



# Simon Star

*Living and working with London's street homeless*

## Community Report



The Simon Community continues to be busy delivering its services to London's homeless population.

At present we have a full-time manager whose salary is paid by the Tudor Trust and a part-time administrator paid out of reserves. We have eight full-time volunteers who each receive £38 expenses per week together with transport costs and board and lodging. One of these is from Romania, one from America, the rest English, two female and of varying ages. All are enthusiastic and compassionate. The community is a popular destination for those on a gap year or at a cross-road in their working life.

Tea/soup runs and streets cafes see around 120-180 people every time they go out.

We stop at six designated sites where we are greeted by those eager for some refreshment and confident that Simon's provisions are freshly made from good basic ingredients, and are offered by the hand of friendship and care.

The numbers are increasing and we have no rea-

son to expect them to drop any time soon.

We are greeted on the streets with equal amounts of derision – for our driving skills, gratitude for coming out in all weathers, general good natured banter and requests for socks and sleeping bags. On one particular day, in addition to socks and underwear, we were asked for long johns, rucksacks, suits for court appearances, nail clippers and the words to Freddie and the Dreamers' hit "You Were Made for Me". We were able to oblige in each instance.

The ethnic breakdown of visitors to our runs is 30% Eastern European, 27% Irish, 10% Afro-Caribbean, 4% Asian and the rest British, with a few Australians, French, Portuguese, etc. thrown in. Those from Eastern Europe have no recourse to public funds and are therefore destined to spend time sleeping rough. Many are now ensconced in squats as a last resort.

Hospitality at the house is great for everyone concerned. We welcome around forty extra people each time, into an average terraced property. All rooms have people eating/sleeping/using the computer or phone, playing chess, doing cross-

## Major Donors in the last quarter



**Grants:** The Tudor Trust; Embassy of Ireland.

**Regular donors:** Pret A Manger, daily supply of their surplus sandwiches & £7,000; Marks & Spencer (Hampstead Heath and Camden Stores), daily supply of their surplus items since March 2009, unable to estimate a value; **Other donors:** A. Hunt Trust; Gallaghers Tobacco (used to purchase 6 new PCs); State Street Foundation (used to purchase garden furniture); CityStore - Self-Storage (free use of some storage space).

# Ending Homelessness:

Since I first got involved in action on homelessness in the early 1990's there have been many changes. Probably the most significant is the amount of government money directed into funding homelessness services, paying for hostel improvements and more outreach and other services. One outcome is the end of the old cardboard cities at the Bullring in Waterloo and



Lincolns Inn Fields, which were not the best or healthiest places to live and probably not missed by many. But this increased funding, the commissioning of services by local authorities, introduces a new drive toward centralised planning and a top-down management approach. Andy Benson of the NCIA (1) argues (see Simon Star Spring 2009) that this is undermining the ethos and independence of the voluntary sector as a whole. The target of no rough sleepers on the streets in London by 2012, championed by some and viewed more sceptically by others, is firmly located in this approach.

The defenders of the zero target say that it would be better if no one had to sleep rough, and who can argue with that. It would be wonderful if we could all start working together more to improve hostels and other support services, so no one rejected the help on offer. Everyone would be accommodated and Simon could shut up shop! But it won't surprise anyone that there is still a long way to go.

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## Community Report *continued from page 1.*



words, or conversing in a multitude of languages. The atmosphere is good – friendly, exuberant and vibrant.

Communications between the nationalities provides us with hours of fun and is a learning experience for all. Ingenious versions of sign language are developed, advanced levels of patience and tolerance are required, and laughter eases the way.

Preparing food for this number of people is a logistical nightmare. Workers/volunteers chop carrots, cry slicing the onions, stir huge saucepans, boil water and fill urns.

The level of goodwill, friendship and hospitality

extended has to be seen to be believed. It is testament to the sound foundations established all those years ago by Anton, his team of volunteers and those lucky enough to find solace within the walls of a Simon house.

The community, its manager and team of workers, its guests and visitors to our services are most grateful and humbled by the level of support it receives from regular donors. Without this long established degree of commitment and compassion, the community would struggle to meet the changing and developing needs expressed by the users of our services.

*Jo Nurse*

# Rough sleeping and the zero target.



Statistics from homelessness agency Broadway (2) show that 3,472 people slept rough in London in the year to March 2009, 2012 for the first time. These figures, compiled by outreach services, are a more reliable measure than local authority street counts, but let's not debate that here. Let's ask instead how we can possibly talk about achieving the end of street homelessness without tackling the root causes that led 3472 people to sleep rough in London last year - poverty, family and relationship breakdown, migration, poor mental health, and drug and alcohol addiction? And the massive waiting lists for affordable housing. By 2012?

