



THE MAD HOUSERS

534 Permalume Pl., Atlanta, GA 30318 (new address) • 404.806.6233 • www.madhousers.org

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept 6, Wednesday, 7pm

Panel Build

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

Sept 10, Sunday, 10am

Hut Build

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

Sept 14, Thursday, 7pm

General Meeting

Reading Room Café (1710 Defoor Ave)

Sept 20, Wednesday, 7pm

Panel Build

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

Sept 24, Sunday, 10am

Hut Build

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)

Oct 14, Saturday, noon

**Volunteer Open House
(Free food and prizes!)**

Warehouse (534 Permalume Place)



Client Interview: Cowboy & Dee

By Michael Ann Chastain

Photos by Andrew Walter

We recently built a hut for Cowboy and his wife, Dee. I spoke with both of them during the build at our new Kennesaw site. Cowboy and Dee worked with a cab company until losing their jobs not long ago.

Cowboy:

How long have you lived in Georgia?

Well, I've been here since '86. 1986

Do you have a big family?

A small family. As a matter of fact, I had a dream about them this morning.

You did? Do you think your hut build today had something to do with your thinking about family and having that dream?.... are you getting choked up?

Hmmm, yes, I am. I'm Ok. I just found out that my Grandpa died on me. I found out. I was tryin' to keep it to myself but yes, Grandpa just died on me. Yes, on a farm in Indiana. My Grandma's right there now taking care of it. She wants me to come back home. She does.

What do you think of that? Going to Indiana?

I always wanted my own land. I reckon this is gonna' be my land for a while, but I'd rather be back home.

Did you go to school in Indiana?

12th grade. Then, I went to also a technical college in Milwaukee Wisconsin.

What did you study there?

Electronics.

How did you find yourself here? Homeless.

Well, I went through a divorce. My ex-wife had an affair on me. I busted her – her and my so-called best friend. On account of messin' up with my head, I did work off and on. Kinda' let it disturb me. So, that's why I'm out here. And, not only that, I'm 'bout ready to get my life together. I also rodeo. I'm a cowboy. A real cowboy. I do, saddle bronc; I did a little bull ridin'. Just a real cowboy.

Do you mind if ask your age?

I'll be 45 in March.

How old were you when you left Indiana? You spent your childhood in Indiana, right?

Yeah, born an' bred. Born and bred. I left in '86, well... actually, I left in 199... no, 1980.

Then, to Wisconsin for college?

Yeah.

Then, you came to Atlanta in 1986. Why Atlanta?

Work. Construction. I helped build Atlanta. You know the twin towers? I was there. The king and the queen buildings. I'm the one who put the dang towers up.

What year was that, Cowboy?

That was back in 1989.

Well, today, the Mad Housers are building you a hut. How did you find this spot to camp?

Well, to be honest with you, I moved around for a while. I was in other parts of the woods, but I finally moved here 'cause of my buddy. He looked out for me. I looked out for him when he didn't have a place to go. And now, he looks out for me. So, he's the mayor, I'm the enforcer, and the other guy's the scout. We look out for each other.

Why did you ask Mad Housers for a hut?

I love it.

Ok... why?

Y'all blessed. And I say my prayers to God and I asked him to get me and my, my girlfriend out where we at because it's gonna' be hot for one thing in the summer. And another thing, I say my prayers every morning. And, I didn't say one this morning... oh, yes I did I take that back. Yes I did.

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Building Cowboy and Dee's hut

How would a hut benefit you?

The beneficial part of it is this: we will not be in that dog-gone hot [truck trailer] 'cause it's gonna' be too hot. We won't be able to breathe.

What kind of things do you think about, or plan for in your future?

Well, actually I want my horse ranch. One day I'm gonna' have it.

Indiana?

Maybe. Preferably Kentucky. (pause) But, yeah cause maybe... I don't like sayin' this. My Grandpa just died my papa just died and he died in his boots. The thing is, he taught me how to be a cowboy. My Grandma is tryin' to lure me back but I'm not ready yet. Time comes push and shove my land might be there too.

