

Phoenix Rising

Voices United in
Recovery



PERSEVERANCE

The theme for this issue of the Phoenix Rising is perseverance.

More than persistence, perseverance describes a person who keeps trying until he or she succeeds, despite setbacks.

(see editorial, p. 5)

RBHA RICHMOND
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH
AUTHORITY

www.rbha.org

Poems & Photos



At dawn, scarlet beauty
Streaks the sky,
As the cloud ignites the clouds.
My soul rejoices
And springs toward heaven!

Can there be more hope?
Nay, I say!

My thirst for peace is quenched.
And now I know Rest.
Forever and ever—
I am prepared for every Tomorrow!
Praise God!

POEM by guest poet
Chip Jeter

Sunrise

PHOTO by guest artist
Luanne Holsinger

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Editorial Page

By Beth Wiltshire

The theme for this issue of the Phoenix Rising is “perseverance.” More than “persistence,” perseverance describes a person who keeps trying until he or she succeeds despite setbacks.

The past three years have been a challenge for most, if not all, of us. I don't know of many people who have not been affected by COVID-19 and its resulting economic and mental health issues. The virus almost shut down the country and the world!

During our lockdown from 2020-2022, RBH was under strict COVID operations. Clients who did not have a smartphone or computer came to see their providers via computer screen. This was better than not making any connection, but it wasn't the same as meeting in person.

I was part of a small crew in the lobby, which included Support Associates, Peer Specialists, nurses, receptionists/schedulers, pharmacy staff who delivered medication to the lobby, and RICH clinic doctors. Emotions were fragile among both employees and clients. Since most providers and case managers were working from home, there was little access to the top three floors. Those in the lobby were often stressed, myself included. Sometimes days were difficult to get through.

In spite of these challenges, my co-workers and I persevered. The mission of RBH—to provide services to everyone who needs them, regardless of race, age, gender, sexual orientation and other factors—prevailed. Clients showed up and staff greeted them. We all persevered.

There were some milestones in the past year. In 2021, RBH celebrated its 25th anniversary of operation. Renowned artist Hamilton Glass painted a mural on the side of the 5th Street building, in honor of the occasion. Colorful geometric shapes surround hands reaching for hands. Hand in hand, the community of RBH keeps going.

There has not been an issue of the Phoenix Rising since early 2021. Perhaps many of us were stuck in a creative morass. The Phoenix Rising relies on client submissions, which were few this past year. You may notice that several guest artists and writers are featured in this issue. While they are not RBH clients, they all identify as individuals living with mental illness. I encourage RBH clients reading this to share art and writing that show how you've persevered through COVID and other challenges.

Staff and clients should congratulate themselves on coming through a great ordeal. As the motto of RBH states, “**Together, we are fearless!**” Together, we have persevered.

Photos

PHOTO by
Beth Wiltshire

Double Rainbow



Green Field

Broadway, VA

PHOTO by guest artist
Luanne Holsinger

Interview with Brittney Lee, Part 2

By Beth Wiltshire

In the 2021 issue of the Phoenix Rising, I interviewed Brittney Lee, a former Support Associate, to see how the pandemic was affecting her physical and mental health. She stated then that the isolation and fear of infection from the virus took a toll on her.

I made contact with Brittney in the last few months to find out how she was faring. COVID is still very much a threat. She cannot gather with the other clients at her Richmond Residential apartment complex because of the threat of exposure to COVID. Until recently she has not been able to go on extended trips. Another reason for the ban on social outings is that often the wheelchair-accessible van at the complex is not available.

Brittney has two major disabilities. She was born with cerebral palsy and is confined to a wheelchair. She also suffers from bipolar disorder and her symptoms have increased during the pandemic.

While often feeling despair at her situation, she is also resourceful and has connected with groups online. Her first computer meetings were with Arc of Virginia, where she trained to become a peer mentor for those with developmental disabilities. For the Virginia Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental Disabilities (VCU-LEND), she encouraged parents of disabled children to use technology to connect with supportive programs. Her most recent involvement has been with the organization Quillo. She made videos to help disabled clients become more independent. Topics included becoming a peer mentor and how to thrive in a supported living facility. Brittney's mental health symptoms are treated by her psychiatrist at RBH and her therapist. The meetings occur online or over the phone. The therapist helps her with negative thoughts and validates her sense of self-worth.

