

Meal NEWS FROM Project Open Hand Times



Autumn 2016 Issue No. 108



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Begin Again: Thuy's story

by Tara Blake
Marketing Communications Officer

"To begin, they put a port in. I had 16 treatments total, and I had to give blood every week as well. Then, I'd sit there for four hours. I watched a lot of Breaking Bad and I could never eat for hours after...just bread or bananas."

Thuy never imagined that this would be how she'd spend her mid-twenties. She didn't imagine sitting alone in a hospital room while being told the lump found in her breast was in fact cancer. She didn't imagine the hardest decision she'd make was whether she should do chemo or opt out.

"There is no right or wrong answer to accepting or declining chemo treatment," she says, in a surprisingly lighthearted and apparently unbothered tone as she recalls about the few short months that changed her world. "I contacted everyone I knew with a medical background. No one wanted to give me an answer. Everyone was too scared."

She pauses, and looks to me to fill the silence. I don't say a word, so she carries on with her thought.

"Chemo feels like a really bad flu. You know the flu feeling when you just can't move? That's it. And you're on the flu every week because they keep giving it to you."

Thuy's dog, Mickey Mouse, has been sleeping by my feet during our conversation, except when Thuy left to feed the meter, Mickey paced anxiously in the room until she returned. Thuy smiles at that when I tell her.

"Oh yeah. Mickey has been there for me more than anyone. He sat with me during every chemo session."

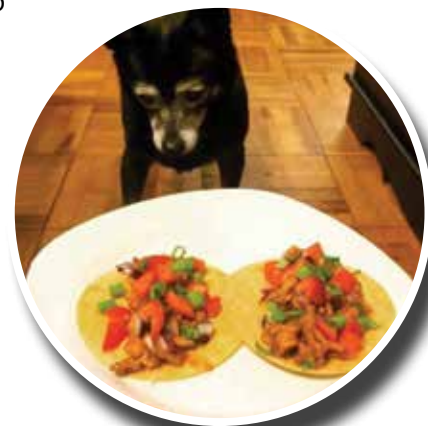


Thuy and Mickey visiting Ireland in July, 2016

Thuy went to high school in Visalia, California, until she moved on to get her undergrad in biological sciences at UC Davis.

"After graduation, I got a job as assistant scientist at Marrone Bio Innovations, but I learned as much as I could and I wanted to go back to school." She got accepted into a master's program at San Francisco State, and saved enough money to take the summer off to relax and prepare for her move.

"Everything changed at once for me." By now, Thuy has placed both hands flat on the table as if she's bracing herself for the words that are about to follow. "I quit my job one day in June, ended a bad six year relationship in July and found a lump in August. August 26th, to be exact."



Thuy's Korean Bulgogi pork tacos, made almost entirely of items from Project Open Hand's Grocery Center

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Project Open Hand

meals with love

openhand.org

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Project Open Hand's mission is to nourish and engage our community by providing *meals with love* to the sick and the elderly.

MealTimes is published quarterly for the friends and clients of Project Open Hand.

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MARK'S LETTER

WINNING THE HEARTS AND MINDS

I was watching an interview with our founder, Ruth Brinker, last week where she was asked for probably the millionth time why she began making supper for her dying friends. This interview was taped near the end of Ruth's life and while she seemed physically frail, she remained powerful at her core.

Ruth's drive to do this work was grounded in her deep empathy for others, her belief in community and her very personal feeling of individual responsibility to help. She described the last part as her "calling."

Every day, I think about carrying this mission forward. To do so, part of my personal responsibility is to "win hearts and minds" — of our clients, our community, our stakeholders and our supporters.

We win hearts every day here at Project Open Hand. You'll see that moment in our clients' eyes on a crowded Tuesday toward the end of the month when other resources have run dry, and they are greeted with warmth and kindness by staff and volunteers and they leave with plenty of nutritious food and love. They are safe and taken care of. Their hearts are full, at least for now.

Now, to win the minds. In 1985, Project Open Hand was the first to begin serving meals as a means to help friends struggling and dying of AIDS. Last year, we were first again. We were the first in the nation to partner with a major research institution (UCSF School of Medicine) to evaluate the medical and social impact of our nutrition services on our clients' health. The results speak for themselves: *hospitalizations decreased by 63%, ER visits decreased by 36%, and medication adherence increased by 50%*. We invested in research to demonstrate our effectiveness and value, not only to our clients but to our community and our funders. So now you know that not only will your \$2.40 pay for a delicious and nutritious meal, it will also lower the cost of healthcare and improve the medical outcomes of our clients.

Stephanie (Steph) Ring is a perfect example of a committed heart and mind. Steph became a client in 1992, fighting for her life against AIDS. We hand delivered hot meals every day until she got on her feet. She grew stronger and found herself healthy enough to move off of our program, and become a volunteer instead.

