

Experiential Project: Homeless in Philadelphia

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Abstract

The following is a narrative of Michael Witt, James Thibault, and Khushbu Kheti during their experience as homeless individuals on the streets of Philadelphia. Included herein is a description of our inventory and a narration of the events that transpired. Additionally, each participant provided first-person editorial comments regarding their experience.

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Supplies

Aside from the clothes on our back, we had 3 cheap ponchos, \$25, 3 (16 oz.) bottles of water, a multi-tool, a backpack, a pad of paper and writing utensils, a blanket, an audio-recording device and Khushbu's iPhone, which was left in the off position until she checked in daily with both her parents and Hanna Agnew, in order to let someone from the civilized world know that we were still alive and safe during our experience.

Narration: Michael, Khushbu and James Begin Their Experiment

They enjoyed their last meal at Fairmount Pizza. Each of them ate a slice of pizza and Michael and Khushbu had a soda to drink. After finishing, Michael told Khushbu and James, "I cannot believe we're *really* doing this!" They briefly exchanged thoughts and ideas regarding what they were about to encounter; there was a mixture of trepidation and excitement surrounding the anticipation of the unknown. Upon finishing eating, they embarked on their journey, commencing from the intersection of 20th and Fairmount toward the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. EDITORIAL, James: I recall at this time Michael expressing how excited he was about the prospect of the fun we were going to have on our "adventure." I remarked at the time something to the effect of "just wait until Sunday when we're cold as hell and our tears are freezing." EDITORIAL, Khushbu: I felt a twinge of uncertainty when we started our journey with a "last meal". For me it, it felt a little overly dramatic to be leaving on a journey of relieving ourselves of worldly possessions by over indulgence in food. However, I did understand the need to "bulk up" before heading out to the streets.

At this time the weather was cooling, the sky was overcast, however not yet uncomfortable. The rush hour traffic sped by them as they stopped to observe all of the

monuments along the Parkway. At one point Michael even suggested that they could, “take [their] time and stop and read all of the monuments” due to their seemingly limitless amount of time, which would soon prove to be detrimental. They relaxed for a bit at the George Washington Statue in front of the Art Museum. Next they headed for what Khushbu humorously deemed as, “The Tunnel of Death.” This tunnel was actually the underpass that starts at Kelly Drive and Spring Garden Street, passes below the Art Museum, and exits at Spring Garden Street right before it bridges over the Schuylkill River. The underpass was formally a two-lane traffic underpass, however for years one lane has been closed. Dividing the lanes are iron pillars. One side for automobile traffic, the other closed and filled with crumbled papers, syringes, and other forms of waste. As they descended towards the underpass, traffic sped passed them on the left; they approached a line of jersey blocks used to close the one lane. They stepped over the blockade and headed into the underpass. The walk through the tunnel was somewhat of a thrill. James led, followed by Michael a few feet behind him, then Khushbu a few feet behind him. Dead center in the middle of the underpass Michael turned around to discover Khushbu several yards behind him. “What the fuck, Khushbu? Are you okay?” blurted out of his mouth.

She said, “Yeah.” They continued through the underpass, kicking through and stepping over garbage. EDITORIAL, James: It should be noted herein that Khushbu was wearing borrowed boots; this likely was hampering her stride to a degree already, though little did any of us know just how important her choice in footwear would turn out to be. EDITORIAL, Khushbu: I indeed, was already feeling the wear and tear on my feet in these early moments of our journey, however what was slowing me down even more was the haunting beauty of being on the other side of a tunnel I so frequently drove through. As I walked through the tunnel, I could only

imagine how certain items ended up discarded so seemingly carelessly. Who had thrown a CD out their car window and not thought twice about it? Why?

As they exited the underpass they headed towards the Water Works via Art Museum Drive. Atop the hill a pavilion could be seen that offered seats and a nice view overlooking the boathouses on the Schuylkill River. Passing joggers made it a point not to acknowledge the voyagers; they eventually reached the pavilion sat on a small cliff above the Fairmount Waterworks Interpretive Center. The view consisted of West Philadelphia; congested traffic on the Schuylkill Expressway (Interstate 76); the boathouses, not yet lit up; and the giant Greek-style pillars that make up the Waterworks. They all sat down and took a few moments to relax. The weather was beginning to turn colder as nightfall was fast approaching. Two middle-aged white women entered the pavilion. Both glanced at the adventurers, and then proceeded to take in the view. After a few brief minutes, they turned around and glanced at the out of place group again, this time with a look of disgust on their faces as they exited the pavilion.