How do you keep in touch with your family in Indiana?

Easy - Cell phone.

Do you have one?

No. Another camper does.

Have you met a lot of people who are living outside for the first time? Recently homeless?

Yeah. I call 'em green horns. In other words, they don't know what they're doin'. I help them get jobs. Help 'em get work at McDonald's. That's what I do. But, I'm just cowboy. I take to the woods. I love my woods. I love my nature.

And I live better out here than I do out there. I can't handle pressure from people, especially pressure from [certain churches] all them places and stuff. It's too much pressure. But, I help my friends out. That's what I do.

Is there a commonality between the people you've met living on the street?

Yes, there is. A lot of 'em wants to be just left alone. They work like I work. They work off and on. And it's hard to get work 'cause half of 'em don't have IDs. It's hard for 'em. And it takes money to get IDs. A lot of things I'm not gonna' say 'bout that.

Cowboy, you're married. How long have you known your wife?

About two years.

How is living out here as a couple?

It's beautiful because we get along. We work together. Stops you from being lonely.

Dee (Cowboy's wife):

Dee, what's the difference, or is there a difference, between living as couple and not, out here?

There's a big difference. When you're out there by yourself you don't have no protection. You have a lot of people out there tryin' to get you to do this; tryin' to get you to do that. And when you're with someone you really care about, he looks out for you.

How long have you know each other?

We first met at church about six years ago.

Then you parted ways?

Yeah, we parted ways. I went my way; he went his. He was with someone. I was more involved in my job and he thought, I don't really know what he thought, he was he was it didn't seem like he was interested. And then we met up again and neither one of us had anyone so he asked me to marry him. We got married. At the courthouse. That was about 3-4 months ago.

When did you first hear about Mad Housers?

When they came out and built the hut for our friend.

Why did you want MH to build a hut for you and Cowboy?

Well, tryin' to get up in that trailer where I've been stayin' is kinda a little bit hard. I had back surgery and I've been tryin' to get on disability, but they say I'm qualified to work an 8

hour a day job which I can't do. Because of back surgery because of me being sick the way I am. I've had skin cancer, hepatitis C, bronchitis, arthritis, and I ended up having back surgery. People just seem like you know like they don't really care. So, I come to my woods to get healed.

How did you afford back surgery? Is it an expensive procedure?

Yes. They had to call a specialist in because I had a pinched nerve. I was on Medicaid at the time and Medicaid paid for the biggest majority of it but uh since then I was on disability at one time and then they just stopped it. They said that I could go back to work an eight hour day job and my lawyer has been appealing it for me. Uh, but not having a regular home that you could really call home you can't get disability. You have to have a home or have to be in a shelter or something like that. And me and shelters don't get along too well.

The MH hut will give y'all a more comfortable living space?

Yes, most definitely.

I meet fewer women living outdoors than men.

The biggest majority of women out there on the streets are, excuse me for saying this, women that sell themselves. That fall under Satan's hands and when you are off to yourself you can have more piece of mind more tranquility. Just lovin' nature.

When you've got opportunities like this, you take 'em

Where were you camping before this spot?

Well, I was stayin' at my sisters place but her adopted son got jealous of Cowboy and he would tell his dad that I had someone stayin' with me there. He was a trouble maker. I just went ahead and left.

Is that your family? Your sister?

I have two other brothers and two other sisters but every time I ask them for help or anything like that they look at me more or less like ah you just you know want to get back into drugs. I say no I don't. I said that's one of the reasons

why I'm out here in the woods to be away from all that.

You were once addicted to drugs?

I wasn't homeless, but I was into drugs. I lost my job. Since I've been out here I haven't even wanted to do drugs. Just like people say once you do somethin' you can't get off of it – that's bull. That's bull. You gotta' have a strong enough mind to not want it. Sure, every now and then it tempts me, but I just don't have the desire.... I know people who have actually lost everything. Lost life in general on the account of drugs. I've did it all.