When we needed volunteers for the UCSF Pilot Study, Steph stepped up to help. Participants needed to go through hours of qualitative and quantitative testing, eat 100% of their nutrition from Project Open Hand and answer weekly surveys about their health. Steph selflessly donated her time to help us build the data and win minds.

And she kept going! Shortly after becoming a study participant, she began volunteering and distributing meals for the study, providing other participants with their meals and collecting survey data.

Like Ruth, Steph cares deeply for her community and feels the need to help whoever and whenever she is able. "Well of course I'm helping, why wouldn't I?" she said, without missing a beat.

Mark Ryle, LCSW
CEO, Project Open Hand



Steph (left) and Mark outside of
Project Open Hand

VOLUNTEER

spotlight

REX ROLAND

It all began in 1993, when Rex Roland started juggling his journalism career with working as a crisis counselor at REAL Crisis Intervention in Greenville, North Carolina.

“We were always encouraged to give back to our community,” says Rex, whose career as a television journalist spanned 15 years with stations that included WNCT in North Carolina and KREM in Washington. Despite the complexities behind being a television personality, it was a rewarding experience.

About four months ago, Rex began volunteering at Project Open Hand in our grocery center twice a week, and five times monthly at our downtown senior site during lunchtime. Needless to say, his dedication has helped immensely. Rex says he’s enjoyed his time with everyone so much that he’s begun spending time with them outside of Project Open Hand doors.

“It seems like we all share that common thread of wanting to give back and it’s nice to be around people like that. For instance, I work with a woman named Mary Jane. She’s been volunteering for 20-plus years, and she is a complete inspiration. I watch her and think, ‘if she can get here every week... yeah, I surely can too.’”

Rex was Born in Midland, Texas, and moved to San Francisco in 2002. His hobbies include swimming, traveling, and cooking. In fact, Rex says, “Project Open



“I watch her and think, ‘if she can get here every week...yeah, I surely can too.’”

– Rex

Hand food has helped expand my horizons since I’ve been here. I’m an experimental cook now.”

“There are people out there that have health issues, myself in the past as well, and they need help to get back on track. I saw a need in my community, and I knew the importance of nutrition for people’s health. I do it for myself as well, it’s a very rewarding experience. If I can talk to someone and help with their day, it helps me grow as a person and makes me feel good. Interacting with our clients, giving a smile, starting conversation...I may be their only contact that day, and they deserve the dignity of a good meal.”

Our team is excited to have stumbled upon news clippings, photos, and more, meticulously archived by staff members over the years. Every MealTimes, we’ll explore Project Open Hand’s deep history by posting a piece from the past.



Ruth Brinker is grandmother incarnate, a balm of memories and sympathies. As she sits at the edge of his messy bed, the young blond man pries the lid off his dinner. An Italian omelet, roast potatoes, broccoli. The cramped hotel room actually smells of home. “Ruth,” he says, “I love you.”

Time Magazine, January 9, 1989.



OTTO PILOT: Keeping Project Open Hand on course

With his San Francisco Giants cap perpetually planted downward, Otto Baltodano's eyes appear eternally fixed on his target: that next stack of Project Open Hand meals ready for delivery. Due to his unassuming and introverted nature, one might not ever know that Otto is both a Purple Heart-awarded Vietnam War veteran and Project Open Hand hero.

"Otto has single-handedly delivered more meals than any other driver in Project Open Hand history. We're talking untold thousands of meals," says POH Manager of Distribution, Scott Yowell, who personally talked Otto out of retirement and recently promoted him to Lead Driver.

A native of Nicaragua, Otto moved to San Francisco as a teenager in 1966 and has lived in the Mission District ever since. Though he was homesick at first, a love of baseball from his Little League playing days in Nicaragua coupled with rooting for Latino Giants legends like Juan Marichal and Tito Fuentes, helped him settle into San Francisco.



› What do you remember about your first meal delivery?

That I lost it! They sent me on the route near the beach. I was looking for this apartment building, and I just kept circling and circling, looking and looking with no luck. I was supposed to be there no later than 6 p.m. By the time I finally got back (to Project Open Hand), it was past 9 p.m. and everybody was gone. I had to find a place to park the van outside.

Otto shakes his head and adjusts his San Francisco Giants cap.

› What is your favorite part of your job?

Being outside and roaming the city. I love the whole city. Well, except for Kearny Street! Oh man! The traffic is crazy there. It can take 30 minutes to go just a few blocks. Pedestrians don't pay attention. All those people headed to Moscone Center... drivers don't signal. Drives me crazy! But I do love helping the clients. It's very nice to bring food to people who truly need it.

› Do you listen to music while you drive?

Definitely. Pure salsa. I mostly listen to Cesar Ascarrunz's show. I can listen to just about anything. Well, except for reggaeton. Can't understand a thing about reggaeton. I can't handle that.