They gathered themselves together and headed west, across the Spring Garden Street Bridge into University City. Khushbu, a Drexel University graduate, explained the Drexel Fraternity and Sorority houses as they walked. They all shared some laughs along the way; despite being hungry in the cold weather, they were all able to maintain a sense of humor and joy. It was as if they were all thinking to themselves, “What did I get myself into?” but at the same time that thought was racing through their minds, they realized that they were glad that they were experiencing the journey with close friends; a small, but essential, support network.

They approached a fenced tennis court at the intersection of 34th and Arch Streets. They discussed the fact there was plenty of time to waste, so they decided to take a seat and watch the tennis players. It began to snow. They joked about playing tennis in the snow, discussing the

wonderment of seeing the sport played in a snow shower. As they watched the players, they shared some very personal aspects of their lives. Khushbu and James started off, while Michael laid on the bench, staring at the night sky, listening to their thoughts. While talking they observed the foot traffic passing; most were young, college aged. The passersby gave us the *look*. The look seemed to say, “Why are these bums ruining everything?” Others glanced at the homeless crew from a distance, with repulsion, but made it a particular point to lock their eyes straight ahead as they passed, acting as if they did not see or acknowledge them at all. At this time Michael began to express a story from his personal life. The bond between the three of them was strong. They had, and still have, a very trusting relationship. EDITORIAL, James: The snow had started out as novel, but as we sat by the tennis courts, it became apparent that the cold at nightfall was a legitimate concern that was starting to cause us some discomfort. EDITORIAL, KHUSHBU: Maybe it was the comfort of a campus I had known and loved for years or the undeniable love and trust I have with James and Mike, but it seemed like the best time to unload some heavy baggage. It was almost as if my mind had decided on its own to dump some of that stuff out so that I could fully absorb the experience of the upcoming days.

They decided to go to Locust Walk, on the campus of the University of Pennsylvania. They sat at the Benjamin Franklin Statue on college green briefly, where they decided to relax and possibly get some sleep. The snow turned to rain, and the cold was now a very real issue. Unable to relax, they noticed the giant button sculpture across from them, in front of the rear exit of the Van Pelt Library. The three of them decided to put their ponchos on and head over to the giant button. Khushbu and Michael crawled underneath; James stood outside of the button. Michael suggested to James that they utilize the wholes in the button to play “Whack-A-Mole,” the arcade game that involves the player whacking the plastic moles as they pop-up. Michael

offered to be the mole, unfortunately the game never materialized. EDITORIAL, James: It was during the rain in the near freezing weather here that prompted us to start considering our possibilities with regard to shelter and sleep during the upcoming night. This began to guide our travels.

They left Locust Walk and headed through Hill Square Park to 33rd Street. As they approached 33rd and Market Streets, Michael begged Khushbu to ask the Insomnia Cookies worker what he planned on doing with the leftover cookies at the end of the night. The worker told us, “There usually aren’t any leftovers.”

Headed down Market Street towards Center City, they decided to stop in the 30th Street Station to warm up and use the bathroom. Throughout this entire journey, they relied on the PECO Building as their primary source of time and temperature. It was close to midnight; the station was somewhat busy. They all used the bathroom and sat down for a moment to warm-up. Within the Station there were several restaurants, all of which were closing soon. They walked into the Wendy’s, where they noticed that the prices seemed to be a little higher than usual, so they decided to continue their journey into Center City without eating.

They arrived at a McDonald’s located at 17th and Walnut. At the door sat a man who asked them for change as they entered. All declined the request and entered the restaurant. Ordering from the dollar menu, they ordered five McChicken sandwiches, two coffees, and one hot tea. All three decided on the McChicken sandwich due to high caloric content. After consuming their food they played hangman for about an hour. At this time two young females entered the restaurant mocking the homeless man at the front door. EDITORIAL, Michael: I made every effort to give these two young females a dirty look in defense of the homeless man.