By far the most important activity Brittney does for her recovery is working on her book, an account of her life experiences. She is only 34, but she has tales to tell, some of them traumatic. She declares, "I don't care who reads it, I don't care who doesn't like it. I am telling my story!" Writing is therapy for her but also, she hopes, inspiration for others with disabilities.

Anyone who knows Brittney understands that she is determined, passionate and caring. She has enriched many lives, including my own.



ART by Louise Seiler
1961 - 2014

FLOWERS OF MY CHILDHOOD

By Carla Heath

The winding paths we made through the dense forest leading to fern island.

Memories of fern island, lush and green,, not to be walked on. We knew not to disturb the beautiful, feathery ferns. They were just to be admired.

A creek bed below where we dug red clay to sculpt whatever our imaginations were holding to give to our beloved mom to cherish.

The field of iris of every color nature could paint marching in orderly rows on top of the hill as we played kickball or toss the shoe in the field nearby.

The woody smell of decaying leaves. The wild flowers in the dappled sunlight. Purple-violet petals like tiny mouse ears.

The Queen Anne's lace growing abundantly by the vegetable garden we worked in on Saturday while other kids vegged out in front of the electric tube watching animated shows.

The limber tree branch we jumped to from the roof of our playhouse, swinging down to the ground and then letting go for the next person to descend.

Spending hours in the woods playing with the empty candidiasis shells, the shells becoming our make believe friends.

The sloping ditch used to extend our sliding board using sheets of wood paneling that we waxed. Waxed with a large wax block, not carefully enough. My sister having a splinter removed from her backside can attest to this.

Finding the delicious nectar of honeysuckle. Catching the sweet drops on our tongues. So loved was the nectar I tried fruitlessly dripping it into a plastic container slowly drop by drop, developing my patient nature.

My brother finding bamboo and splitting it to line the walls of his bedroom. He loved the woods the most of all and was usually the brainchild of our adventures.

Finding fields of juicy blackberries staining our fingers purple, the shades of a bruise. Accumulating enough for mom or aunt to make a tart cobbler topped with vanilla ice cream. A perfect ending to a summer day.

POEMS and THOUGHTS

By Angela Jones

I feel lost and alone
In this world of mine
I am a mother
I am someone's wife
A grandmother
And a godmother
But at the end of the day
Who am I?

This is for you, Mom and Dad
I'm mad at you guys.
What are we supposed to do
Without you?
That must mean
We have to hurry up
And help each other is all.
We miss you.

What's love
But a feeling
That people use
All the time?
But do they mean it
When they say it?
Is love
Really unconditional?
Is it?

It's time to walk away
From everyone.
I can't do it anymore.
I am sick and tired of everyone.
It's time to do ME.
I need to concentrate
On me and mine!

Photos

PHOTO by guest artist
Luanne Holsinger

Morning Clouds



Rainbow

PHOTO by guest artist
Luanne Holsinger

Meet the Support Associates

The editor of the Phoenix Rising interviewed the new Support Associates about how they came to be at RBH.

Isata Turay

Why did you decide to apply for the position?

I wanted to get engaged in Peer Support environment to help others in their recovery process.

Tell me about your illness or addiction in a few words.

It has been a long journey in my recovery. This is my second time working at RBHA. The first time I relapsed and had to stop working, but continued to receive services here. RBHA has helped me recover from my mental illness. I am glad to be employed again.

