favorite pastime, encouragement. A close second is sketching still lifes and landscapes.

MYTH: THE HOMELESS SIPHON OFF OUR COMMUNITY

Knoxville's homeless are brought in by bus. Other cities pay them to leave. If we offer them services, we only give them an incentive to stay and siphon off our community. We're enabling them.

FACT: THE HOMELESS ARE PART OF OUR COMMUNITY

Almost 80% of Knox County's homeless population became homeless while living in the area. They are our fathers and mothers, husbands and wives. They are our sons and daughters. We're not caring for the outcasts of other cities; we're caring for our own.

WILLY

Photograph

If you asked **CHARLES** for the shirt off his back, he'd give it to you and anything else you needed. He is easy to get along with and generous. Having a home means that he gets to spend more time cooking for himself and others. He especially enjoys experimenting and trying new foods. He's not a messy cook though. Too many lessons on cleanliness from his mom prevent that.

He has family in Arkansas, a brother in Georgia, and another brother in Knoxville. Charles likes going for long walks, and he likes time to himself. Lately he's been reading the Bible, and he offers plenty of advice to that end: "Try not to worry. Try to get your life back with God."

Ask him about being on the streets and Charles will tell you, "God's been with me all the time."

CHARLES



Photograph by Jeremiah Harris

MATT was born in Marietta, Georgia, but he moved to Knoxville with his family so that his mother could take care of his aunt. He hasn't forgotten his roots though, and still follows the Braves and Hawks. When Matt isn't watching sports, he enjoys working puzzles, shooting pool and throwing darts. If he and his girlfriend Linda were hanging out, they would go get chicken teriyaki and watch a movie, most likely a mystery or thriller.

Matt has a ready smile and a kind heart: "Just because I have a place to live doesn't mean I'm better than other people."

MYTH: FLENNIKEN IS A HOMELESS SHELTER

FACT: FLENNIKEN IS A FRESH START

Flenniken offers permanent homes for people who have been chronically homeless, but have been working to get off the street. They are taking measures to address their problems. Residents must pay rent and abide by community rules.

Flenniken isn't a shelter; it's a fresh start.

MATT



Of all the things in her life, **BETTY** is most proud of her son and daughter. She likes having a safe, quiet and private home where they can visit, and she particularly enjoys the luxury of being able to take a shower anytime she wants.

If Betty had a few dollars to spare, she'd go to a Chinese restaurant and order her favorite dish, chicken lo mein. You can be sure that she'd remember to say grace because Betty certainly isn't shy about showing or talking about her faith: "If it weren't for Jesus and God, I wouldn't be here."

Her favorite Bible verse also speaks to this dependency: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

BETTY



Photograph by Jeremiah Harris

WILLIAM was born in Maryville and grew up in Alcoa. He remembers fondly his church's annual potluck lunches in the Smoky Mountains. William played outside linebacker for Maryville High School and still tries to keep in shape by working out at the YMCA. He watches his diet, but on a perfect day, he'd splurge and eat a full rack of ribs at Calhoun's. After that, he'd do some fishing, take his time browsing in thrift stores or watch a documentary or a scary movie.

"I've had to pay for it," he laughs, recalling the bad dreams that inevitably follow scary movies.

If he could do high school all over again, he would take up a recruiter's offer to learn how to box at a local gym. For the most part though, William seems at peace in the present: "My new home provides me with everything I need to survive: food, clothing, structure, camaraderie...friends."