They had all discussed that at some point in time they were going to have to use the bathroom; Michael took this opportunity at McDonald's to do so and Khushbu highlighted the luxury Michael had of having to use the bathroom while they were paying customers within a restaurant. Michael took a Lysol bleach wipe with him; once Michael finished, he thoroughly scrubbed his hands clean in the sink, wetted some paper towels, then returned to the stall to run the dampened paper towel between his legs and then got another for under his arms. This was his *bath*.

After further discussion, they decided to head to Love Park, with hopes of possibly meeting and conversing with other homeless people. They walked through the park, but it was empty. While sitting at the benches close to the intersection of 17th and Arch Streets a few people walked by them; the passersby seemed to make every effort to avoid staring and failed to acknowledge their existence. EDITORIAL, Michael: At this point, my hip and leg began to ache and stiffen-up due to a pelvis fracture sustained after a thirty-five foot fall in 1999, which lead to several surgeries over the years. I am prescribed hydrocodone-acetaminophen 7.5/750 as a form of pain therapy for the inflammation and osteoarthritis of my right hip and joints, but did not have my medication.

After some time they decided to head back toward Rittenhouse Square, in part to force pedestrians "out on the town" to confront us on the sidewalk. As they passed by the visitors' center within the park, they heard a voice from near the building. "What the fuck is that?" Michael asked. "I hear it too" said Khushbu. James, who was leading the way, stopped and turned around. Michael approached the building and said, "Hello?" A female voiced yelled back, "Hey! I'm okay. I'm homeless and just sitting here. *You*s can come down here and talk to me if you want. Come on." They headed down cement steps to a walled, basement like area that lead

to a door labeled “Restricted Access”, below the visitors’ center. In front of us was a puddle of fluid; on the other side in a corner was a middle-aged white female. “I’m just looking for a place to stay warm. I *just* became homeless.” She said. They all greeted her, then she requested, “Come on over and sit with me. Just step over my pee.” As the three of them neared her, the scent of alcohol reeked from her breath and skin. She immediately began slurring, and asked, “What are you guys doing out here?” She soon introduced herself as, “Raquel,” almost immediately followed by full disclosure of her recent personal history. Throughout the discussion, Raquel consistently used foul language and racist slurs when referring to others. Raquel revealed that she was an alcoholic, who had recently been released from a crisis center. According to her, she “just had a few draughts of Yuengling” at a bar before heading to Love Park. She continued, “Are you guys looking for some dope? ‘Cause you’re in the *wrong* area for that shit.” Raquel informed them that she had been homeless off and on for years. Raquel informed them that she had spent time at Guadenzia treating for her alcoholism, and earlier this very night she had phoned an outreach program for the homeless that offers transportation to the center. She began to tell a story that took place before she arrived at Love Park. “I was at this store and the chinky-gooky guy wouldn’t let me buy two bags of Doritos with my access card. I was gonna fuckin’ fuck him up.” Raquel went on to inform us that prior to entering the store, she had called the outreach program to request to be picked up from the store.

“So I was tellin’ that fuckin’ chink to let me buy ‘em, then some fuckin’ nigger showed up. Yeah! I said it!” She then started yelling, “Nigger! Nigger! Nigger! Nigger! Who the fuck cares? You guys are white so you’re cool.” All three maintained composure and eye contact with Raquel. “So I told the fuckin’ nigger to keep his fuckin’ monkey hands off of me, and he said, ‘Goodbye lady, you just lost your ride.’”

Michael asked Raquel, “So the guy you called a ‘nigger’ was from the center, and came there to pick you up?”

“Yeah, but I don’t fuckin’ care. They can all go back to the planet of the apes, where they came from. I fuckin’ hate ‘em.” Michael glanced at James then Khushbu. Raquel’s drunken and hateful rant continued, until they decided it was time to move on.

“Aw! You’re gonna leave me?” Asked Raquel.

“Well you’re going to be here later?” Asked Khushbu.

“Yeah. I ain’t got nowhere to go!”

“Okay. Well be back later.” Said Khushbu. Raquel insisted that they promise her that they would return. She told them that she loved them and requested them to put their hands on top of her hands.