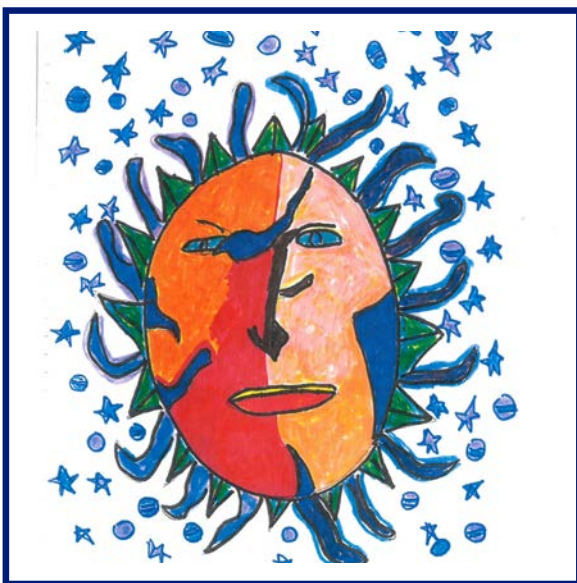
What future goals do you have?

I hope to be gainfully employed in a more active role in the Peer recovery environment, as I am a certified Peer Recovery Specialist.

What are other interests you would like others to know about?

I was a college athlete and I love sports and music.

ART by Louise Seiler
1961 - 2014



Meet the Support Associates

The editor of the Phoenix Rising interviewed the new Support Associates about how they came to be at RBH.

Roger Deneal and Eric Gordon

What kept you going through the pandemic and how did it affect your mental health?

Roger: I had to cope with my family getting COVID and losing my job because of it. I had to deal with not coming outside for a long time.

Eric: I kept telling myself I needed to work so I could help others and keep them healthy, mentally and physically.

Why did you decide to apply for a Support Associate position?

Roger: I applied because it's conveniently close to my apartment and because I need extra money for my car. I like the job very much. It is not back-breaking work.

Eric: I applied because when I was diagnosed I wanted to help people in my own position.

What are your future plans in mental health?

Roger: I plan to become a peer specialist next year.

Eric: I want to be a peer specialist because I can work with clients one on one and help out in a more deep way.

What keeps you busy outside of work?

Roger: I relax and hang out with my neighbor or I go see my son in Blackstone.

Eric: I do outside work on weekends and hang out with my girlfriend.

THANK YOU Isata, Roger, and Eric for sharing your stories.

Poems & Photos

POEM

by Beth Wiltshire

The church bells tolling
And the leering gargoyles
And the intricate patterns
In the wooden door:

I enter

A dark space,

Only it's not so dark.

And the sound,

The loud sound echoing

An organ playing Bach.

Visitors and I

Are surrounded by crashing chords.

Then I turn and behold Rose windows.

Sunlight streams on faces.

I turn again,

See massive organ pipes and console,

Dwarfing the man playing.

I am 15.

A moment with the almighty,

A soaring of the soul,

All our eyes and ears

United with the holy.

PHOTO

by

Luanne

Holsinger



POEM

by Beth Wiltshire

CORONAVIRUS 2019—

Those revelers

Clad in bikinis

And sagging trunks

Gathered like a colony

Along the miles of beach

Like ants.

Fire ants are what you will become:

Fever raging

In your sunburned head

And body.

Lack of breath

So you can no longer

Scream and sing.

Trade a ventilator

For the crashing waves,

The moon above

And the gritty sand

And a masked man or woman.

It's not difficult.

Glare at this intruder

Like the sun you worship.

Glare until corona

Vanishes into the sea.

Trail the colony home.



PHOTO

by Beth Wiltshire

MEET THE GUEST ARTISTS AND WRITERS

The guests for this issue are Pat Long, Chip Jeter and Luanne Holsinger. Pat and Luanne have written statements on the pandemic, mental health and their art. Chip was not available to interview.

Luanne Holsinger

The pandemic has been a terrible time. I try to look at a bright side in regards to my artwork. The time alone has given me a chance to think about my art, as I was not having the number of visitors and outings as before. I was able to look at my past creations and analyze what was good and bad about each of them. During the pandemic period I improved the quality of my output. I have even taken up the challenge of doing landscape photography. As I am now over age 60, making changes has been harder than when I was younger. I realize that when you are an artist, it is important to spend time alone with your pieces, and the pandemic forced me to do this in a productive way.

