

Premiere Issue  
Spring/Summer 2005

# Village Spectrum

## Off to great places

a human review

## Just paper and ink

## Leaving the street

and hitting the ground running

## Human-ness

what it is to be human

A Back Door Publication



Marilyn Dyck  
Director / The Back Door

# Human-ness

## *How can we talk about what it is to be human?*

What words are useful? What ideas are important?

The dictionary is somehow not sufficient for our quest. And perhaps therein lies the essence – being human is not in our definitions but in our actions.

It is easy to compile lists of nouns and adjectives, verbs and adverbs, that represent pieces of our human-ness. With eyes cued by these concepts we witness our shared human experience.

The work of The Back Door is to help young people, who have been living on the street, reintegrate themselves into society. This means sustainable independence in

*Each human being is nurtured  
in and by the spectrum of  
their personal village.*

finding work, a place to live, and numerous other goals which our participants set for themselves. The Back Door does not provide the solution. It is a process, where participants and volunteers work together to set out the steps necessary to achieve a goal.

This work originates in human-ness, in the inclusion of acceptance (as individual persons) and the shared information of our cultures as the way we make our lives work together (as society).

Our continued human existence depends on learning what we need to know to survive and how to share our spaces. These things we learn from our parents and families, in daycare and kindergarten, from teachers and coaches, our friends and neighbors, and through the voices of books and media. Each human being is nurtured in and by the spectrum of their personal village.

The Back Door is pleased to offer our premiere issue of *Village Spectrum*. A spectrum is inclusive and variously hued by the activity and interplay of light. We offer you a spectrum of brief glimpses of the deep and rich color palette that is our community – the village for our children as they grow into society.

This first issue of what will become a bi-annual publication of *Village Spectrum* is a gift to you. Please read and share with a friend. We welcome your feedback, as well as your response and stories, at [info@thebackdoor.ca](mailto:info@thebackdoor.ca).

## The bus driver effect

Thomas Carrozzi

People often underestimate the influence of the individual. Perhaps it's because we live in a world that is seemingly controlled by faceless institutions such as governments and corporations. Our yearly appointment with the accountant, or a night at the theatre, can be a friendly reminder that we do not have much choice in certain matters. After all, when was the last time you were asked for your opinion on tax rates or the price of a box of popcorn?

Now before you start fretting over the futility of our world situation and the lack of control, I'd like you to stop and think about this – what if the bus driver doesn't show up?

Allow me to tell you. The people on the bus route won't be able to get to work, their employers will have difficulty operating their businesses, unhappy customers will stop consuming and fearful investors will stop investing. The economy will grind to a screeching halt, the dollar

will plummet and our entire economic system will come crashing down.

How reassuring to know that economic disaster and societal meltdown can result from the absence of one bus driver. I admit that this analogy is overly dramatic however, my goal is to demonstrate the importance of one person – a bus driver in this case – to our community.



Now we see that our bus driver is much more than a means of getting from A to B. He not only serves those who ride the bus, he serves the employers of those who ride the bus, the business investors who support the businesses who employ those who ride the bus, and ultimately, the economy. This individual is an essential component of the much larger function of our society.

This logic is easily applied to other individuals within our community. In this, our premiere issue, you will meet some of those people such as Back Door participants who have found a way to build a better life for themselves and others, a tireless volunteer whose efforts help young people, and people who will inspire you with their humanity. This inter-weaving of individuals is the fabric of the *Village Spectrum*. We encourage you to take some time, pour a cup of coffee or grab a box of popcorn, and enjoy.

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# The answers lie within

Thomas Carrozzier

In November 2002 her roommate told her about The Back Door. Two years and many contracts later, Erin is attending college and has very realistic goals for her future: an education and financial stability. In her own words, she wants to be *middle class*. Motivated and well-spoken, Erin spent seven years on and off the streets before deciding to turn her life around. Back then, she wished someone had told her to listen and look twice as much as she talked. “That’s why God gives people two ears and eyes, but only one mouth,” Erin says with a chuckle.

Recognizing that answers often lie within, The Back Door helped Erin become a goal-oriented person and, more importantly, taught her how to break goals down into bite-sized steps. “They don’t take your hand and walk you from A to B. They want you to learn the skills necessary to achieve goals that you set for yourself,” she says. “When you are told where to go and how to get there, your options are narrowed. That’s not to say The Back Door won’t point you in a preferable direction if they feel the need for guidance is there. It just means they’re empowering you to become the decision-maker.”

Erin also points out that The Back Door is unique in this respect based on her experience with several other helping organizations. She quickly adds that the cash given to The Back Door participants for each contract is no small incentive.