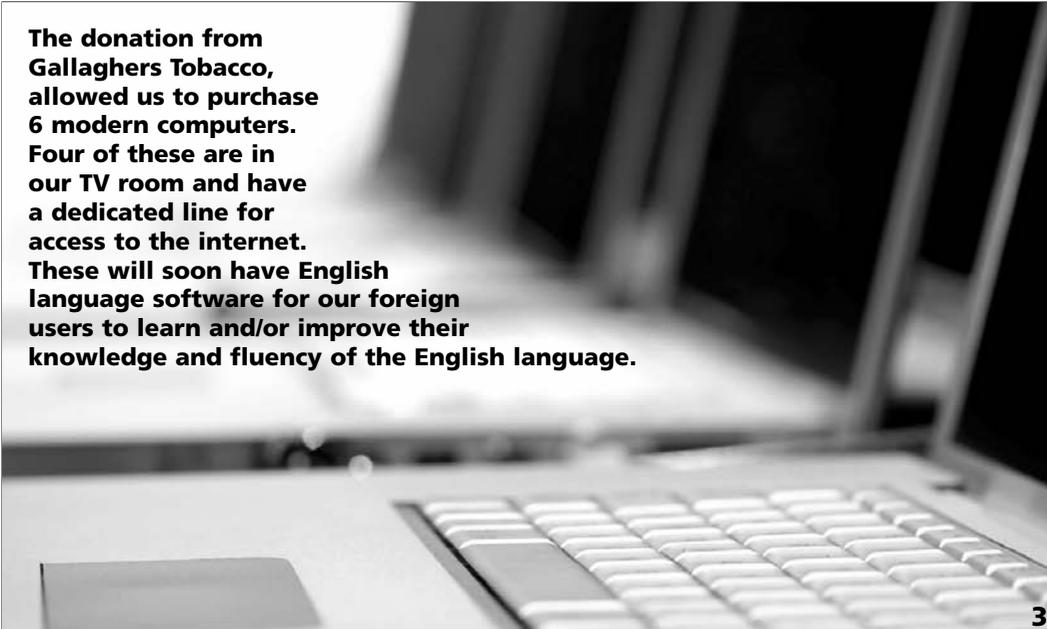
Unfortunately the short answer looks like increasingly aggressive outreach work. If a rough sleeper is offered a hostel bed (which not everyone is) and turns it down, for whatever reason, outreach services will quickly adopt a tougher enforcement approach, up to and including waking them up every night, or getting an ASBO so they have to go somewhere else. The rationale is that it is not

in anyone's best interest to stay on the streets, but the Simon Community represents an alternative. We try to stand alongside the alienated and the vulnerable, especially those who are most damaged and "resistant to services." We reject the practice of further punishing and disempowering those who are already amongst the most marginalised. The experience of the people who use Simon seems to show that they value this more supportive and holistic ethos, and more and more come to Simon for the help they struggle to find as easily elsewhere. Our belief is that the Simon approach will make more difference in the lives of vulnerable and marginalised people in the long run.

*Alastair Murray*  
works for Housing Justice and is  
a Simon Community Trustee

(1) National Coalition for Independent Action  
[www.independentaction.net](http://www.independentaction.net)

(2) Broadway Street to Home report 2008-09  
[www.broadwaylondon.org/ResearchInformation/RoughSleepingReports](http://www.broadwaylondon.org/ResearchInformation/RoughSleepingReports)



**The donation from Gallaghers Tobacco, allowed us to purchase 6 modern computers. Four of these are in our TV room and have a dedicated line for access to the internet. These will soon have English language software for our foreign users to learn and/or improve their knowledge and fluency of the English language.**

# Simon "Curiosities"

## At 129, snoring is allowed

One hospitality day I walked into the TV room. It was full of people and there must have been some three or four independent conversations going on, each one at its own pace. Needless to say, the noise level was rather high.

Impervious to all this, someone was lying on the sofa fast asleep. A few moments later, this person began snoring.

There was an immediate silence in the room and everyone turned their heads towards the person snoring, in amazement and as if to say... "What rudeness to snore in the presence of so many people!!".

To my surprise, nobody in the room shouted or made any gesture to wake him and stop his snoring.

Instead, they all just got back into the conversation they were having.