What do you think this hut MH is building right now will do for you and Cowboy?

Security. Courage to go on.If a person has had a nervous breakdown or something they can come out here and get themselves together.

Thanks for being so open with me. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

There's a better life than drugs, alcohol, nervousness. There's a better life out there. Why get high on drugs when you can get high on life... (laughs) did I just say that? (laughs more). Some people would rather live in tents, but if you don't have enough protection from the winds, and the rain in the tents, when it rained everything would get wet and you'd have to let it dry. When you've got opportunities like this, you take 'em.

At press time, Cowboy was in jail on a parole violation and Dee was staying with her sister. Currently, another camp member is occupying their hut.



Home Sweet Home

“...he's the mayor, I'm the enforcer, and the other guy's the scout. We look out for each other.”

Hello from the Board of Directors!

The past year has been a time of exciting changes and important developments for the Mad Housers. We've received record donations, built several new camp sites, and made some changes to our Board of Directors.

This year we've escaped the problem of limited camp site growth inside the city of Atlanta by building outside the perimeter. In fact, the last five hut builds have been in Marietta and Kennesaw, and we've now reached our goal of building 18 huts for the year. Donations are looking great, especially thanks to a couple of very large checks. We've also had great media exposure from news articles (Village Voice, Creative Loafing, Atlanta Progressive News), architecture conferences, architecture books (Design Like You Give a Damn), an Athens radio interview, and the ATHICA art gallery build.

And finally, we're pleased to announce that as of the May 31, 2006 Board of Director's meeting, Salma Abdulrahman is now the President of the Mad Housers. Salma joined us back in 2001, when builds were being held in Nick Hess' front yard. Her dedication, hard work, and organizational skills have been essential in building the Mad Housers into a reliable organization, and we're sure that we'll flourish under her guidance.

She is backed up by our existing Vice President, Susan Ziony, whose experience with nonprofit work continues to serve us in good stead.

Salma's role as Treasurer has been handed off to a returning old-timer volunteer, Susan Lee. Susan was involved with the Housers from the

early to mid 90s. Susan, along with Shauna Mettee, will work on moving our bookkeeping system to Quickbooks as well as manage our day-to-day finances.

Michael Ann Chastain remains as our Secretary, backed up by Kurt Haas. The Secretary helps make sure that we remain legal with the State and Federal government, an important task that Michael Ann has done admirably.

We have also added three new members to the Board: Susan Lee, mentioned above, acting as Treasurer; Gerald Weber, Legal Director of the Georgia ACLU and chairperson of Task Force for the Homeless' Legal Committee; and Megan Anderson, the Executive Director of Atlanta Furniture Bank. These new Board members add depth of expertise and outside perspectives to our Board, and we're grateful to have them along.

Nick will remain as a Board member and active volunteer. Expect him to be a little more in the background, but he's not going anywhere!

We should all be proud of how our efforts, big and small, have turned the Mad Housers from a tiny ragged group of slightly cracked zealots into a small, but thriving organization. Whether you've hammered a nail, written a check, contributed to a newsletter, or searched for a camp, you've helped us keep our promises to our clients, our donors, and ourselves. Here's looking to a bright future.

And, as always, see you at the build!
- The Mad Housers



Volunteer Interview: Royce Bosselman

By Salma Abdulrahman

How did you first hear about the Mad Housers?

I read about it in the newspaper in 2003 and it seemed like something that I always wanted to do. I sent an email to Andy and he told me about the next hut build. I told him I had a truck and a trailer, and he said "Oh boy, we could use that on Sunday." My first Sunday down there, we put a hut up over there by the water plant or the state police thing over up on that big hill.

What was that first build like?