“The money I received helped with my bills,” says Erin. “That was my laundry money, my grocery money... what I like to call my bread and milk money.” This experience taught Erin a lot about the economic struggle many go through, so last Christmas, she organized a food drive and assembled 39 food hampers to assist fellow students.

Her great effort and leadership also brought 44 families \$25 gift certificates to Real Canadian Superstore and food baskets. “When I realized that even if I started saving in October, I would only be able to put away about \$150 for my Christmas expenses, I became motivated to help myself and others,” says Erin. “I began by handing out flyers to businesses and I ended up with tons of non-perishable food items. By collaborating with 11 companies I was able to do some good.”

Erin feels The Back Door was instrumental in helping her become self-sufficient. Now 23, and close to her graduation from the program, she volunteers 25 hours each week at the Drop-In Centre and submits three articles each month to the student paper at her school – a great step towards her next goal, a career in journalism.

# Just paper and ink

Dave Beck



*It was about a year and a half and another person ago, that I first set foot within The Back Door, cold and distraught. My friends, already participants here, had brought me along with them. I was excited to be accepted into the program. What more could a street kid want than to get money handed to them? All we had to do was fill out some forms, have a little chat, sign, shake hands, done. Sweet and simple. My first months of contracting were great. I’d come at the beginning of the month, do all my contracts in four successive days and not come back until the next. What were they thinking? Did they really believe I was going to put any effort into achieving those goals I made up? Were they even aware at all that the contracts, to me, were just paper and ink to be traded for more useful paper and ink? With such an awesome gig as this I had to keep coming back.*

Time after time I wrote goal after goal. “For money,” I thought, “for money.” Yet, somewhere in between then and now, things began to change. Perhaps the premise for coming was monetary gain, but the eventual results were much more substantial than anything tangible. True or false as they were, seeing these goals over time and in repetition emblazoned them subconsciously into my mind. After a while, seemingly out of nowhere, I surprised myself, and actually began to achieve some of these lies I had committed to paper.

What was happening here? Had I been fooled, or misled? I was supposed to be the one who fooled. I had betrayed myself. Only this betrayal was wrought by me unto my former self as a metamorphosis of sorts. Dependence became independence, laziness was industry, and lies were replaced by truth.

Hindsight shows me that The Back Door staff knew I might falsify my intentions, or put forth little effort in their actualization. But they still achieved their primary goal: to get me here and keep me coming back. Once this was achieved, they knew the rest would (in most cases, as in mine) fall into place with time. It worked for me, and many others who have frequented the Door.

Where I would be right now, had I not had the opportunity given to me by The Back Door, I could not truly say. Such circumstances likely would have been bleak. What I can say, however, is that in an age where people seek instant, meaningless gratification, The Back Door acts as both path and guide for the street kids who are lost, leading us slowly but steadily and surely towards success that we can hold as our own.

# Faces of The Back Door

Meet Judy Thomas, Back Door volunteer

*Each volunteer brings  
humanity and cultural  
awareness to The Back Door.*

*They personify the village.*

## Why did you choose to become a volunteer?

I enjoy helping others. Working at The Back Door and seeing participants change and grow is truly amazing. These are very interesting people. I can only imagine what strength and fortitude it takes to live on the streets, and what would happen if they had the skills to channel this energy into more productive activities. The potential contribution to society and to themselves is enormous.

## What have you gained from volunteering at The Back Door?

I have learned how life really is for these young people and how they struggle to survive in a society that has no consideration for their value. These are kind, intelligent human beings who, like most of us just want to do and be better. Our system just seems to find ways to hold them back.

## Which of your interpersonal skills do you think most benefits the participants?

I am a good listener, and by simply listening to their stories helps them find their own solutions. Talking to mainstream people, rather than to their peers, puts a different light on the problem. This leads to alternatives that would not have been considered otherwise.

## Do you feel there are enough people willing to volunteer?

We will always welcome more committed volunteers.

## How did you discover The Back Door?

I was looking for a place to volunteer when I met Marilyn Dyck from The Back Door, at the 2002 *Women of Vision Celebration*. She was a gift to me.

## What is unique about The Back Door compared to other non-profit groups?

It's a proactive process; it's not a handout. These youth come because they want to and The Back Door helps them find their own way into mainstream culture. When participants take time to think about what they want, they are no longer fenced in by a particular way of life. It takes a lot from any of us to make a change – even when we really want it. Their challenge, from my perspective, is overwhelming.



## The Back Door in three words:

Improving participants' outlook.

## What would you want others to know about Judy, the person?

I truly want to make a difference, even if just for one person.

## So you work hard and you volunteer, but what do you do for fun?

Read, run, ski, enjoy time with friends.