“One! Two! Three!” Counted Raquel, who then threw her hands in the air along with theirs and by herself yelled, “White power!” EDITORIAL, Khushbu: When Raquel asked me my name, she seemed startled at the response that came from my mouth. It was as if she was expecting me to say something less difficult to pronounce, asking me to repeat myself with a look of confusion on her face. I don’t know if after she learned my name was Khushbu that she was just overlooking the fact that I wasn’t really white or she was just THAT drunk. It seemed to me that I was accepted by the white boys; therefore I must be okay in Raquel’s book of harsh racial biases.

“Oh. Okay. We’ll see you later.” Said Michael. They exited Raquel’s area from beneath the visitors’ center when Michael said to James and Khushbu, “The recorder! We forgot all about it!” He immediately requested the recorder from Khushbu and began to dump his thoughts and recollection into the recorder, which included adlibs from James and Khushbu. They left the park

and while they were still recording, a man asked them for change, which also made it onto the recording.

In the area of 18th and Chestnut Streets there are several popular nightclubs; Khushbu, who lives nearby, has friends and acquaintances that frequent or work at the bars and clubs. The crew decided to make a few passes by the nightclubs in attempt to see if Khushbu would be recognized, and to observe the responses they received from those whom passed. They received several strange looks and finally a bouncer in front of Byblos nightclub looked twice at the group and singled out Khushbu.

“What you doin’ out here?” He asked.

“I don’t know, just walking around.” Responded Khushbu.

“Why are you dressed *like that*?” Asked the bouncer.

“Cause I am.” Said Khushbu, with a slight giggle. Both said their goodbyes to each other and the three homeless-looking Ivy League students continued their journey. “What the fuck! I knew that shit was gonna happen!” barked Khushbu at the crew.

“It’s what we wanted! That’s why we walked through there,” responded Michael.

“Yeah. I cannot believe he recognized you considering that you look like a guy!” Joked James. EDITORIAL, Khushbu: I felt awkward and uncomfortable having my “normal” life clash with our homeless experiment. It was strange to be looked at in such a way by those who normally see me as attractive and charismatic.

They continued walking towards Rittenhouse Square Park; on the way three younger females wearing tight dresses were walking in front of them. One turned around and looked at them then leaned toward her friends to say something. EDITORIAL, Michael: I suggested at

this point to James and Khushbu that the three females would rather walk next to a dark park, than walk fifteen feet in front of three people, simple because they looked a certain way.

Along Walnut Street, they stopped to sit on a three-foot high brick wall. Khushbu reached into her backpack and pulled out a permanent marker and wrote in small print her, Michael's, and James's initials on a graffiti laden wall. They remained there for about twenty minutes before deciding to head back toward University City. EDITORIAL, James: Michael convinced our group to head back to University City solely for the purpose of hoping to land some cookies from Insomnia cookies when the truck closed at 3 am.

Headed westbound on Walnut Street, all three were shivering due to the cold and wet weather. There was little traffic and they only thing on their minds was food, shelter, and warmth. The bitter weather was picking up; the rain fell harder, and the wind whipping across the Walnut Street Bridge cut through their clothing.

As they approached the Insomnia Cookies truck on 33rd Street, they relied on the PECO Building to get the time. It was before 3:00AM; they sought shelter on the patio of Drexel University's Hagert Library, ducking away from security in the nearby window. Time to *relax*. All three of them collapsed onto the cement and sighed with relief, still suffering from the cold weather. Almost as quickly as the relaxation settled, it ceased. Fire trucks blared past them. First one, followed by another a few minutes later, and then followed by an ambulance shortly after that. There was no peace, or relaxing. The urban streets and Mother Nature seemed extremely unforgiving.