Well it was like all the impressions – they were thankful people that were happy to have it built. There were 8 or 10 other huts and it was December 10 or 11, and it was cold. I know that when people sleep at night they want to stay out of the cold, stay out of the rain, stay away from lightning or snow, stay away from ants, rats, snakes, bugs... and having been in the Army and having slept underneath trees myself in sleeping bags and those little bitty tents that the Army had, I knew what it was like to sleep outside. It wasn't something that was comfortable.

Did the site location present any difficulties in getting the panels up there or doing the build?

No. We drove up there with the truck and it was easy to build, it was the first hut there. We all stood out in front of it in our jackets and took our picture, with the recipient standing there with us. I just felt good about doing something for somebody, because when I went to church for 40 years I heard the same thing in church every Sunday. They said 'be nice to people, do good things, help 'em out'. I had heard about that for so long that I decided, well it's time to do it.

What was your impression of the clients?

It's been amazing. They've all seemed very

decent. A lot of times people are homeless because of drugs or alcohol or mental problems, or just some unknown reason. And most of these guys seem to be 'unknown' because they're all decent people, they're all friendly. I've talked to them, asked them what they do. Some of them go out and work, they go out to construction sites or stand out in the road and hold up their arm, they wanna be hired, and they're trying to live as best they can.

What did you think of the Mad Housers volunteers you met?

Well what really amazes me is that most of the volunteers are middle aged or younger people. They work all day long, and then they work on Wednesday nights [at the panel builds] after they've worked all day on Wednesday. And then on their weekend when they've only got two days off, they come out on a Sunday and build a hut. So being retired, I've got time to stop at construction sites and ask for lumber and go to Home Depot and ask for things. But most of the Mad Housers are young working people who are just good workers.

Tell me more about the salvaged lumber and the ladders you've gotten for the Mad Housers.

Well as for the salvaged lumber, being retired I would drive by a big construction site and stop in and ask for the manager. I would show 'em the pictures of the huts that the Mad Housers had put up. I'd tell them what we did and then I'd say that we'd love to have some of their salvaged lumber. One construction company gave me several hundred 2x4s and I brought those down to the warehouse.

When you showed them those pictures, what were their reactions?

Most of them said, "Oh, we didn't know there was that many homeless people living in Atlanta. We never heard of the Mad Housers." They'd ask three or four questions, where do you build them, do you have to have permission to do it, does the government approve of it, and I would simply answer, "no, no, no" ... that nobody approves of it, we just build where they've been living for months, and nobody has complained. We don't put a permanent hut there, it's temporary, it's removable. I would show them where they had slept at night and I would show them when we were building the huts and then I'd show them after we were done, so it was before, during and after pictures. And they were always impressed with the fact that those people could actually be sleeping in those huts.

And the story of the ladders?

Well, I'm an ex-pilot, and I go to Oshkosh to the air show every year. One year in Oshkosh, WI, I walked through one of the big warehouses where they were selling tools and stuff, and they had the folding Little Giant Ladders. So I bought one of those ladders to do work around my house. They fold up and expand and you can make two scaffolds out of them. At the hut builds I saw Nick Hess using a little wooden ladder and sliding off the roof and trying to step on it. So I brought one of my ladders and I took several pictures of it and sent the pictures to the Little Giant Ladder manufacturers. A week later there were some boxes in front of my garage, and it was two ladders they had sent. I sent the Little Giant Ladder company pictures of those ladders actually being used as kind of a thank-you letter.

What does your wife think about what you do with the Mad Housers?

She agrees with it. She knows that I do woodwork at home and I'm always doing outside work, and I've always wanted to do something like that. Having been an insurance adjustor and handling property claims, when a house

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would burn or a tree fell on it, people would have to move out and they were temporarily homeless and they'd have to go live somewhere, so it was up to us to get it repaired quickly. Get contractors out there and make sure it was done properly. So taking care of people who are out of a house is not completely new to me. But this is a completely different thing, and a little bit more pleasurable because this is helping people who can never be helped unless someone like us does this.

