

My Brother's Table



YEAR

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MBT's 20th

A Special 20th Anniversary weekend, October 24-27 will celebrate our past and look to the future of My Brother's Table. October 24th will be the 20th Anniversary of the first meal served at My Brother's Table on Union St. in Lynn—20 years ago.

Since then about 50,000 volunteers have served over a million and an half hot and nutritious meals to our guests on over 7,000 evenings or weekend afternoons. But numbers tell only part of the story.

My Brother's Table is about people. We've asked some of our family members—volunteers, guests, staff, and others close to the Table, to share what My Brother's Table means to them—what makes it such a special place. Please take a moment to read what they say throughout this issue and send or e-mail your thoughts about the Table to mary@mybrotherstable.org or to MBT, 98 Willow St., Lynn, MA 01901.

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20th Anniversary Events

My Brother's Table's 20th Anniversary Weekend will begin on October 24th with a service remembering our deceased guests, volunteers and supporters. The interfaith service will be held at the Washington Street Baptist Church (a block from the Table) at 5 p.m. The service will be followed by a delicious roast beef dinner served to our guests. Members of long-time catering groups will serve that evening.

We expect representatives from Trinity Baptist Church of Lynnfield who served the first meal on October 24, 1982 to join many of the MBT Founders and members of initial catering groups including Star of the Sea of Marblehead, First Church Congregational of Swampscott and St. Ann's in Peabody in providing table service to our guests on this special night. These three groups are still catering after 20 years. Others helping that

night will include parishioners from St. Joseph's and St. Alban's of Lynn and St. Joseph's of Salem, Trinity Church of Topsfield and Boxford, the Sisters of Marian Court College, and students from Gordon College. All these groups catered and served dinner during the first month of the Table's existence. Long-time caterer, the GE Minority Development Council will anchor the servers that day.

All members of the My Brother's Table Family—volunteers, guests, and donors, are encouraged to come on October 24th as well as for the Walk on October 27th.

Next spring there will also be an art show featuring the original works of many MBT guests and a special volunteer appreciation dinner at the time of the Annual Meeting.

20th Anniversary Walkathon

The 20th Anniversary Walk-athon will be held on Sunday October 27th at the Church of the Holy Name, 60 Monument Avenue in Swampscott. Registration begins at 1 p.m. and the three-mile walk along the Lynn and Swampscott shoreline begins at 1:30—rain or shine.

"This year we hope to reach out to everyone who has done the walk before, as well as to newcomers," said Jane Hunt, Walk-athon Chairperson. "This beautiful route is only three miles long. We'll have refreshments and prizes and even a 20th year birthday cake. It's an event for people of all ages. More than 95 percent of the money raised directly benefits the guests of My Brother's Table," Jane said.

The goal is to ask each group of walkers to find **20 people** to walk as a team. Then each walker will find **20 sponsors** who will be asked to pledge **\$20 dollars.**" Of course every donation, no matter the size, is very much appreciated," she stresses.

The walk has brought in about \$10,000 annually in recent years according to Hunt. "We're hoping to increase the number of walkers, teams and sponsors this year to celebrate the 20th Anniversary. It's also important because dollars have been harder to come by this past year, just as the number of guests is increasing," she adds. So please, "**walk the Walk**" for the guests of My Brother's Table.

The Table From Summer to Fall to Winter

Many thanks to all the volunteers and donors who made the **2002 20th Anniversary Garden Party** such a big success. The *Lynn Item* called it an almost perfect evening. The best thing about it? This year, for the first time ever, the goal of \$50,000 was exceeded—thanks to the generosity of our sponsor, Willow Laboratories and Medical Center, hundreds of donors, advertisers, volunteers, and food and beverage suppliers.

Think Thanksgiving, and everyone thinks turkeys. That's really true at My Brother's Table where we collect over 500 frozen turkeys for our Thanksgiving guests and distribution to Lynn area food pantries and some schools and outreach organizations as well. We hope you can help us as you have in the past by dropping off a **frozen** 12-15 pound turkey to MBT by November 18th.