Pat Long

I am a 71-year-old retired bookkeeper. My bipolar disorder began at age 19 but was not correctly diagnosed and treated until 9 years later. I spent most of my life at the depressive end of the scale, with one out-of-control manic phase. My symptoms are currently well-controlled by a combination of four prescription drugs. I had an easier time than most during the pandemic because I am an introvert. Human solitude was less of a problem. I also had the wonderful companionship of my cat. Zoom made human contact possible! Poetry is a different way of seeing. At its best, it gives us new eyes and an appreciation for the beauty of the world. The goal of my painting is to create something lovely and uplifting.

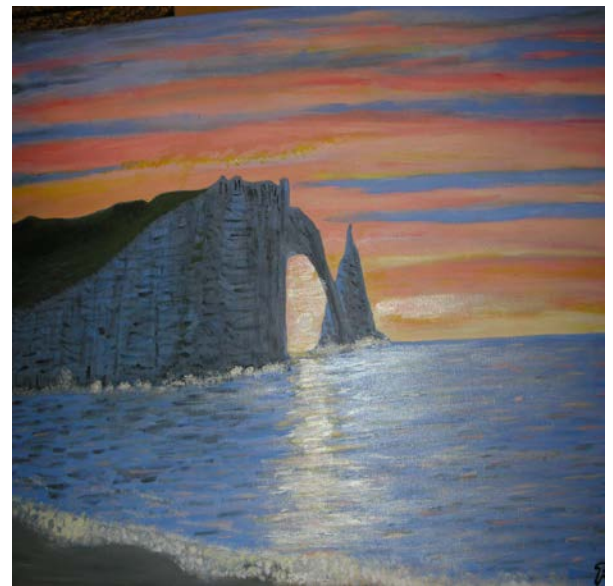
Editor's note

Louise Seiler was my friend and a client at RBH for a short time. She passed away in her sleep in 2014.

Poems & Photos

Dear Barnum and Bailey (or Sweetness and Light)
You hearten us daily with love and delight
A warm, furry ball all curled up for a nap
Is blissful reward for a welcoming lap.
You yawn and you stretch when you finally awaken,
And soon by your antics the calm house is shaken.
With fierce show of power you wrestle each other.
Then foes turn to friends as you each bathe your brother.
The little cloth mouse gets a swat from a paw.
He's in mortal danger from fang and from claw.
You love to exterminate brown rubber bands
Unless they are rescued by merciful hands.
When someone is eating you both start to cry.
Why shouldn't a kitten get part of the pie?
With more pluck than grace you aspire to new heights—
Leap straight up at nothing—what comical sights!
The nasty spray bottle you're learning to dread,
But nothing can keep you from crawling in bed.
You're growing so quickly, it's hard to refute,
Just when we've all gotten addicted to cute.
Although you've been with us for just a short while,
We thank you, dear kittens, for many a smile!

**POEM by
Guest Poet
Pat Long**



**ART by Guest Artist
Pat Long**

Poems & Photos

A LOVELY DAY

A lovely day!
The velvet grass is dotted with wild flowers
While overhead an ancient maple towers
To shade the way.

The sky is blue.
A gull sails by as smoothly as a glider,
And on the silken thread web of a spider
Sparkles the dew.

The day is fine.
In breezes soft a blossom gently trembled.
It seems the whole of nature was assembled
By hands divine.

**POEM by Guest Poet
Pat Long**

Enter my twilight
And reach for the key
That will allow you to unlock me.
It has two luminous eyes
And two bold wings.
'Twill ask you, "Who?"
In haunting cries.
Answer it, "Me."
In revealing dawn
Then wait and see
If I have flown.

**POEM by Guest Poet
Chip Jeter**

Sunset

**PHOTO by
Luanne Holsinger**



Phoenix Rising



ART by Charlie Thedieck

To submit articles, poetry, or art to the Phoenix Rising,
please contact Beth Wiltshire at wiltshireb@rbha.org or

RBHA

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All submissions are welcomed, but subject to editing.
We want to hear from you!

This newsletter is produced by

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