How far do you think the Mad Housers goes towards solving the homeless problem?

I don't think we're trying to solve the homeless situation, what we're trying to do is help the people who are homeless and solve that problem – get them out of the weather, get them in a healthy situation. It might help them get better and get their situation together and go out and get a job and maybe not be homeless

anymore. And if that helps them out, then somebody else will take over their hut. It's just a simple solution. The world hasn't solved this, all the governments and all of the experts haven't solved this problem. We're just solving their problem of not having a place to sleep. And that is a positive thing and it's nice to do.

What would you like to tell people about homelessness and the Mad Housers?

Well it's a national problem, so figure out some way you can help them out. Do what you think you can do. Either donate money or help build huts or talk to a friend and let them know about it. That's all you can do. One of the reasons I do this is whenever I do something nice I always look up and say, 'This is in honor of my daughter, Ann Rebecca, who passed away at 29.' I do hut builds in her honor or in honor of someone that I know who's passed away.

Royce and his wife Becky have been married for 48 years. When not building huts for the Mad Housers, Royce enjoys traveling the country with his wife in their RV. They've visited 49 states (!) and hope to visit Hawaii this winter.

We had to cut some of Royce's interview due to space limitations. But you can read the entire interview, including a hilarious account of Royce and Becky's marriage, on our website at [HYPERLINK "http://www.madhousers.org"](http://www.madhousers.org) www.madhousers.org



"Royce always comes through for the Mad Housers" "Royce and his wife, Becky"



Used with permission of Architecture for Humanity

Hot Off the Presses!!!

Earlier in the year the Mad Housers was featured in the Architecture for Humanity book "Design Like You Give a Damn". Well the book has finally arrived! The theme is 'Architectural Responses to Humanitarian Crises'. It looks terrific, with over 300 pages of articles, interviews and color photos from architects and designers all over the world. You can order your own copy at www.architectureforhumanity.org/designlikeyougiveadamn or read the Mad Housers excerpt at www.madhousers.org.



Additional Comments:

**As the weather gets colder, our work of building warm, secure shelters for the homeless is more important than ever.
But the Mad Housers needs your help!
Please donate generously this holiday season.**

Meet the Board!

Salma Abdulrahman
President

Susan Ziony
Vice President

Michael Ann Chastain
Secretary

Susan Lee
Treasurer

Frank Jeffers

Kurt Haas

Bill Callison

Nick Hess

Will Barton

Megan Anderson
(Director, Furniture Bank of Metro Atlanta)

Gerald Weber *(Legal Director, ACLU)*



"Hot Diggity Dog!"

Volunteer Open House

You've seen the emails, you've read the newsletters – now it's time to meet the volunteers and see what building huts is all about! Join us on Volunteer Open House Day, October 14, 2006. Take a tour of our warehouse, chat with our volunteers, and chow down on some free food and drinks. Munch on a hot dog while you watch a demo build, or pick up a hammer and take part in Hut Framing 101. If you've thought about volunteering but never tried it, this is a great opportunity to come meet the Mad Housers volunteers in a fun, relaxing environment. If you're a long-time volunteer, let us take this chance to say "Thank You" with some great food and friends. All volunteers of any age or skill level are welcome. Hope to see you there!

Date: **Saturday, October 14, 2006**

Time: **12pm - 5pm**

Place: **Warehouse, 534 Permalume Place, Atlanta, GA 30318**

FEEDBACK FORM

- I'd like to volunteer.
- I'd like to make a donation: \$ _____
- I have materials to donate.
- I know someone who needs shelter.
- I know a campsite.
- Please remove me from your mailing list.

You can use the back of this form for additional details.

Mad Housers, Inc. is incorporated as a 501 (c)(3) charitable organization. All Donations are tax-deductible.

Name

Address

City, State & Zip

Phone Number

call me

Email Address

add me to your email list

Send all correspondence to:

The Mad Housers, 534 Permalume Pl., Atlanta, GA 30318