On Christmas Day volunteers from the Jewish Federation of the North Shore prepare a festive dinner and pass out new sweaters to the men, women, children, and infants who come to our door on the holiday. Often this is the only gift many receive. So if you can, please bring a new, unwrapped sweater to My Brother's Table by December 12th. We'll make sure there's a shiny package at the Table for all of our guests. Also on the Winter Wish List are new mittens, gloves and hats, long underwear, and sweatpants. Again, thanks for your generosity and concern for others.

I was working at the door during the early days of the Table. As two of the guests, both older ladies, were leaving, one said thanks and handed me a ten dollar bill. The other reached into her pocket and pulled out 35 cents. She said it was all she had but some of the other guests needed it more than she did.

Vic McCurdy, volunteer

Thank you so much for having kindness and giving hearts. I thank God every time I pass through your doors. How much I appreciate knowing that we have a place to go when times are tough. Sometimes it's the only place I may go that day when someone asks me how I'm doing today. For me it's not just a place to have a meal, but also to learn about people, life, gratitude, and making friends. I will always remember having "Brother's Table" there to help. In appreciation and thanks,

Dale, guest

I went to this great restaurant. The food was good and they had tablecloths and flowers.

4-year old guest

I feel like a little piece of this organization. It takes lots of little pieces to make an organization like My Brother's Table work.

Rene Michaud, volunteer

I think what strikes me is the tremendous volunteer base at MBT. We have the most giving and caring people doing whatever one asks of them. The other striking thing is that we have guests and not clients.

Mark Messenger, volunteer

Hot Meals and Warm Smiles—A Day at the Table

By Carolyn Stanton

If the phrase *soup kitchen* conjures up images of 1930s bread lines, think again. My Brother's Table in Lynn, Massachusetts is refreshingly different. Each evening at My Brother's Table volunteers and guests, young and old, comfortable and impoverished, share a meal. It is a center where barriers break down and understanding begins. It's 4 p.m. Volunteers are arriving. Outside the brick Victorian building guests are gathering. In the kitchen today's catering group leader stirs a huge pot of pasta. Tonight's meal is American chop suey. Across the room others chop peppers, onion, and tomatoes for the meat sauce. Salads are put into bowls, milk and juice containers filled, bread buttered, coffee started, desserts arranged on paper plates. Teenagers and senior citizens together prepare dinner for 200.

Lynn needs this soup kitchen. After World War II, major industries gradually moved out and unemployment climbed. As many as 25% of Lynn's citizens live below the poverty level. Meeting the needs for an evening meal 365 days a

(cont'd page 5)

Reflections on the Table at Twenty

Wanda Hearn was a volunteer and Board Member when she died. Wanda made no apologies for her life, so neither will I. She was a recovering drug addict who contacted the HIV virus and died from AIDS.

At the funeral, one of her relatives spoke about Wanda's life. She described in some detail the hardships that Wanda had endured. Then she began to relate Wanda's road to recovery the culmination of which was that Wanda was chosen to serve on the Board of Directors at My Brother's Table. All of the staff from the Table was stunned. We knew that being a Board Member had been important to Wanda but we had no idea just how important it had been.

Often as a staff member it was humbling to learn just how important My Brother's Table was (and continues to be) in people's lives. No person taught me that lesson as clearly as Wanda Hearn.

John Feehan, former Executive Director

As a volunteer at My Brother's Table it seems that I benefit as well as our guests. Serving food to those in need is a great "hands on" experience and the satisfying results are immediately apparent. On the way home, the realization that you have made a real difference in someone's life often helps you put your own problems in perspective.

