



HALEY HOUSE

But I Don't Like Veggies

By Didi Emmons

This article is an excerpt from Didi's cover article printed in Edible Boston (and featured on the Edible Nation blog) this fall. Just wanted to draw your attention to a nice feature about the Haley House. We have print copies available in the café and corner shop (the photos are great!), but you can also download the full text: <http://www.edibleboston.net/content/index.php/articles/fall-2008.htm>

The teenagers in my class are laughing and bouncing off the kitchen walls, and one of them, Gina, is singing full throttle into a rubber spatula "Should Have Let You Go" from Keisha Cole a la MTV, thrusting herself onto her buddy Giselle. I'm thinking she really could pursue a future as the next MTV star, but I force myself to move on as we have a lot of ground to cover. "Hello everyone. Today we are making a pizza with our own organic dough, tomato sauce, fresh mozzarella, red peppers, sweet potatoes, and caramelized onions." I get no reaction.

"Okay, from 1 to 10, how psyched are you about today's recipe?" Two give me a 10 and then four teens in a row give me a one. Then it's Giselle's turn. Looking as if I've just punished her, she grumbles "Zero. That pizza is nasty," I interject, "Giselle, do you remember what we say instead of nasty?" She says carefully, "I don't care for vegetables, thank you," then follows with "they make me throw up every time".

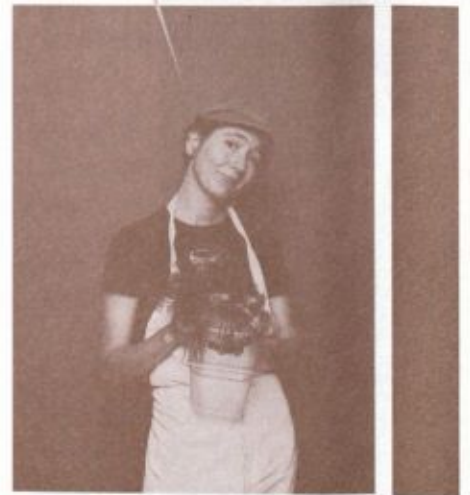
I often feel like a killjoy populating their beloved foods with vegetables, but there is a reason for my antics. Although the classes may illicit fear and loathing, there is a lot to learn. Our mission: To learn the difference between good food and junk food, the impact

junk food has on our body, and most importantly, how to cook.

Soon, knives flail, the onions are sliced, sweet potatoes cubed, peppers cut. The students are bright, inquisitive, engaged, and intent on getting the job done right.

Boston Police officer Bill Baxter (a.k.a. Donut) teaches gang resistance in the public schools and came up with the idea to bring his students to the cafe for cooking classes. As a child, he had taken cooking classes. As an adult, he became conscious that the way we pre-judge foods (such as "I plain hate onions") is the same mental mechanism that we use to prejudge people and

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Didi Emmons

photo by Michael Piazza

newsletter

winter 2008



photo by Michael Piazza

a letter from the editor

Early this fall, Ilona tried to get her head around this 43-year-old, grassroots organization. She grabbed potatoes, ink, and pens and charted out the development of our programs with a series of potato-stamped circles on sheets corresponding to Haley House's different eras. It culminated with X radiating circles. The staff made only one suggestion. Include the first year—the year that Kathe, John and others spent on Upton Street inviting homeless men into their basement apartment. Ilona came back to us with page #1 marked, "Upton Street" with a lone black circle in the center.

Strategic planning has begun. As staff, board members, and friends gather to envision the future of Haley House, we also take a look back. Haley House is forever shaped by its unique development from its first 25 years as an all-volunteer organization. The circles signify periods of intense political, faith, and family involvement. They mark periods when the soup kitchen lasted all day, and they mark the creation of the Haley House Bakery Café, now a thriving component of the Dudley Square community.

Today, the office is quiet. Kathe has spent all day in meetings at the café, her "second office," Noreen, still managing all of our housing 15 years later, is off meeting a contractor, and Kathleen O'Connor, our CFO, is at the bank. The live-in community is about to welcome its second child into its midst, and the corner shop is having a special "Baked Goods for a Dollar" day. Sitting at the development desk, I've received calls from folks looking for directions to the café, and calls from folks looking for volunteer opportunities. In the quiet of the day, I am crafting this letter to ask for your contributions to help sustain our programming. The underpinning of Haley House has always been people supporting our efforts in whatever way they could.

outdoor dinner & a movie

In August we offered our first outdoor dinner and a movie at the café. After a sun-drenched *Jellysmoke* was projected on a giant inflatable screen. Despite some technical difficulties, the night was a great success.

Volunteering

As we approach the holidays the weather worsens and our days are shorter. While we have a lot of volunteer inquiries, everyone seems to be busy with the days that surround them. We would love assistance in the days leading up to Christmas! Please be in touch if you are interested and available.

Or "Horace, you can't turn on all your cooktop burners to get your unit up to the 80 degrees you like. It's not healthy and it's not safe."