Michael noticed that the cashier inside of the truck seemed to be closing down for the night. Too shy to beg, Michael pleaded with James and Khushbu to ask the guy for the leftover cookies. After nearly a half-hour of begging Khushbu to beg on his behalf, Khushbu finally gave

in and approached the truck. The employee seemed both hesitant and upset at the fact Khushbu was asking, however he still gave over two boxes stuffed with leftover cookies from the day. They had gained a food supply. Michael reached into the boxes and picked out his favorite cookie and began to eat it as they headed east on Market Street. Cohesively, they decided it would be a good idea to revisit the 30th Street Station for warmth and to relax with our food. EDITORIAL, James: Michael was extremely eager, almost obsessed with eating a cookie as soon as we had them in our possession. Michael was unable to wait the three-block walk before eating, Michael forced open a box (there were two boxes, and they were heavily laden with cookies and Khushbu was holding the boxes with both hands, thus unable to defend the box tops) and snatched a cookie and began eating it like a starved animal. Clearly, our plight was getting to Michael more so than either Khushbu or myself at this point in time. While the cookies seemed like a prize at first, it would later become clear that a diet of “sugar bombs” and McDonald’s would haunt us.

They entered the main lobby of the station; to their surprise, individuals were sleeping on almost all of the benches, while two Amtrak Police officers stood at the center desk without objection. They all used the bathroom then returned to two vacant sets of wooden benches. Khushbu and James lay on one bench head to head. Michael laid on the bench adjacent to them. Finally. Warmth. Shelter. Peace. Quite. Sleeping was next to impossible. Michael fell asleep first, followed by Khushbu. James decided to take this opportunity to write about the journey thus far.

Awake. Asleep. Awake. Asleep. Repeat. The cycle continued until there was a knock on the bench above Michael’s head. “Time to wake up. Do you have a ticket to ride?” Asked an

Amtrak Police Officer. Completely out of it and confused as to how to answer, Michael sat up to hear the same words calmly repeated to him, “Do you have a ticket?”

“No. No ticket.” Replied Michael as Khushbu and James got up.

“It’s time to go then, bud.” Said the officer. The three of them took turns using the bathroom once again. After about ten minutes, they headed back out to the streets.

The cold and wet weather welcomed them back to misery. James decided to lead the crew to the pavilions at Lemon Hill. The walk from the 30th Street Station to Fairmount Park was quiet. Fog covered the distance. The vibrant City of Philadelphia seemed dead and depressing, and as if it were rejecting them altogether. The three unwanted travelers crossed back over the Spring Garden Street Bridge, making a brief pit stop at the same pavilion they had visited the previous evening.

Upon arriving in Fairmount Park they all gathered at the same table under a pavilion. Michael began to inform Khushbu and James of his need to leave. Khushbu offered him her blanket. Sitting next to James, Michael slid over towards him more and they both placed the blanket on their legs, underneath the table. Repeatedly, Michael informed them both of his need to return home. His constant complaints were a nuisance to the point where Michael even stated, “I know my bitchin’ is getting annoying. I can’t help it.” Directly in front of him, but on the other side of the picnic table, Khushbu looked exhausted. After a few minutes of conversation, mostly of which was of Michael’s complaints, Khushbu came over to their side of the table in a desperate attempt to gain warmth via body heat. The wet weather was slightly above freezing—the most miserable of conditions. Not cold enough for snow, not warm enough for comfort, but just wetness, dampness, and a bone-chilling breeze depleting them of their warmth.

EDITORIAL, Michael: I kept telling himself, “Don’t pussy-out. Don’t pussy-out.” but my

thoughts were unconvincing. Faced with the harsh reality of homelessness for less than twenty-four hours, I had reached my limit. With every spoken word, or even the slightest facial movement, I could feel the outside corners of my already cracked lips continue to split open.

The crew noticed a woman in the distance with her Newfoundland Retriever. James said, “I bet that dog is lovin’ the weather. Nice thick coat. It’s like their natural habitat.” They all agreed. Moments later Michael snapped. In a demanding demeanor Michael said, “I’m fuckin’ done. I can’t do this anymore. I need to go. I’m sorry, but I’m fuckin’ done.” When asked by Khushbu if he was going to walk back to James’s house Michael informed Khushbu and James that he would use the ten dollars in his pocket to catch a cab back to 20th and Fairmount Streets, get his car, and then return with the key to James’s house and replacement money. Additionally, it was agreed that Michael would bring hot tea to Khushbu and James.