WILLIAM



Photograph by Jeremiah Harris

TWO STORIES

C O M E T O G E T H E R

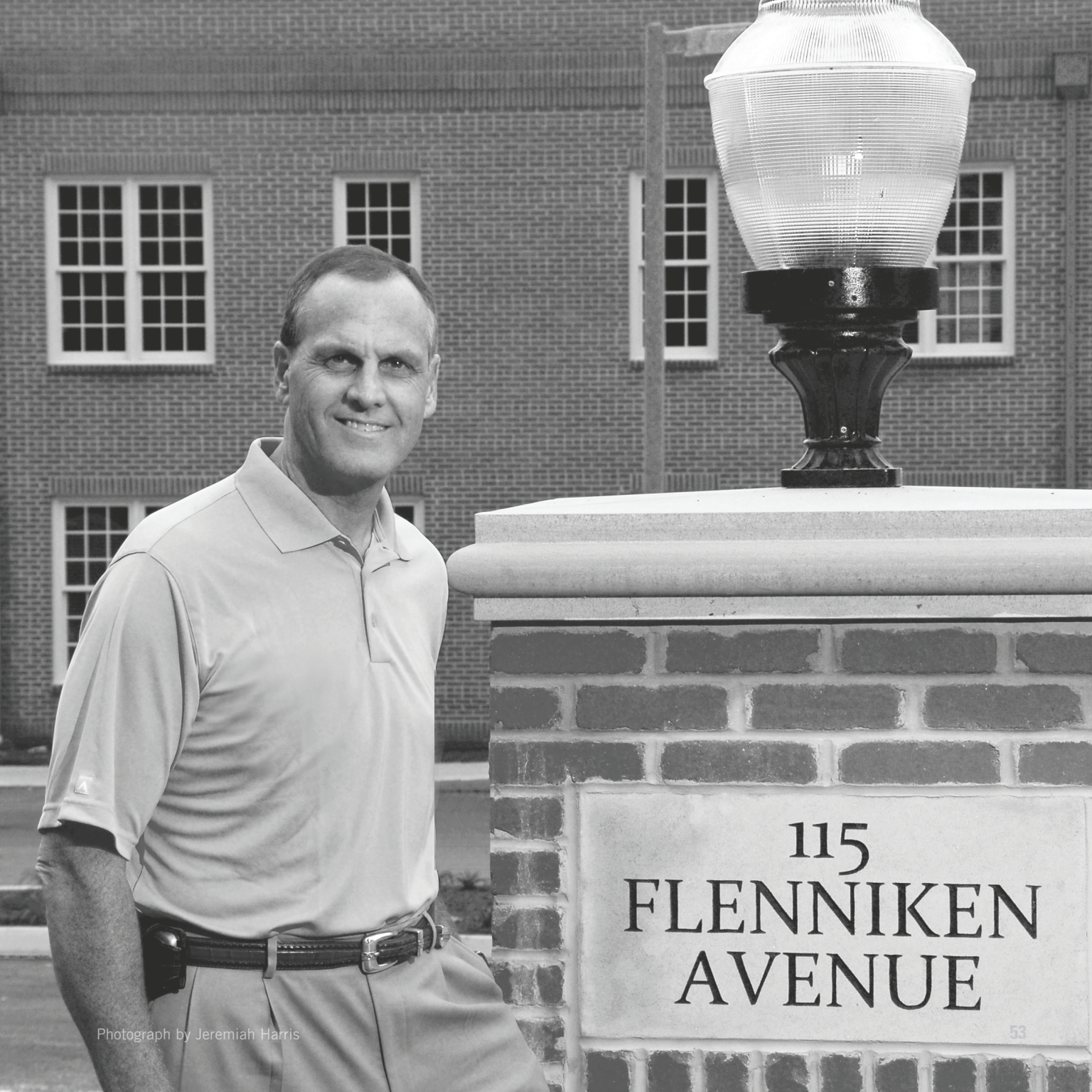
As you can see, this book weaves two stories together. The first is a story of hope for a better tomorrow through education, and the second is a story of redemption and second chances.

I hope by now you agree that the story of the Flennikens, the school that they built and the legacy that they created is worth telling.

Over the past three years, I have watched these two stories merge and have asked God a lot of questions: What are we supposed to do? Where are You in all this? Why has this been so difficult?

161 years after the first schoolhouse was built, I am convinced that God's hands are still on this place called Flenniken. I was there when He brought the Flenniken renovation project back to life, not once but three times! Without boring you with too many details, I'll tell this story about the death of a vision.

The Flenniken project was controversial from the start. Some people were for it; some were against it. Despite the strong opposition, I quickly came to understand that Flenniken wasn't about my or anyone else's opinion but about God's mysterious plans.



115
FLENNIKEN
AVENUE

AGAINST ALL ODDS

In the fall of 2009, the Flenniken project came before City Council for a “Use on Review” hearing. The Council Members were voting whether or not to give the green light to the proposed use for the renovated building, which was permanent supportive housing for people who had once lived on the street.

Everyone at KLF knew that Flenniken was dead in the water. We had heard earlier that day that we didn’t have enough votes. Showing up to the City Council meeting would only be a formality.

Soon after I took my seat, the public had a chance to speak, and the Executive Director of Catholic Charities of East Tennessee, Father Ragan Schriver, stood.

The gist of his message to Council was, “This is a moral decision, not a political decision.” He went on to encourage Council Members to vote for compassion. He appealed to their hearts. He asked them to lay aside their political differences and agendas and to do the right thing.

In the silence that followed Father Ragan’s short speech, none of us had any idea that his words would help resuscitate the project.