## Do you have a role model?

I have many. God, Wayne Dyer, Mahatma Gandhi, the Dalai Lama – basically anyone who espouses love and that we have choices.

## What do you believe would make our world a better place?

Treating each other the same regardless of social status, being more aware of our spiritual/inner selves, and slowing down to smell the flowers.



Overnight success is not an option when you're trying to get off the street. Look at it that way and you're bound to fail. I tried to get off the street for five years before eventually succeeding, and now I've hit the ground running and I'm never looking back.

The first month off the street was really hard: no money, no food, no friends, nothing. You have to leave everything behind and realize you can only help yourself. You can't make others around you get off the street.

On a positive note, many things change for the better: your habits, the way you dress, the way you talk, think and ultimately the way you live. Above all, what changes is

your perception of the world; you begin to see that everyone is not out to get you or bring you down.

I have now been off the street for more than six months and my life has improved a lot. I have an apartment, a beautiful kitten, a job that I love, a fair and interesting boss who thinks my jokes are hilarious, and a boyfriend who I believe is finally starting to get it. Most importantly, I have people in my life who have dreams and aspirations and want something out of life.

I feel this little fire growing in my soul (no, it's not heartburn) and notice a light in my eyes that hasn't been there in a long time. It's fun to live now, doing things like tobogganing at 1:00 in the morning, or

cooking dinner with friends and burning the chicken because we were so excited about starting a band.

I no longer worry about where I'm going to sleep or if I'm going to get food poisoning from eating dinner. I now have time to worry about what I'm going to wear, if I'm ready to write my GED, or if I'm growing a new mole on my back.

Before it was always, "Well, if I end up losing my place, I can always go back to the street." But failure is no longer an option. I promised myself that one day I will wake up and know that I have made it and I have done it through blood, sweat, tears, back alleys and dumpsters.

Amber Williamson

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# After hours

Books | Music | Drama | Art



## Changing Lanes

Directed by: Roger Michell  
Starring: Ben Affleck and Samuel L. Jackson  
Rated R for language

*Changing Lanes* begins with a freeway collision between Gavin Banek (Ben Affleck) and Doyle Gipson (Samuel L. Jackson), two New York men whose lives will be altered greatly by the fender bender. Banek is your typical hotshot lawyer, whereas Gipson is a recovering alcoholic struggling with the legal system to gain custody of his children.

At the time of the accident, both characters happen to be running late for very important meetings. Banek throws a blank cheque in Gipson's car to cover the damage and flees the scene, leaving Gipson with a trashed car and no way to the courthouse where his custody hearing is being held. Gipson notices that Banek, along with the blank cheque, has inadvertently dropped a file. He decides to hang on to it.

The judge is not impressed by Gipson's lateness, and matters only get worse. Gipson discovers he can't uphold the promise he made to the judge to buy a house for his former wife and children, because his credit has been ruined by one of Banek's people.

Now, Banek and Gipson are in possession of the other's important information, and their conflict escalates from there.

My advice: Look twice before changing lanes. *Jasan Shannon*



## Whale Rider

Directed by: Niki Caro  
Starring: Keisha Castle-Hughes, Rawiri Paratene, Vicki Haughton  
Rated PG 13 for brief language and a momentary drug reference

*Whale Rider* is an extraordinary family movie set in beautiful New Zealand among the Maori people. The film opens with the birth of twins – Pai and her brother. Both her mother and newborn brother die leaving Pai's father overwrought with grief. He then denies his destiny and leaves behind his surviving daughter to be raised by his mother and father, Koro, the village chief.

Twelve years later, with no son to assume leadership as tradition would dictate, the chief struggles to find and train his replacement.

Bright and inquisitive, Pai believes that it is her destiny to lead her people. This dream is shattered when Koro arranges to train some of the village boys in the traditional ways of spiritual leadership and, as a girl, Pai is forbidden to attend. Undaunted, she takes action. With the help of her uncle, she spies on her grandfather's training lessons and excels in all, but to Koro and his stubborn traditional ways, she is still "only a girl."

This story is rich and complex in its characters, storyline and striking scenery. It received the coveted People's Choice Awards at both the 2002 Toronto and Sundance Film Festivals. *Whale Rider* is an inspirational movie – definitely worth watching. *Lennie Rae*



## The Power of One

by Bryce Courtenay  
Published in the U.S. by Ballantine Books,  
a division of Random House, Inc. New York

*The Power of One* is a classic bestseller that will stand the test of time. The book follows the life of young Peekay, a poor, ostracized child of divided South Africa whose childhood and adolescence lead him to discover many truths about life. Through his desire to become the boxing welterweight champion of the world, Peekay develops passion, skill, insight, presence and power to champion the victims of South African society to justice. The book shows the ugliness of society's views about race, social status, prejudices and hatred.