"I don't do that. Not me."

"Then how do you explain that the heat detector over your stove melted and set off the building fire alarm?"

"Beats me."

Or "Horace, you're going deaf. You can't go to sleep with your TV blaring. Teri upstairs spends the night listening to your choice of programming which she doesn't even like and can't get to sleep which she would very much like."

"Tell her to get earplugs."

Horace had been a truck driver, making enough money that at first he didn't qualify for a subsidy. He wasn't poor enough and therefore without a subsidy his rent was \$568 a month. But one day he accosted me in the hallway. "Lady, I can't pay this rent no more. They retired me. Can you do anything about that?" And we were able to obtain a subsidy for him and give him a degree of economic stability. Another time he met me outside the building, "I can't do those steps no more," referring to the four flights of stairs he climbed to reach his fourth floor unit. "Can you fix that?" And we were able to move him into a ground floor unit where stairs weren't an issue.

"Horace, you're not looking so good. Where were you? We missed you."

"I just got back from the hospital. Kidney transplant."

"Can I do anything?"

"I'll let you know."

Horace was also a gardener of sorts. Without asking permission – of course – he started planting vegetables in the little plot of land in front of the building. While other South End buildings have well

planned and planted gardens, our building displays a riot of pole beans, pepper plants, herbs, sunflowers and hollyhocks. And once a year I drove Horace to Home Depot so he could pick out a sack of mulch or a pack of seeds. (It was always preferable to be on Horace's good side.) And it was fun to watch people walk by and almost universally smile at the outrageousness of it all.

One of our ongoing struggles was the condition of his room: picture disaster. A couple times a year, mostly timed to anticipate inspections by outside agencies, I'd knock on his door. "Horace, you have to get this place clean. It's a health hazard."



"Lady, mind your own business. This is my place and it looks fine to me."

"Well, Horace, not actually. I'm responsible. When you own the building you can do what you want. But for now, you've got to clean this place up."

And then I would hold my breath on inspection day, hoping his room would pass muster – which it usually did miraculously. "Thanks, Horace," I'd quietly offer as we moved on to the next unit.

Over the years, we'd meet outside on the steps as he waited for a cab to take him for a check-up.

"How's it going, Horace?"

"I'm aching bad, Noreen." "Can I do anything? Do you need a ride?"

"I'll let you know."

But it was clear to both of us – and left unsaid – that his health was rapidly deteriorating, and he was suffering.

As the most recent inspection approached in early July, I approached Horace in his unit one more time. His back was to me as he worked carefully at a painting on an easel.

"Nice painting. I like the way you use the

color red. How are you doing? You don't look too good. The inspection is next week."

"I know, I know, Noreen. But can you send over that young kid to help me again?"

"Sure, let me check with Jim." Jim, being a member of the Haley House live-in community who, fortunately for me, had gained Horace's confidence.

"And I'll be back next week. OK?"

"OK, OK."

As I turned to leave, Horace also turned and hobbled three steps towards me, his feet now terribly swollen and deformed. He put his hands on my shoulders and surprised me with a gentle but sure kiss on my cheek. There was a surprising ease. We said little.

"Thank you."

How far we'd come! I walked back the five blocks to Haley House wonderfully grateful for this time in my life and the many, many people in Haley House who have shaped me over the past 15 years. "Thank you."

Five days later Wayne, the resident manager at 503, called the office, a certain urgency in his hello.

"Noreen, I think Horace is dead." I ran over to the property, thinking, "No. I just saw him." I entered the now so familiar room one last time. Horace was slouched in his chair, the TV blaring. He had died quite peacefully in his home of many years.

It was very difficult to say good-bye. It was much easier to say, again, "Thank you."

And "thank you" is the prayer with which I begin each day at Haley House.

For more information about our housing, please visit

[:http://www.haleyhouse.org/housing.htm](http://www.haleyhouse.org/housing.htm)

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by Michael Piazza

Volunteering

As we approach the holidays the weather worsens and our college volunteers head home to their families. While we have a lot of volunteer inquiries, everyone seems to want to work on the actual holiday, but not on the days that surround them. We would love assistance in December and January—almost any day but Christmas! Please be in touch if you are interested and able: volunteercoordinator@haleyhouse.org

Today we have more circles of activity dancing across the page. Our staffing has increased, mostly from hiring people in the Dudley Square community to learn valuable skills and give back through fresh produce and healthy, tasty creations at the café. The farm is also going strong. Beth and Bob receive weekly volunteers and donate thousands of pounds of produce to the café and food pantries. Our cooking classes are thriving and receiving more requests than ever before.

In closing, I ask you to think about what Haley House has given to you, to those you know, and to our

community. We work so hard to abide in our mission, focused on the root causes of suffering, while being mindful of ethics, justice, and love. We try not to ask often, so please consider opening your hearts.

Thank you for your support, thank you for your participation, and thank you for your care of Haley House throughout our 43 years.