Carolyn Stanton, volunteer

My Brother's Table would not exist today if it had not been for the incredible contribution of time and talent made by persons from St. Joseph's Parish in Lynn 20 years ago. I was fortunate to work with a most talented, compassionate and spirit-filled group—Sister Rita Hennessey, Father Harry Lawson, Frank Kearney, Sister Mary Kelleher, Father John Gallagher, and Sister Florence Barton. All worked tirelessly to make the establishment of My Brother's Table's possible. They inspired many others to volunteer their skills and within a ten-month span the idea became a reality. Over one hundred guests were welcomed for the first meal on October 24, 1982. The contribution of this group and St. Joseph's Parish in Lynn should not be forgotten.

Nancy Ryan, volunteer

My Brother's Table has been a beacon of hope, compassion, and friendship serving the needs of the community for 20 years. My hope would be that organizations like My Brother's Table would not be needed in the future—that there would be no hunger and homelessness. If that is not to be, My Brother's Table will continue to serve the community and provide that beacon of hope.

Alice Goldsmith, volunteer

*"And since we are caring for God's people,
we will always get what we need."*

A free dinner served no matter what...in a snowstorm and despite a bomb threat...warm appreciation from those who come to dinner...years of faithful service from so many volunteers... thousands of caring people giving what they can to feed strangers...it's a privilege to be part of such an amazing place.

Ilia Stacy, Executive Director

Many years ago I met a guest/volunteer whose nickname was Alabama, and he and I sometimes washed pots together. I always felt that he exemplified the spirit of the Table. Although Alabama was a person who must have experienced a great deal of hardship, he had a wonderful sense of humor and a cheerful personality. I feel that Alabama was an example of one of the Table's missions because he was able to reach the point that he could give as well as receive.

Jerry Madorsky, volunteer

While I am grateful that we are able to meet the nutritional needs of our guests, I also feel it important to provide a place where peoples' need for socializing is met. It is wonderful to know that those who live alone can come to find someone to share both a meal and conversation, perhaps the only companionship of the day.

Jane Hunt, volunteer

20 Years at the Table

A Day at the Table *(cont'd from page 2)*

year takes 2,500 volunteers from churches and temples fraternal organizations, retirees' groups, businesses, hospitals, schools, and individuals. Camaraderie prevails as they prepare food, serve, scrape dishes, scrub pots, and sweep floors. Tonight's catering group from a church has cooked once a month since the Table opened 20 years ago. American chop suey is one of many menus—along with stew, meat loaf and baked potatoes, chicken à la king, shepherd's pie, hot dogs and beans, ham and yams, baked fish, and special foods for ethnic holidays. On nights when no group is assigned to cook, Ian Jones, staff Cook and Kitchen Manager, creates the menu.

Just before the doors open at 5:30, jobs are passed out. Workers join hands, and a blessing is asked on all who enter. Finally, "Remember, we serve hot meals with warm smiles."

The guests wait in the hallway. Some are alcohol- or drug-dependent; some are former mental patients, some homeless, most lonely. The evening meal is their chance to be with others, to talk about their concerns in a comfortable, attractive setting. Many remember standing in the cold outside the old store-front kitchen where My Brother's Table was first located, started by six concerned people in 1982. From serving 75 guests 3 times a week, the Table has expanded to serving as many as 300 guests seven days a week, even more on some occasions. A donation of \$100,000 from United Parcel Service employees in 1992 made it possible to move to a larger, more comfortable building.

Bill, tonight's doorperson, welcomes the guests. Families with children are welcomed first, each person picking up a tray and moving down the serving line. Servers and guests converse. "Dressing on your salad?" "Would you like more bread?" "How's the baby today?" "Is your sister out of the hospital yet?" Some guests respond like the old acquaintances they've become. "Missed you last month." "Who's cooking tonight?" A woman who left Lynn for Boston is back because she felt lonely. Hugs comfort an elderly guest whose son just died of AIDS in California. Some move along silently. Many say "thanks." Occasionally someone complains.