What is more powerful than these entities in Courtenay's book, is the ability of one small, apparently insignificant and powerless child to use the strength within him, his mind, his heart and his friendship with others, to turn him into a strong, formidable leader who will win for all peoples. A must-read for adolescents and thinkers of the world, *The Power of One* is a book that will ignite in its readers a renewed strength of the ability of the human spirit to persevere and prevail. *K. Lech*



## Win cinema tickets

Solve this puzzle for a chance to win 2 cinema tickets. This cryptogram is a Haiku poem written by Troy Lighthouse. Haiku is a traditional form of Japanese poetry consisting of 3 lines of 5, 7 and 5 syllables.

ZO PAN PZEN ZP PRSNC  
PQ FNKRPN FNHZOZPZQO  
XQY BRO ANDG CQENQON

Email [backdoor@thebackdoor.ca](mailto:backdoor@thebackdoor.ca) or call 269-6658 with your answer. A draw will be made from all correct entries received by June 30, 2005. The Uptown Stage & Screen is located at 612 8th Avenue SW. For more info: [www.theuptown.com](http://www.theuptown.com).

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# Off to great places

A human review



Teachers of kindergarten, professors of literature, parents, grandparents, concerned citizens, fun-loving storytellers and children of all ages celebrate daily the profound contribution of Theodor Seuss Geisel, born March 2, 1904 in Springfield MA.

He used his way of seeing to create political cartoons, documentaries and profound stories which offer personal insight as varied as the people who experience his work. His writing demonstrates the power of humour to make us think.

Shortly before his death, it is said he was asked if there was anything left unsaid. His answer included these words, “The best slogan I can think of to leave with the U.S.A. would be: We can ... we’ve got to ... do better than this.” Judith and Neil Morgan’s *Dr. Seuss and Mr. Geisel: A Biography* (Random House, 1995; Da Capo, 2000).

Dr. Seuss’s final book, *Oh The Places You’ll Go!* was copyrighted in 1990. An excerpt from The Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data summary says: “ ... Advice in rhyme for

proceeding in life, weathering fear, loneliness, and confusion; and being in charge of your actions ...” It speaks of the quest of each of us to be aware in the moments of our lives, to think and to challenge ourselves to maximize our choices and our potential. Thinking out of the box is only the first step!

Dr. Seuss advocated for social change, teaching generations of children not only how to be better readers, but better people as well. And to people everywhere who have read or will read, we quote the final line in *Oh The Places You’ll Go!*

“You’re off to great places!  
Today is your day!  
Your mountain is waiting.  
So ... get on your way!”

Theodor Seuss Geisel died September 24, 1991 at 87 years. The world is changed in many small and large places because one man was true to his integrity and followed his vision. We are fortunate that his legacy remains a part of our village.

For years *The Back Door* has been committed to offering excellent coffee to all who enter. Our Aramark coffee guy is Hugh. We have done business with Hugh forever.

Hugh is not just any guy – but he could be. If you met him on the street you would say he looks exactly like any guy. To us ... there is more answer to the question: Who is Hugh? He pays attention to the people who are his customers. He cares who they are as people. He remembers what their ‘usual’ order is. He represents his business with a strong ethic of service. Hugh cares about life. He cares about what makes it work for different people.

Why does that matter? For us, it matters because we are happy to see him. After his regular stop we are cheered, motivated to reflect his excellence in our day, and proud to serve the product he brings. Our “customers” in turn enjoy!

Does Hugh and how he does what he does matter? To us? To others? To the world?

Being human in our society is difficult. We have complex and busy agendas and make life work by overwhelming numbers of choices, decisions and

activities. There is no left-over time. Moments are rare that are offered to us unscripted. Being human in any moment must be an intentional choice.

Children offer us those moments. Being in the moment is their best gift. To join them in the moment is to be human. The millions of moments that build our lives begin when we are born. Shared moments are the context of learning and growth. Each one is an opportunity. Our past moments build our future. Our children are nurtured by and vulnerable to this process. The Back Door is the experience of being human in a context where we can ‘see’ one another and recognize our shared humanity.

In being human, our greatest advantage, our immeasurable possibility, our largest triumph, is in the context of the moment. Being human is not hard. It just needs us to pay attention. We can all do that! And if we forget, the next moment is a second away.

At *The Back Door* today we realized we are running out of coffee. Hugh is not scheduled until next week but we know that when we call him, he will fit us in today. His commitment to life makes our life work. Thank you Hugh for being in our village!



“It is the things we do not see about a person that makes them human.”  
Miriam Toews, *A Complicated Kindness*

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