It seemed as if, at that instant, they had all come to a subconscious unanimous decision that the snoring would be acceptable.

Where else has something similar ever happened?

## Message written on our van

You know how people often write on dirty/dusty cars texts like "wash me, please", etc.

Well on one occasion, when our minibus was a bit more dusty than usual, someone wrote the following words just below the Simon Community logo on bonnet of the van... "NICE PEOPLE".

It is gratifying to know that people feel this way about the Simon Community.



**These cartoons were created and drawn by Cezar, one of our residents at 129. They can be purchased for £3 per pack of 6 cards (3 of each). Send us a note with your order and the respective payment by cheque (made payable to "The Simon Community"). The cards will have the text "Seasons Greetings" inside. On the back they will have our logo and reference to the year of print 2009.**

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# Notes From The Chair

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The highlight of the last few months has been a community-wide discussion on Simon Community philosophy and its application to the street-homelessness today. Whilst the basic principles of Simon remain the same e.g. to meet the need where the need is greatest, to support and campaign for those for whom no other provision exists, the application varies. Those for whom no other provision exists change as homeless services develop and improve. The focus of street homelessness varies and we have to respond.

The predominant group currently on the street are Eastern Europeans, many economic migrants who have been caught in the benefits trap: if you haven't worked for at least a year you cannot claim benefits. They are thus homeless with no money; it is easy to offer them a roof over their heads. But is there no other provision? Should we be focussing on this group or on others who have traditionally used our services?

Our commitment is to provide the best and most comprehensive outreach services. We have and always will have limited accommodation. The outreach services have greatly improved in the last 1½ years both in quality and scope. We are meeting more people and are increasingly approached for advice and support. We need to ensure that we can do similar work with those in our houses. This means limiting the numbers who live there and putting effort into enhancing the group work and community aspects of the projects. Thus those who come and live with us are supported and given the opportunity to break the cycle of homelessness in a loving environment.



The next AGM will be on 23 January 2010. At that meeting I will be standing down as chair of the trustees, but will stay on for at least another year, initially to handover to the new chair, and give what support is necessary. We have an impressively involved group of trustees. Every member of the board is active in the community. This greatly valued.

We are short of one or two trustees. If you feel you would like to be involved with a lively community doing valuable frontline work with the street homeless you would be most welcome. Trustees offer their expertise and experience in overseeing the work and guiding the strategy of the community. Trustees meet once a month at Friends House close to Euston station, enabling those who live outside London to attend conveniently. A number of the trustees have worked in Simon Community in the past, but previous experience is not essential.

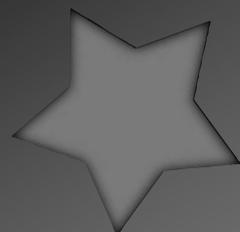
There are also opportunities to be involved as a co-worker. Our co-workers give invaluable support to the volunteer workers and the community as a whole; they are the backbone of our work. They are vital to our outreach services, contributing to the tea and soup runs and going out on streetwork. They also help in the house and at the Street Cafés. Please contact Jo Nurse the Community Manager if you would like to be a co-worker.

*John Yeudall*

**Annual AGM** will take place on  
Saturday 23 January at 11.00am.

Venue: **St. Silas the Martyr Church,**  
**11 St. Silas Place, Kentish Town, NW5 3QP**

*All welcome*



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# What's Wrong With Ending

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As the Mayor of London asked for responses to his housing strategy, we continue to find ourselves in a strange position. We oppose the target to end rough sleeping in London by 2012. Why would we do that and what else did we have to say about the plan?

The strategy includes the target which has been around for some time to end rough sleeping in London by 2012. We are worried as it seems to us to be firstly a target motivated more by how London will be viewed in 2012 during the Olympics than by concern for rough sleepers. We're also concerned that to reach this target, statutory bodies and other agencies will be forced to 'oblige' people to 'accept help' and/or make the alternative of sleeping rough even less palatable for that individual. We are not naïve enough to suggest that people choose to sleep rough as a 'lifestyle choice' but we do know that there is often an element of choice involved. For example between a violent and noisy hostel place which combines with mental health issues and escaping to the street. We are concerned that the current strategy may lead to an extension of 'enforcement' style tactics seen recently in the City of London under the title of 'operation Poncho'. These practices are immoral, counterproductive and, we suspect, illegal. We would seek guarantees that no individual will be harassed or suffer any coercive action to 'disrupt' their rough sleeping.