Michael apologized several times. He continuously reemphasized the fact that he could not do it anymore. He said, “I know I’m letting you both down, but I don’t fuckin’ care!” Perhaps it was a thought, but Michael said it out loud. EDITORIAL, Michael: I felt as if Khushbu was upset over my departure. Either way, I felt defeated by Mother Nature and the unforgiving circumstances to which I had been voluntarily exposed. My thoughts and actions were a direct result of my lack of self-control caused by the impact of the circumstances. I allowed the experience to *get the best of me*. At this moment I was thoughtless. Everything was about me and my comfort, and I had little to no concern about what James and Khushbu thought of my need to conclude this journey only eighteen hours after getting started.

They both agreed that Michael should voice record his final thoughts before departing. Khushbu pulled out the digital recorder and Michael made his report. James reached into his

pocket and pulled out a single key and set it on the table. Michael picked up the key, apologized again and departed. His sore feet burdened every step as he headed towards Kelly Drive.

Kelly Drive, Michael's Perspective

During the short, but endless walk towards the Drive, he kept his eyes peeled for a taxi. After a few failed attempts to successfully pull a cab, one finally stopped. He asked himself, "Do I look *that* shitty?" He jumped into the back of a Toyota Rav4 taxi. The feeling of a cushioned seat was luxurious. Michael put his head back and took several deep breaths. "It's over," he thought to himself. Khushbu and James were the last of his worries. During the short cab ride Michael fantasized about a hot shower and a bed.

Michael arrived at James's house. Immediately, he went upstairs and grabbed his car keys and headed back out. Out of pure laziness and exhaustion, Michael decided that he would purchase tea from a nearby Wawa, rather than making it. He entered the store and went directly to the deli and placed an order for a sandwich. After getting the tea, accompanied with a chocolate milk, he rushed back to his car. Completely impatient and in desperate need of food, Michael devoured his sandwich in his car while parked in front of Wawa and proceeded to head back to James and Khushbu.

They remained at the table underneath the pavilion, completely covered up. As Michael approached he called out, "Jimbo! Khushbu!" The unveiled themselves and Michael handed them their sixteen ounce cups of hot tea along with several sugar packets. Michael again apologized and stated, "I don't regret my decision." Michael wished them a safe journey and headed back to his car.

EDITORIAL, Michael's Response

When I arrived at James's house, I undressed myself and jumped into the shower. It was a paradise. The hot water beating off of my skin rinsed the misery away, for the entire forty-five minutes that I remained beneath the spout. Moments later I collapsed into bed and slept for six hours. Upon awakening, I immediately packed my belongings and started my drive home. Normally, my music is loud and I spend my road trips singing in his car; this trip was different. I didn't even bother to plug in my iPod. The hour-long trip back to the Allentown area seemed endless. I couldn't help but worry for James and Khushbu. A few miles before the Lansdale exit, northbound on Interstate 476, I pulled off to the shoulder and expressed my apologies, concerns, and well wishes to James and Khushbu via text message. Although they did not have access to their mobile devices, I wanted to make sure I documented my feelings as I was experiencing them. I spent the duration of my trip asking myself, "If I feel this worry and fear for James and Khushbu and I *know* that they will be home soon, what about the families, the mothers waiting for their sons and daughters to return from life on the streets?" My feelings of worry felt incomparable, but exceptionally relevant. I was now experiencing homelessness from another perspective. Knowing that two of my closest friends were wondering the streets, in the cold, only reactivated the massive stress load. I pulled off the shoulder and proceeded home, but with resistance toward wanting to return to meet up with James and Khushbu. "If I go back, it's unfair. I slept. I showered. I ate. I wouldn't even know where to find them. The park? West Philadelphia? Home? Maybe they snapped too?" These mixed emotions were almost more nerve-racking than the experience of homelessness itself. I wanted to be with them. A variety of thoughts streamed through my mind, as I continued to speculate as to how individuals with loved ones, lost in life on the streets, must worry day to day; week to week; month to month; year to

year. I found myself with a thought that I can only assume that those individuals with homeless loved ones share, “They’ll be home soon.”

I recall the work of Ruby Payne, which discusses generational versus situational poverty, which brought me to a personal conclusion. With generational poverty, as research has indicated, people are able to adapt to the circumstances over extended periods of time. In the case of situational poverty, it is more sudden, and more of a shock. Given that I had never been homeless before, or had ever had to worry about my next meal, I was being subjected to situational poverty. This subjection proved to defeat me to the point where I had to exit; however I had the option to exit. Millions lose their jobs, income, home, and families. They virtually go from having it all, to having nothing in almost an instant. As I experienced, on a much lesser level, this is extremely stressful. I’ve learned a lot from this experience and will likely reflect upon it throughout the remainder of my life.