After he finished speaking, the Council cast their votes—five to four in favor of Flenniken’s proposed use. Father Ragan’s words caused a Council Member to change a vote in the middle of the meeting.

That was when I became certain that God’s hand was on this project.

HOPE IN THINGS UNSEEN

The second death and subsequent resurrection came in July 2010. Our investor withdrew from the project, and the Tennessee Housing Development Agency (THDA), the issuer of the tax credits, gave KLF thirty days to find a replacement.

Identifying and persuading an investor to hand over millions of dollars can usually take months, or even years, so the chance of finding another one was slim.

Yet, in the last week of July, three weeks after the loss of our first investor, another group signed on. This just doesn't happen. Financial institutions are slow to show interest, and even slower to make multimillion dollar decisions. For an investor to get comfortable with our project in such a short time had little to do with our efforts and everything to do with God's plan.

BACK TO LIFE AGAIN

What's even more amazing is that it happened again. Later that year, in October, when the project was within thirty days of closing, our second investor backed out.

David Arning and I were at a conference in Cincinnati when the news came. "You've got to be kidding me," I thought. "That's it. We're out of time."

Between the two of us, we came up with one idea, a tiny glimmer of hope. Our original investor had called us in August to see if we would still be interested in working with them, but by that time we were engaged with the second investor. David suggested as a last resort that we circle back to the first investor to see if they still had any interest.

Why not? We had nothing to lose—only the better part of three years of work. We should have known that God would show up—for the third time!—and remind us that we were not the ones in charge.

We made the call, and our contact picked up. By 4:30 pm that same day, the investor's Board of Directors had approved a \$3 million investment in Flenniken.

That's right. Five hours later, we had another investor. Talk about drama. We were ecstatic.

I don't know how you explain these circumstances, but I do know that smart, talented, and influential people worked very hard on the project, only to see their efforts fail. The Flenniken project and the theme of this book is much, much larger than human efforts. This renovation project died three times, and despite impossible circumstances, God brought it back to life.

WHAT GOD DOESN'T SEE

God cares about the down and out, the kicked out, and the outcast sleeping under a bridge in a cardboard box. Read some of the minor prophets in the Old Testament and refresh your memory on the kind of people with whom Jesus spent the most time, and you'll agree that God has a special place in His heart for "the least of these"- people who don't know where their next meal is coming from and have to pray for their daily bread every single day.

If you take away only one thing from this book, take away this: God cares about the homeless and the poor, the drunks and junkies, the people who were victims of circumstance, and even the people who make bad decisions.

God doesn't see missing teeth, dirty hair, stinking clothes, and squandered potential. He sees a beloved child.

My telling of this story isn't intended to be a sermon, but a confession. Too many things went wrong for this project to happen. Too many key people backed out at the last minute, and too many people opposed the project.

No matter what we did at KLF, the project kept failing, and yet, Flenniken is finished and will open its doors to receive new residents.



REDEMPTION

THE STORIES OF SECOND CHANCES

The Flenniken family has a story. Flenniken School has a story. I have a story, and you have a story. Each and every one of the people who will make a home at Flenniken Landing has a story.

At some point, you've got to step out of your own perspective and zip code, lay down your pride, and have the humility to realize that people who have lived on the streets are not statistics, lost causes, or riffraff. Like you and me, they are people created in God's image, and like us, they need second chances and an opportunity to tell a different story.

Talk to people who have lived on the streets, engage them in honest conversation, and you'll walk away with an awareness of how much you take for granted.

Flenniken, the place, has always been a response to a need in our community.

You might wonder, "Can God really care about people who walk the streets, live in rundown neighborhoods, or make extremely poor choices?"

THE LEAST OF THESE

I would say that He not only loves them, but He also wants me to know them and love them too—not because He needs me to, but because I need to. These relationships force us to realize how blessed we are and teach us how to depend on Him for basic, day-to-day needs.

What He desires for us is to realize how much we need Him and to share His concern for the poor, broken and marginalized.

He wants us to share His heart for them, so that our hearts begin to resemble His.

God has been saying this for a long time: “When you do it to the least of these, you do it to Me.”

Going forward, Flenniken can make a difference to people for the rest of their lives. It can give people a different story to tell, a story of hope and redemption.

How does your story intersect with the stories of the poor? Your life will be much richer if you look for ways to roll up your sleeves and rub shoulders with people who make you uncomfortable.

Flenniken is a story about the second chances that we all need.



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For additional copies of [Flenniken Landing: A Story of Hope and Redemption](#)

contact KLF at **865.524.2774** or visit **www.klf.org**.

All proceeds go to provide case management services for people now living in Flenniken Landing.