Rather than looking for innovative and sustainable solutions, increasingly 'technical' responses will be sought by the collection of large agencies currently active on the London Delivery Board. However, community responses are essential in

providing a basic social safety net for those sleeping rough and we would welcome a supportive approach from the strategy and board. We have just heard that colleagues at Housing Justice have successfully lobbied to get a place on the board to represent smaller organizations.

The strategy also suggested that targets to end the commitment to each new development containing a certain amount of social housing and the introduction of flat targets. We felt that this was a dodging of a politically difficult issue.

There was also a mention of meeting the 'challenge of migration'. Migration brings benefit to the city of London. In fact, the housing needed for the city is largely being built by migrant tradesmen and women whether in the formal economy or outside of this. The strategy should recognise the needs of EU citizens in the city, particularly when they are unable to find work, have mental health needs and alcohol or drug dependency. At Simon Community we are now seeing large numbers of EU citizens from the accession states who cannot access any support from homelessness agencies or the state. Small and voluntary organisations like ours are picking up this bill and our services are stretched. The strategy should either relieve this burden by providing for some level of statutory support or accept the major role of small organisations and support them to deliver. Any middle ground is both unfair and counterproductive.

We did see a commitment to turning empty homes and buildings back into usable housing which was very welcome. The work of the campaigns group continues, please do contact the office if you'd like to get involved or to receive a full copy of our response.

## What's New in the Community?

A new industrial washing machine and a new and bigger tumble dryer to complement it. A new cooker. The whole of the garden wall that had partly crumbled. Our new website will be launched in November.

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# Rough Sleeping?



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## CAMPAIGNS UPDATE

The work of our campaigns group continues with urgency. We are working on the issues around the government target to end rough sleeping by 2012 and wrote a response to the London housing strategy. Thanks to lobbying by our colleagues at Housing Justice, there will be a representative of the smaller community organizations on the mayor's delivery board. As part of this we will have our chance to say our piece when the Community Manager will be part of a meeting with the Mayor's Head of Housing, Richard Blakeway later this month. There are two big issues on the horizon at the moment. First is the worry that 2012 will see people sleeping rough in

London being moved on and hidden from view to prepare the capital for the 3 weeks of Olympic spotlight. The second big issue is the continuing refusal to fund work to support people from other EU countries sleeping rough in London. We'll also be having another head count to draw attention to the numbers of people still continuing to sleep rough in London.

There's a great deal to do and we're looking for keen campaigners to join us. Please contact the office to find out when the next meeting is and come along.

*Dave Clark*

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## New Simon Community Website



We will shortly be launching the new Simon Community website at [www.simoncommunity.org.uk](http://www.simoncommunity.org.uk). Currently under construction, the new website will be much more user friendly, with simple clearly labelled sections and a more up-to-date feel.

Using the simple interface, one will be able to easily access information on all our services. Together with a time table of our weekly outreach work, directional maps will indicate the drop-off points for tea & soup runs and also to the sites of our street cafes and hospitality house.

Information on our history, management committee, accounts and statistics, will all be readily available, and we are hoping to include, in the near future from our archives, a visual history

of Simon through the decades.

You will also be able to sign up, on-line, to receive a copy of this quarterly newsletter, either as an e-mail or by post.

All our latest campaigning issues will be explained, with regular updates and progress. The new 'News' section will keep you in touch with all our latest events and you will have the opportunity to comment on these via our blog.

Together with our other current sections on volunteering and supporting the Community, we hope that your experience on the new site, will be a good and positive one.

*Cynthia Jameson*

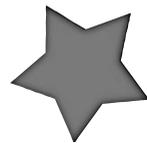
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## Legacy Appeal

We have always been very fortunate to receive much of our funding from supporters who remembered us in their will, either by leaving a pecuniary legacy, a specific bequest, a residuary gift, a reversionary bequest. Contact us for more details.



# Soup Runs



In July this year the London School of Economics (LSE) published a report entitled "Soup-runs: the right help in the right place at the right time?" Ambiguous title aside, the report was broadly supportive of soup-runs and, to a greater extent,



the Simon Community's street cafes. For anyone who has been on a soup-run, the positive benefits would appear to be self-evident, but it was good to see confirmation of this from such a reputable source. In my dystopian vision of the future – that is, around the arrival of the 2012 Olympics – I imagine that the department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) will have made a number of attempts to entirely rid London of "rough-sleepers" and "anti-social behaviour" using a variety of increasingly punitive tactics. It is highly likely this will include the banning of soup-runs. (Westminster City Council led a similar, ultimately unsuccessful campaign at the end of 2007.) When that day comes, for once, we will be supported by a report that provides evidence showing that far from encouraging homelessness, "soup-runs... can reach people who may not be reached through mainstream service provision". I use the word "evidence" advisedly, since it is so often confused with "my opinion". It is an important distinction since much homeless