Narration: Khushbu and James Continue

Upon Michael’s departure, a calm came over the two remaining travelers. For an unknown period of time, there was peace and quiet. This was later broken by Michael’s return. After his final departure, Khushbu and James reflected on the new level of peace that reigned. EDITORIAL, Khushbu and James: We spent a good deal of time discussing our inability to aid Michael in coping through his struggles with the experience; we had tried a variety of approaches, but there was nothing we could do to convince him to stay. In the end, we were relieved by his departure, as it reduced the amount of negativity we were experiencing, and certainly the situation was difficult enough without having the added burden.

This only lasted so long; the cookie diet got to Khushbu, and she ended up getting sick in a nearby trashcan. As dark gray weather turned to lighter gray weather, they decided to take to

the streets once more, in search of something other than cookies to eat. During the walk back to McDonald's, they discussed the incredible amount of physical pain they were starting to feel in their knees, and feet. After eating, they began to experience a new level of exhaustion where nodding off became commonplace.

They decided to make their way to University City again, knowing that their classmates would be attending a study group on campus. Upon encountering multiple classmates, they were offered some refreshments. Khushbu and James shared a sandwich that was NOT from McDonald's and ate some fruit and some potato chips. While eating, they were able to dry out and warm up for a short while inside of the food court at 34th and Walnut.

In order to avoid more rain, they sought out Barnes & Noble after the food court, and picked out some books and sat in the café. After dozing off, they were awoken by a security guard and dismissed from the bookstore.

As evening descended toward nightfall, they decided that this night would be spent in Olde City, exploring another neighborhood at night to see what kind of interactions and responses could be observed via the pedestrians there. On the way there, while stopped looking at a menu in a restaurant window, Khushbu accidentally knocked over a chalkboard menu on the sidewalk. A passerby volunteered, "You know, if you break that sign, you're gonna have to pay for it." EDITORIAL, James: This was becoming more typical of the way in which onlookers were viewing us. I should add that now we were indeed an odd couple; Khushbu had a boyish look to her, and considering our age differential, we were getting looks of confusion like: "Are they father-daughter, father-son, a perverted old man with his young male/female partner?"

As they approached Olde City, their legs were becoming less and less functional, and Khushbu was reporting several blisters on both of her feet; this slowed their pace to a near crawl,

which made it more difficult for them to stay warm. Upon arriving in Olde City, they made their way to the Irish Immigrant Monument and sat at the base of it in the rain, considering the plight of said immigrants. They recorded more thoughts about their experience in the audio recording device.

As late night arrived, they made their way back across town toward the McDonald's on the 1700 block of Walnut Street, in order to have some warm tea and dry out. Crossing the city was laborious, and took well over an hour at a snail's pace. McDonald's was warm inside, and what little money they had left afforded them tea. EDITORIAL, James: People watching at this point was making me jealous; everyone was having fun, socializing, having spent a night out on the town with their friends. We too had spent a night out on the town, but it was far from fun, and increasingly more painful and exhausting. Anyone who looked at us at this point was likely to assume we were homeless; we looked and felt the part.

As McDonald's closed, Khushbu and James took to the streets again, completely exhausted and wondering how we would survive the increasingly colder temperature and winds. They made their way to Love Park, curious to see if they would run into other homeless individuals, or maybe revisit Raquel. No one was on the streets or in the park. They sat on a bench and huddled together for nearly two hours, the wind whipping by, unable to sleep or get warm. EDITORIAL, James and Khushbu: We discussed how close we were to Khushbu's apartment building, and how we would likely go hypothermic if we remained out on the streets in the cold windy weather for much longer. We seriously considered giving up and making our way to the lobby of her building, but instead we held out hope that we could make it to sunrise, or the opening of McDonald's in the morning. EDITORIAL, Khushbu: It felt like a tease to see my building from the bench of LOVE Park. I couldn't stop staring during parts of the night at the

building that housed me for the past two years. How lucky I felt that I would be arriving back to that apartment in a few days, and how unlucky for those who just don't have that end light.

