



Faces and Voices and Seva

By Stevan Maxwell

I have always felt that as a human being living on planet Earth, we each have a responsibility to help out in some way to make a contribution to the greater good of humankind. In speaking of Seva, Swamiji wrote the following in Doorway to An Extraordinary Life:

“Rudi said that if we do not build into our day the simple capacity to open to and love our fellow human beings, we cannot claim to have a spiritual life. A spiritual life is about opening to and feeling the bridge between ourselves and our fellow human beings.”

Faces and Voices is a project I started in 2010. In its embryonic stages, the project triggered in me a bigger need to connect with disadvantaged people, using my artistry to build an exhibit with potent emotional content that tells some of the stories about what it is like to be homeless. Faces and Voices is a multimedia exhibit consisting of photographs, voice recordings, transcripts and B roll video of the homeless in America.

Faces and Voices was birthed out of pro-bono work I did for United Way in the late 90's through 2006. As a way I could give back and help people, it became my Seva. I feel that in giving of myself in service to United Way and, consequently, to Faces and Voices, I have been blessed with the opportunity to make a contribution to other's lives by helping to bring greater understanding and, hopefully, awareness and compassion to our fellow human beings.

Our mission is to give voice to the homeless population that is frequently not acknowledged or respected. The homeless are a much maligned and misunderstood population. Some made poor choices, some were born into homelessness, some have had bad luck, and most have no safety net. Regardless of our circumstances, we all face challenges in life, and the need for help and support and the love of others is universal.

The project has presented a significant challenge in my life. Not only is it a serious test to my ability to use photography and other mediums to adequately represent the impassioned content I am often confronted with, I have



“There seems to be a lot of ‘I see you but I don’t see you; I’m looking at you but I don’t want to look at you.’ ” Renee T.

[Click HERE to see Renee’s interview](#)

found it to be emotionally grueling. For instance, in the interview process, I ask three questions: "What lead to your homelessness; What is it like to live in a homeless shelter or on the street; How do you feel people treat you?" My son Robin, who serves as my production assistant and chief technical advisor, and I are often brought to tears during these interviews.



"I believe they (people) are afraid of me, maybe not afraid of me, but afraid of the idea of me. I think people see me as what has been thrown away and it's not worth picking me back up again. I am one of you. We are all the same." -Ken H.

[Click HERE to see Ken's Interview](#)

As Mother Teresa said, "The poverty of being unwanted, unloved and uncared for is the greatest poverty." The startling fact is, most of the people I have interviewed for Faces and Voices have never been asked anything about their lives. The process, therefore, turns out to be a cathartic event for them, particularly when I ask the last question. It brings tears to more than 90% of the participant's eyes.

Faces and Voices is a predominantly volunteer effort. My son, Robin, has helped me with the project over the years by recording and editing the interviews of nearly 50 people. Catherine Cline, a resident at The Movement Center, has donated her outstanding writing and editing skills to our newly published book and various project materials, as well as adding creative insight to the design and aesthetic of various aspects of the Faces and

Voices website and collateral. We also have volunteers who help with our Facebook page, transcribing interviews and exhibit installation as venues change.

My role is that of Photographer, as well as Creative Director and I have partnered with Grand Valley Peace and Justice of Grand Junction, Colorado to help with production management. Grand Valley Peace and Justice is a social justice agency committed to advancing their mission through education, advocacy and networking.

In addition to maintaining the project in Colorado, our intention is to expand the project into Portland, Oregon, starting June of 2016. Further information can be found on our website [Faces and Voices](#), and on [Facebook](#). Our recently published book can be viewed at [Faces and Voice Book](#). Also, contacting Stevan Maxwell at 970-216-3045, stevan@stevanmaxwell.com, can answer any additional questions about the project.



Stevan is fascinated with the creative process, and has a passion for making images that tell stories. He has a keen interest in documentary photography and the search for truth. Much of his work is informed by our culture and the effect of man on his environment. He holds an MFA from the Academy of Art University in San Francisco and teaches college courses in photography.