Otto covers his ears.

› Do you have a favorite song?

"Lady in Red." That was my mom's favorite song. She passed away in 2006. Makes me think about her and makes me cry.

› Do you have a favorite delivery vehicle?

Actually, I like this Mercedes Sprinter. I call it Little Red.

› Ever been in an accident?

No. Never been pulled over. No tickets... Okay, there was one accident. But they hit me. It was somewhere around Ellis or Turk. Guy ran a red light. That was years ago.

› What is the meaning of life?

Oh, I dunno. Be happy. Stay away from Kearny Street. And please use your turn signal!

PROJECT OPEN HAND Plate Clubs

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Every gift makes a difference. In each issue of MealTimes, we give special acknowledgement to our supporters who have given a total of \$1,000 or more during the previous quarter (July 1, 2016 through September 30, 2016) and have given a total of \$1,000 or more. Your generosity enables us to provide nourishing food to so many of our neighbors. If you have questions about this list, please contact John McArdle, Director of Development, at jmcardle@openhand.org or (415) 447-2413.

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»»» NOTES FROM OUR COMMUNITY

Project Open Hand,

Please accept this little gift, some postcards of my artwork, signed and stamped on back. Just a little example of what I have been creating throughout the years. Do what you wish with this – they are for you.

I have been living with HIV for over 25 years – experiencing a lay-off and realizing how expensive the lifesaving drugs are, not to mention rising healthcare costs and living expenses, life can be a struggle for me, and many.

My art is my catalyst, a release from the daily grind, and the goal of my work is to capture the energy of the late 70s' discos – the music, lights and love. My art has been described as energetic, happy, and full of life. That manic energy is what my art is all about!

Sincerely,
durkART



THUY'S STORY *continued from page 1*

In between work and school, Thuy was temporarily uninsured at the time of diagnosis.

Coming from a low-income family and having spent all of her savings on treatment, she began exploring local resources she could lean on after her mastectomy. Her social worker mentioned Project Open Hand, and shortly after beginning chemo, Thuy was getting *meals with love* delivered to her home.

"I used to eat fast food and drink energy drinks." Her voice seems to get louder as she continues. "It's because of Project Open Hand's creative, prepared meals that I started cooking, and now it's one of my favorite things to do. After chemo, I was pretty beat up; I got tired walking across the street to school." She continues, "Now that I'm more energized, I get Project Open Hand groceries, and I can do things longer without getting tired and..."

Thuy stops mid-sentence and says, "What was I saying? I'm sorry, I have chemo brain" and her infectious laugh makes me laugh back, though I never imagined I'd be able to in a conversation like this. I get a sense that's just Thuy. From the moment of discovery to her last chemo treatment...I don't imagine there was ever a moment of self-pity.

Because my chance of breast cancer recurrence is so high," she adds, "it's important that I maintain my current weight on the medication I am taking.



"It's because of Project Open Hand's creative, prepared meals that I started cooking."

- Thuy

Project Open Hand meals and groceries have helped with that immensely. I am much healthier now because of it."

During recovery, Thuy regularly drove from San Francisco to Sacramento, from school to appointments. She drove over the Bay Bridge every week. Having found so much symbolism from those trips, she later got the bridge tattooed on her arm.

"San Francisco was the place I could begin again and leave the rest behind — my breakup, my diagnosis. It began to be a sign of 'it gets better' and 'there's always a way back to that better place' for me. When I cross the bridge, I don't really think about cancer. This is a reminder that I always have a way back to that feeling."

Recipe

FROM OUR
KITCHEN TO
YOURS

SICILIAN PORK & LENTIL STEW

Serves 5

ingredients

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1 fl oz canola-olive oil blend 75/25 oil | 2 cups tomato diced in juice, pulp & juice separated |
| 2 lbs diced cooked pork | 8 oz capers, chopped |
| 1 gal vegetable stock | 1 tsp ground coriander |
| 8 oz brown lentils | 1 tsp red chili flakes |
| 8 oz slab bacon, diced ¼" | 1 tbsp kosher salt |
| 1 sweet potato | 1 tbsp dried basil |
| 1 yellow onion, diced ½" | 1 tbsp fresh sage, chiffonade |
| 2 carrots, diced ¼" | |
| 1 green bell pepper, diced ¼" | |

directions

1. Heat a medium, heavy-bottomed pot over medium heat. Add oil.
2. Add bacon to pot. Sauté for 5 minutes.
3. Add onions and carrots. Sauté for 5 more minutes.
4. Season with salt, pepper, dried basil and coriander.
5. Add the cooked pork, tomatoes, lentils and stock. Bring to boil and simmer for 20 minutes.
6. When lentils are al dente, add bell peppers.
7. When bell peppers and lentils are completely cooked, add the capers and fresh sage. Adjust seasoning.