policy is based on anecdotal evidence and opinion masquerading as the truth. Hence, Mike Nicholas from Thames Reach – one of London's largest homeless charities - recent assertion that arresting drug-users is very often the best way to stop them using drugs. I imagine that the thought process went something like this: a drug user is arrested and stops using drugs, therefore the drug-user stopped using drugs because he was arrested. On initial inspection it seems obvious, no? However, further examination reveals that what this genius piece of logic failed to account for was any of the other factors involved in this individual's cessation. At the very best we might be able to say that one drug user at some point in time possibly stopped using drugs because he was arrested. However, to then use this one example as support for a

policy that affects hundreds of people is simple-minded in the extreme, and likely to have quite a different affect to the one intended.

So here's to evidence, to complexity, to looking deeply. And down with simple-minded solutions! As for the LSE's report, we have continued to discuss its recommendations at the "soup-run forum" – a quarterly meeting organised by Housing Justice to better co-ordinate the efforts of outreach "providers" in London. This forum is important because it brings together the different groups currently doing outreach in London from, amongst others, Emmaus and the Upper Room. And more recently, since the publication of the LSE's research, the forum has been attended by members of the CLG – who are keen to discuss the implications of the report's findings. The discussions have been lively. A full copy of the report can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/yddub8k>

*Steve Barnes*

# Community People



The work the Simon Community does is always with those who fall through the safety net of our society. But what does that mean in practice.

At the heart of our work are those lonely and isolated people who find it difficult to love and be loved. They have usually had very troubled early lives, which have left them without the social and emotional tools they need to sustain relationships of any kind. Life for them is a ceaseless struggle in a world that they often find bewildering and unkind. Many of them have learning difficulties, difficulties reading and writing, personality disorders. We believe they need long-term, patient, loving in a structured residential environment, where they can learn or relearn how to deal with the complexities of living.

However, these are not the only people who sleep on the streets. As society changes, so it shakes out a kaleidoscopic and ever-changing variety of new "misfits".

When the community started in 1963 it was not uncommon to find families with children sleeping rough. There were also very many homosexual men, especially from Ireland and Scotland, who had become homeless because they were unable to cope with the pressure of living with the religious and social stigma and illegality of their state of being.



The world has changed enormously since 1963 and, I believe, in many ways for the better. We live in a society, which now, at least, pays lip service to the rights of all its members. But we also live in a society, which is increasingly complex and bureaucratic and new groups of people continue to fall through new tears in the safety net of the state. And we continue to try and find new ways of supporting them. Our street cafes, which we operate during the day in central London, have become a crucially important point of contact with the many hungry, homeless, east Europeans who are victims of the recession, especially the collapse in the building trade. The hospitality we provide at St Josephs house is essential for people with no money or other resources, or entitlement to any help from the state. We are able to link these often desperate people with their families abroad and more importantly with services in this country which can help them return home or find work and a place to stay. This puts heavy pressure on our longer-term residents and workers although they do as much as they can to help despite the lack of space, privacy and resources.

This is, we hope, a transient problem which will slowly disappear. The real long-term problem is the increasing lack of affordable housing in general. By next year in England alone there will be a shortfall of 1 million homes. This creates enormous social pressures, which can have catastrophic results for the more fragile and marginal members of society pushing them over the edge and onto the streets.

Our response to these shifting social mores is twofold. First; to accept people as they are and care for them to the best of our ability with our limited resources. Second, but of equal importance; to campaign for greater understanding and compassion in society as a whole and to highlight both the old and new events which force people to become homeless.

*Dave Clark*

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# In Memory...



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Announcing the sad news that Lynn Rose, a former member of the Simon Community died on 20th November 2008.

Many of you may not have known Lynn, but I'm sure those of you who did will remember her as the unconventional young girl with long blonde hair, long skirt, bare feet and always the heady scent of patchouli oil, renowned for her excellent skill of "tapping" convents for donations for the Community.

Lynn was born on 23rd November 1957 on the Island of Jersey. Following troubled adolescent years, she ran away to mainland England, where her life continued to be difficult and chaotic. Becoming heavily involved in drink and drugs, she lived rough on the streets of London. Despite all, she never lost her ability to care for and about others. Displaying admirable strength in not only being able to stand up for herself against the thugs and bullies of street life, but also in looking out for others sharing her lifestyle.