Sincerely,

Christine Evans

Director of Development

If you would like to donate to Haley House please use the enclosed envelope or go to www.haleyhouse.org/contribute.htm.



From left to right: Kelly Dunn, Bing Broderick, Ramona Bermudez, Ron Gerald, Annette Bonds, Joi Smith, Margaret Santiago, & Cesar Alicia



Fulani Hayes gives the students something new to try.

photo by Michael Piazza

This photo was taken following the *ServSafe* class in July, when one of our trainees, Annette Bonds, received both her *ServSafe* & graduation certificates. Annette currently works for Children's Hospital.

an evolving relationship

Noreen Manzo reflects on her 15 years developing our permanent housing and supporting the tenants at Haley House

I wouldn't call it love at first sight, but over the years the relationship grew. Some times it was love/hate, sometimes it was love/love, and occasionally it was just a game we played of cat and mouse. And over time we learned to make accommodations for each other. But that kiss: that I shall never forget.

On June 1st of this year I completed fifteen years' working at Haley House. It was, for me, both a celebration and a surprise. In 1993 I agreed to work at Haley House as it embarked on a project to buy and rehab two buildings in Boston's South End and make them into permanent housing for homeless individuals. I thought it would take me about two years to get systems in place, and then I would go back to life as I had known it.

My learning curve those first two years was huge. I learned about construction as we did a "gut rehab" on the properties. How had I ever lived without understanding how and when to "sister" joists? I learned how to calmly but persistently pester contractors to keep to the construction scheduled. And I learned that there was an entire alphabet soup of city agencies and funders to whom we were now accountable and each of them had its own reporting requirements.

And I came to know Horace. He was one of a handful of residents who lived at 497 and 503 Columbus Ave. when Haley House purchased the properties. Indeed, he was the elder statesman of "503" having lived there from 1987. When Kathe McKenna and I made our first presentation to the residents – about how we were going to take their dilapidated, drug, rodent and crime infested units and turn them into lovely, safe, and affordable Single Room Occupancy units – we expected a warm reception. Not Horace. He looked at us curiously, perhaps even suspiciously, and said nothing. It would be that way for years. He didn't much care what our plans were as long as we didn't bother him.

As I had anticipated, it took me about two years to get the systems in place to run the buildings efficiently and satisfy our lenders that we knew what we were doing. But by then "bricks and mortar" and systems were not the focus of my job. For in addition to Horace, I had come to know Pablo, and Gale and Hattie and Howard, and would soon know the other seventy five individuals who have called Haley House home over the past fifteen years. Each of them came to us in crisis, homeless and trying to get their lives back in focus. I was humbled listening to their stories of bad luck or self-destructive behaviors that take them from living rooms to shelters. I came to see in their faces the face of my brother, my sister, my dad, and my mom but for bad luck or bad decision making. And I continue to be humbled even now as I walk a new resident into his or her room, hand over the keys and note the tear running down a cheek. Their frailty, their resiliency, remind me on a daily basis that we are all one, that there is more that binds us than separates us.

And over the years Horace and I danced our dance.

"Horace, what's that peculiar aroma coming from your unit and wafting through the building?"

"What smell? I ain't doing no weed. You mind your business, lady, and I'll mind mine."



Noreen Manzo

continued from page 1...

groups. Such prejudice is based on fear and is often mistaken while cutting us off from enjoyment, growth, and connection. Officer Baxter sees the kitchen as a laboratory. He constantly informs the youth during class "always be willing to take in new information." "If you hate onions on burgers, you might actually like them in soup, so check it out."

The whole-wheat pizza dough is ready and laid out on a big sheet pan. It was made earlier by the Haley House Café training program. I invite the students to touch and get familiar with the way fresh dough feels. Darrius, 14, squeezes the edge of the dough and asks with excitement, "can you chew this like gum?"

A half hour later, while the rest of the girls are setting the table, Giselle, who was lamenting about the vegetable pizza an hour ago,



watches me like a hawk as I pull the pizza from the oven. I'm guessing she's watching so she can choose the slice of pizza with the fewest vegetables. But she asks me how to know when a pizza is done (the underside of dough becomes golden) and I let her cut the pizza into squares, a job that takes considerable strength, but she handles it with confidence.

At the next class she is impatient to start chopping and raises her hand first for every task. By the sixth class, I overhear Giselle boast to Gina that she plans to go to culinary school. Best of all, she has been eating (and keeping down) a portion of vegetables in each class.

Danielle and Caliph's son, and the younger brother of Axé, the newest member of the Haley House community who was born on the second floor of 23 Dartmouth Street on October 30th, 2008.

Photo by Savannah Jacobson

In the last few months at Haley House, we set out to discover what specifically the youth were eating. We distributed disposable cameras to all of our classes and asked each teen to shoot what she or he ate until their film ran out. Out of 340 food photographs, we received only seven photos showed vegetables that could constitute a single serving. Three photos were of shredded iceberg lettuce and tomato salads, which while nearly void of nutrients, at least have fiber.

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