As it was still cold and dark out, and they were near freezing, Khushbu and James took back to the streets on foot and made their way back toward McDonald's, hoping against hope that it would be open by the time they arrived. The walk was extremely slow, Khushbu's blistered feet and their nearly crippled cold knee joints finding it difficult to move. Upon arrival at McDonald's, they noted that all the chairs were up on the tables. The sign in the door indicated that they would open at 6am; it was 6:05am, and when they tried the door handle, the door pulled open, and they entered to the warmth inside.

Khushbu and James ordered tea with the remainder of their money, and sat, exhausted, while the sun rose outside. They could see the sunshine for the first time since Friday day, before they had embarked on their journey. They began a discussion coming to terms with the reality of their situation; it was time for them to end the experiment, there would be no purpose to staying outdoors for another entire day into another night, as their bodies simply couldn't handle it any longer.

EDITORIAL, James' Response:

When we left McDonald's and emerged into the sunshine, I felt different, somehow transformed. I could not imagine what it must be like to wake up day after day facing homelessness. Of course there are services that a true homeless person can invoke, and others who remain on the streets day in and day out spend their rainy wintry nights down in the subway tunnels that run through the city, partly removed from the elements. We knowingly did not utilize services in order that those in need could use them; we purposely avoided the subway tunnels as a matter of safety and to increase the challenge of the experience.

During the experience, we took to calling the regular citizens that we passed on the street “fancy animals” as we certainly were getting looks and treatment as if we were animals, and they were not. There was a distinct us versus them dichotomy. From the first night to the second, there was a shift from other homeless people begging us, to other homeless people acknowledging us with a nod that seemed to emote “brotherhood” or some form of “we’re on the same team” type affect.

When I returned home, the ability to take off my dirty clothing, to enjoy a shower and to climb into my bed with my dog and curl up with her was a heavenly experience; something that I may tend to take for granted on a day-to-day basis. Having children, I tried to imagine what homelessness would be like having to look into their eyes and tell them that I had no idea where our next meal would come from, or where we would rest our heads the next night. I considered that I would turn to crime in order to provide for them prior to letting them suffer that fate.

Considering counseling someone who may be facing homelessness, I can better understand the severity of the stress that is involved with facing that reality. I know we had “an out” that we could always return to the safety of our homes if we really needed to, and there was always “light at the end of the tunnel” given our experience was for a limited time. However, I never would have realized just how quickly your body can begin to break down with lack of sleep, and even simply lack of getting horizontal; the continual sitting and/or standing really took a toll on my psyche and my body. There were moments during the second night where Khushbu and I would be talking to each other and literally dozing off in the middle of a sentence, almost narcolepsy, but pure exhaustion. It will be a long time before I ever forget the harsh reality of our experience, however staged and limited it may have been when compared to someone who is truly homeless; the feeling of isolation, the looks of judgment, the feelings of inadequacy, the

desperation and the overall stress. As a result of this experience, I will certainly be one who lends time, money or counseling services to aid the homeless when I am in a position to do so.

EDITORIAL, Khushbu's Response:

As I left James to enter my building I felt nothing. I often imagined the feeling of returning back home during these few days as an almost heavenly experience. However, I grabbed my keys from the front desk and headed upstairs in a haze. I opened my door to find my roommate and her fiancé “camping” out in the living room. The high pitch scream from my roommate indicated a level of relief that I was indeed back home. Immediately the questions began firing and I could get out but a few words at a time. I smelled. If you know me, you know that smelling bad is simply not an option. There I was, back from the streets, and smelling way worse than I ever imagined. I sat myself down on the couch knowing that the reality of being home would slowly sneak up on me. As I fielded some questions from my anxious roommates, I realized the need for not just sitting but putting my feet up to rest. I went into my room and finally took off my shoes. I was scared because I had felt the blisters form, hurt and then eventually pop during this period and I wasn't quite sure what I'd find. My feet were demolished and they were as bad looking as they felt. Shortly after, I took a nice long shower. The shower was followed by a 30-minute nap, which was then followed by brunch (a mimosa, of course) with my roommate and a classmate.