For a period of time during the 1970's she lived in the Simon Community. Here she received non-judgemental, unconditional, support and friend-

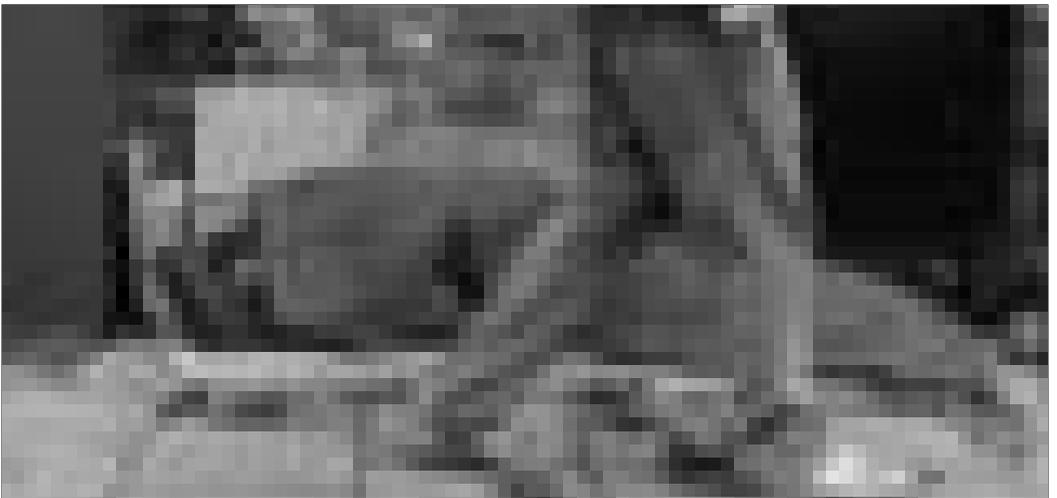
ship, that was the unique code of care established by Anton Wallich-Clifford.

Here she grew in strength able to both give and receive the support and friendship of life in Community. Working at St Joes and Simonwell Farm.

I'm sure many of you will have good and not so good memories of that time. She would be the first to tell you she was "no saint" and had at times a tempestuous temper to prove it. But as she grew into a mature woman her beautiful spirit grew ever stronger. She left her troubled life behind her but she never forgot it. She died from Lung Cancer aged 50. She lived life to the full and was always caring and non-judgemental of others. She felt she had lived 100 years within her brief 50, and most certainly the last twenty years of her life she lived and worked, happy and content, free of drugs but never complacent.

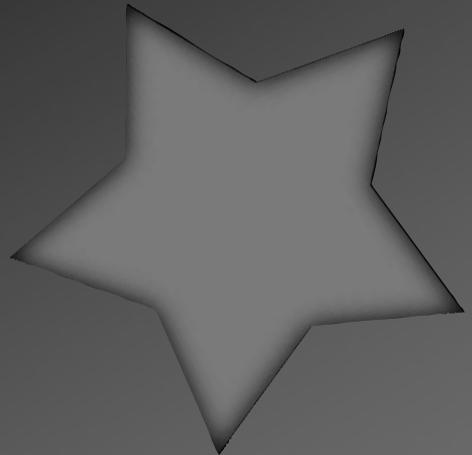
I feel both happy and proud to not only have known such a beautiful person but to have also been her friend.

*Sue*





**The photo on the left is of our house at 129. See this space in the next issue for a photo of our new house.**



**Please complete this form and return it with your donation to:**

**The Simon Community**

**P.O. Box 1187**

**London**

**NW5 4HW**

*Alternatively you can make a secure donation online via our website,  
why not visit us at: **www.simoncommunity.org.uk***

*giftaid it*

Using GIFT AID means that for every pound you give between 6 April 2008 and 5 April 2011 we get an extra 28p from the Inland Revenue, helping your donation go further. You may cancel this arrangement at any time simply by notifying us.

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Initial:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Surname:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **Post code:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Please treat:**

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- All gifts of money that I make today and in the future as Gift Aid donations until I notify you otherwise; OR
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Please notify us if you change your name or address OR if your circumstances change and you no longer pay sufficient income tax and/or capital gains tax.

Please tick the appropriate box(es).

**I would like:**

- further information on including Simon in my will;
- I would like further information on volunteering as  
a  trustee,  co-worker OR  worker;
- I would like to receive Simon Star by  email OR  post.

**I enclose:**

- a cheque/postal order made payable to "The Simon Community".