



Witnesses to Hunger

Issue 1, December 2009

The past year has been a busy one for Witnesses to Hunger between interviewing for articles, preparing for exhibits, traveling all over the country, and meeting with politicians. Though at times it can be crazy, we are happy that the word is getting out there and that the public seems eager to learn the truth about hunger in the United States. Some highlights:

· **May 4-8: Witnesses to Hunger Exhibit in the Rotunda of the Russell Senate Building** by invitation of Senator Bob Casey, Jr. (D-PA). Twenty-one Witnesses went to D.C. for a reception.

· **June 2: Congressional Policy Briefing in the US Capitol** with Witnesses to Hunger hosted by Representative Chaka Fattah (D-2nd District, PA). Witnesses Ashley, Erica and Quiana spoke on the panel.

· **September 16: Shearine spoke at a Congressional Spouses anti-hunger event in the US Capitol** and was introduced by Dr. Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden.

· **September 17: Imani was the keynote speaker at the Washington State Food Security Coalition Annual Conference in Wenatchee, WA.**

· **November 11: Witnesses Barbie and Christina attended and spoke at the Share Our Strength Conference of Leaders in Washington, D.C.**

· **November 16: Witnesses to Hunger Statewide Tour** opened in Scranton, PA.

Next up: Witnesses to Hunger is touring Pennsylvania with the help of Senator Bob Casey, Jr., and his wife Terese Casey. Two new Witnesses from Scranton were introduced and one of them spoke during the event. We are very excited about expanding Witnesses to Hunger statewide. Our next stop will be Harrisburg, where the exhibit will be on display in the State Capitol Rotunda beginning January 11th. This exhibition will feature photographs by Witnesses from Central PA. We'll be in touch with more details!

A Message From A Witness Herself Whitney Henry

When I first started with Witnesses to Hunger, I was not sure if this was the right thing for me to do. I'd never had someone other than my mother who cared about how I felt about wanting to make a change. I have talked to my mom for years about becoming a caseworker or outreach worker. When I met with Mariana Chilton for the first time, I was not sure if telling my story to her was right. I was always told not to tell my business to other people, but then came Mariana. I opened up to her because she made me feel so secure about myself. Something about this woman makes you want to talk to her! I started taking pictures for the project and realized I was taking the time to find myself. I finally got the chance to do what I love the most - run my mouth - but for the good! I started meeting with the other mothers in the project and learned that I was not the only single black woman raising my daughter alone. I found out that there are women like me all over the city. I have found another place to call home--Drexel University! When I step foot in the building I feel like a million bucks, because this is the building that allowed us to come in and make change. I have a whole new perspective on life now. I have the support and courage to do what I have to do to better myself. I now have the resources that I didn't have a

year ago. Now I know the right people I need to speak with, and I'm looking forward to continuing my relationship with Witnesses to Hunger. I am a proud member and I now feel like I have to help other mothers who haven't had a chance to experience. I want everyone to read about Witnesses to Hunger and have a chance to join in. I figure that by writing an article, I can reach out to you all, all over the world. We women of Witnesses to Hunger, we are women of change, women of the struggle. We look forward to sharing with you the things that we have learned in the past year. Believe that if we all stick together as one we can make it. There are people out here that care and we are those people! So when you see the Witnesses to Hunger newsletter know that there's a change coming from inside.



Strong Barbara Izquierdo

Strong is the ability to stand in front of complete strangers and tell a story. A story that was not made to amuse, distract, entertain or deceive. It is the ability to hold your head high after having your way of life exposed to millions of people without an ounce of shame. My story will be one of strength because it is not a story at all. It is my life.

Picture that it is the middle of March. It's snowing outside. There are two infants crying, so you think of how you can soothe them. You get up walk over to the window and cover it with a bed sheet so the light wont disturb the nap they are about to take. You then go downstairs and take the pots of water that were boiling on the stove, carry them up the steps to the tub so you can mix it with the cold water, and give them a bath.

You then run back downstairs and turn on the stove to provide heat for the home because there is no other way. You dress them, then feed them the only thing you have available which is a can of Chef Boyardee, the same thing they eat everyday because it is all you could afford. You divide it evenly for them, and while they eat, you stare at pizzeria menus to take away your hunger pains. When they are done and all cleaned up you take them up the steps and begin your bedtime story.

There once was a girl Name Persistence. Persistence had many dreams. She dreamt of a big home with a white picket fence, a career, a college education, and a car. However, she faced many obstacles on the road to pursuing her dreams. Therefore, every morning when she got dressed, she would put on her lucky pair of jeans and, in the front left pocket, she would place courage. In the right ambition. In the back left pocket she would place determination and in the back right she would place hope. She would leave her home with all of these things and start her journey towards her goal. Nevertheless, what persis-

tence failed to bring with her was reality and reality was working against her.

She had no money, no formal high school education, and a disgraceful background. She grew up in a broken home without a father to whom she lost to prison because of drug trafficking. A mother who only would like to see her fail and a drug addict brother who stole anything he could to get what he needed. Her family you ask....well, she had none. Only an uncle whose hands she escaped when he tried to rape her. She was not so lucky when it came to a neighbor so she learned to trust no one. With all of these things floating around in her mind, she would go to colleges and explain how she was of "low income" but had high expectations of herself. However, the admissions counselors would inform her you could not pay tuition with hope, dreams, and expectations. Therefore, she would leave.

Her next stop the public assistance office who would inform her she was ineligible for assistance because she had a job so she could provide food, pay rent; pay bills buy essentials, clothe herself and two children, pay medical bills, and constantly replace everything that was missing in the home. Therefore, she would leave. So



slowly everything she had in her pockets would fade into sprinkles of lint.

As I dry the tears away from my eyes I kiss my sleeping children and whisper, "Persistence stands before you." So here I am, everyone, and I want to inform you I will not give up. I would not let my limited income limit my ambition, or persistence. I would not let it interfere with my intelligence. That is why I chose to be the first mother of Witnesses To Hunger. I want to be a well-educated woman so I can provide a life for my children where canned food is not dinner. Where hot water does exist. Where the stove is used for preparing meals only. Where they could be safe and not molested my neighbors or raped by family. Because I am more than a statistic. I am a person just like you. I am here because I want to change my lifestyle. I want people to see in me what I see in myself...

What do you see in me??

As I Grow Shearine McGhee

Grow with me for yet
I'm a seed waiting to blossom
I have found a spot for yet
I did not know
In a warm and dark place
Under Mother Nature's wind
She will protect me from bad and evil things
Shelter me and feed me
With knowledge and nourishment
My roots grow stronger each and every day
I can feel the tears from God's eyes
As I rise As I raise
I am growing from soil
From this dark and damp place
I can see the light from the sky
So blue God was right can this be true
Fields of green and grass and trees
I am amazing beautiful
Tall long leaves of green
I am a Rose
Smarter in every way
I came from earth God made me this way

This is the first issue of the Witnesses to Hunger newsletter, featuring stories, poems and articles by the women of Witnesses to Hunger. To join our mailing list, please visit our website at www.witnessestohunger.org