Paper bouquets made by local schoolchildren decorate the round tables, each seating six. Some volunteers help children and the disabled with their trays. They are encouraged to sit and talk with the guests and, more important, to listen. My Brother's Table does not accept government funding and is not a United Way affiliate—so finding donations of money and food is pressing every day. As a privately funded, independent soup kitchen the Table can accept guests of all backgrounds who do not have to disclose their names or explain why they need a meal. The Table's supporters recognize the need for free meals with no strings attached.

At 7:15 the door is locked, and cleanup begins. By 7:30 the volunteers gradually drift away. "Good night." "Thanks to all." "See you next month." Without the commitment of these volunteers, Lynn wouldn't have a Table.

To a child, twenty years seems like forever—an eternity. For adults nearing middle age it is often a midpoint and a time to reflect on where they have been and where they are going. For elders, it is a mere slice of their lives, a portion, a phase.

When I think about what twenty years of My Brother's Table means I can't help but have very mixed feelings about what a twenty-year old soup kitchen says about us, our guests and the world we live in.

In twenty years we have made great strides in technology; now we carry little phones in our pockets, we have instant access to knowledge and people across the world through the internet, we have discovered HIV and found ways to keep people alive with this disease, and we have figured out new ways to kill one another through something as common as a commercial airliner. Yet, something as simple as making sure everyone has enough to eat in a country where food is so plentiful it is often thrown away remains an unsolved problem.

In the New Testament it says that we will "always have the poor with" us. I've often wondered is this a promise or a threat? Is this just a simple statement of fact or an indictment of humanity? Why will there always be poor people? And does poverty have to mean that people must go without food, shelter and health care?

The Table has taught me that an important part of this equation is that the poor are "with" us. Not apart from us. They are us and we are they. The table proves this every night when volunteer, donor and guest break bread and dine at a common table as one. There is something bittersweet about the regularity of that event—but more sweet than bitter by far.

Dianne Kuzia Hills, Associate Director and Advocate

Camping from the Table

This summer, a few of the children who come to My Brother's Table went to overnight camp. Our children went to two camps, Camp Lapham and Camp Rotary for a total of 69 days. Thanks to the generosity of our donors we were able to pay their camp fees and thanks to some really great volunteers we were able to get them rides to camp too!

This is the 12th year that we have sent children to camp, and although we have done it many times the joy and excitement that these children feel at going to camp always surprises us. For many of our youngsters, this is their first real summer vacation where they have the opportunity to swim, ride bikes, make crafts, and go on trips. For one of our young campers it was also a unique experience for another reason. When this camper was relating to us what was great about camp, the words "and I had my own bed!" drove home to us how little some of our youngest guests have, and how appreciative they are for even the simplest comforts.



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MY BROTHER'S TABLE



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I remember Alabama. I never really knew his full name. I knew he had been in the Navy or served in shipyards, he lived alone upstairs from his brother and mother, was retired, had a small house up in Gilmanton, New Hampshire, and worked as a volunteer at MBT for years. A loyal and long term volunteer. He was a hard worker, loved to tease the ladies, valued good hot, soapy water to cut the grease washing the pans (he always did the pots and pans), did not have a very high opinion of many things and was very feisty at times. But he was always there to help. MBT was very much a second home for him, very much an extended family. He volunteered at MBT almost up until he died. There is a little plaque in his memory above the pots and pan sinks. This was and will always be "his station."

Walt Haug, volunteer

MBT was the first soup kitchen I volunteered at that has men, women, and youth as guests. The first time I actually served a meal at MBT was the third time I volunteered. The first two times I was on pot duty—thanks to my good friend Bridget the intern. To watch young children going through the line to receive a meal and watching my high school kids serving them was so overwhelming—I cried and cried and cried. For the first time I really realized that hunger is such a problem. But at the time it was beautiful to watch high school youth helping young people.

Jim Flanagan, volunteer