

## “Lemme Tell You About Yesterday”

June 2, 2023  
By Lena Bluestein

Thank you all for joining us in our 2nd annual Evening of Fine Dining. And thank you so much to Chef John's for allowing us this opportunity to use their lovely and iconic space! We really want to make this event distinct from other fundraising efforts, and thanks to the generous donations of Todd and Brad Reed Photography and Smith and Eddy Insurance we were able to provide all this, this evening. We hope that you enjoyed the food prepared by Jonathan Smalley (and his team), we will call him our own personal chef who also serves as the President of our Board at Blue Hat Ministries, also my brother in law and dear friend. As I speak please help yourself to the desserts and coffee.

Thank you for this opportunity to share. I hope you can leave tonight with a better understanding of the need, mission and accomplishments of Blue Hat Ministries in our county and beyond.

I started 5 years ago helping a few adults that I met at church and saw they had a need for connection and support. The more involved I became in their lives the more needs I saw and eventually someone from our Community Mental Health asked me to consider going to the courts to become a legal guardian. A guardian is assigned to people who have been deemed in need of help with their finances and medical decisions. This is decided by professionals such as doctors, Adult Protective Services, Psychiatrists, Social Workers, lawyers and the probate judge. Once they come to the conclusion that an adult would benefit from the support of a guardian, the court begins to look for an appropriate person to serve as guardian. If they have family the court would prefer to appoint a family member as it is such an all encompassing role and usually a lifelong commitment. However, so many disabled adults either come from families with their own issues that cause them to not be appropriate for guardianship. Or perhaps they

have alienated their families because of years of stress or mental illness, and of course many just have no living family. That is where Blue Hat Ministries come in.

In my first year I was overwhelmed with trying to understand what exactly was required of me in this role. The probate court and those listed above are the ones that recruit us for our services but they do not employ us or offer any compensation or reimbursement for time, gas or resources of a guardian. The best the courts currently offer for these adults is to hope that people will sign up for this task out of the goodness of their heart. Unfortunately, what I have observed of other guardians that attempted to take on a few clients that way is that the learning curve is too great for all the different resources clients needed to be connected with, the burden of sharing your life and free time with people with extreme emotional challenges was overwhelming and within six months to a year these people were petitioning the court to find another guardian. I definitely felt this as I had committed to over 20 adults by my third year, was juggling multiple other jobs to stay afloat but truly spending most of my time with my clients who I felt a compelling drive to help. Two years ago I knew something had to change, I was giving every ounce of my energy to clients, spending all my money on needs that we couldn't meet via any other agency, including driving to medical appointments all over the state. As people who loved me encouraged me to consider moving onto something else, because "it couldn't be worth the stress" I really felt a burden knowing that my clients that loved me like family and I loved them would just be moved onto just another person that would struggle to figure out how to help without the resources to do so, either. At that time as I prayed, I felt the idea dropped in my heart to pursue becoming a non-profit and to share this excitement and burden with others. The idea alone gave me strength to move forward and new hope to support my clients day in and day out. And as I like to say, year in and year out! It also gave me the courage to begin saying yes to more clients as the probate court calls and there is no shortage of individuals in need of guardians who will serve wholeheartedly.

In just the nearly two years since becoming a nonprofit we have now hired two part time staff, have volunteers who faithfully serve in different areas from office support, to driving, to in-home client support. We have dozens that support us with monthly financial giving and then those that have reached out with generous one time gifts of finances that have made all the difference in the world to how we can support these adults. We have become contracted with the Michigan Transportation Connection and are able to bill for at least 40% of the cost to transport people to non-emergency medical appointments. We have a functioning board that supports with oversight and energy and finally, many people that commit to pray or keep us and our clients in their thoughts. To top things off in January of 2023 we were recognized by Pennies from Heaven as a force worthy of a matching grant of \$50,000 for both 2023 and 2024. We are now overwhelmed by support and re-empowered to keep doing the work for decades to come. Lastly, we are pleased to announce that we have been able to establish a fund at the Mason County Community Foundation. Just this year we have brought the fund up to \$25,000 and have a goal to bring it to \$50,000 by the end of this year. As most of you know these funds will grow and allow donors the peace of mind to know that their dollars are going to last for years to come and continue to benefit organizations like Blue Hat Ministries and other community based groups. Because of these new developments with support we have nearly doubled the amount of clients we now consider family and have been able to help them in many more ways than we ever thought possible.

So - - What exactly do you do? That's a great question! I have to start by explaining our name - Blue Hat Ministries - as my married name is Bluestein, the color choice was obvious! But we went with Blue Hat because we are constantly wearing different hats on behalf our clients. To first illustrate the different types of hats, let me tell you the many different types of clients we support. For the most part people who require a guardian or conservator fall into three categories.

First: those with aging diseases that are robbing them of the ability to juggle finances, medical care and living arrangements. Often these adults lose the ability to get to and from places safely and then the ability to make sense of or remember what medical professionals are recommending to them. They need a guardian to help them remain independent or to see when it is time for transitions to greater levels of care. Some of these clients treasure my visits as few to no other people visit them, and some have a hard time remembering who I am from visit to visit.

The Second Group is those that were born disabled, with a major cognitive impairment and often never able to mature past a certain age of childhood development. These individuals may need support in every small detail down to shopping or navigating relationships with peers. On top of that, those placed in our care often don't have any family to spend even the holidays with. These adults are quick to call me mom or daughter or sister and I don't take that lightly.

The third group: those that have become disabled due to mental illness later in life. Those that lost their cognitive abilities due to extreme conditions of addictions and homelessness. Often a combination with mental illness. These adults often don't understand why they need a guardian, but by years of being faithful to support them when needed and by giving as much independence as they can handle, I have had the pleasure of some of the most heartfelt thank yous. One gentleman who died last year honored me with this compliment, "I wanted to say thanks - I know you handle all my crap and do stuff I don't wanna do, it means a lot."

As you can imagine the hats I wear when I meet with each of those different adults are quite different. Their need and the way I can interact to bring about life long changes in their life is so immensely different. And all day long these appointments, drop bys and phone calls all overlap and touch each other - it can be very hard to even know how to dress each day, not only bringing the right hats - but determining if I will need clothes I can get dirty or clothes for medical appointments or court!

To show people the many things myself and my team may face in one day, I've found it easier to say - "Lemme tell you about yesterday". In almost any given day if I were to tell you about yesterday, you would see the drastic variety of affairs we handle, how much focus and time they require and how the unique relationship, from knowing my clients over the years, helps me to guide them into the best individualized solutions for them.

So I've picked three yesterdays from the past few weeks 😊

One such yesterday, I started my day resolving a major financial crisis for my newest client. Unfortunately over the past couple weeks I uncovered some costly errors made before she was deemed in need of a guardian. Prior to this client moving into Sutter Living Memory Care for dementia, she or someone assisting her had attempted to purchase her a preneed burial. The one she purchased was worth \$3500 and this can be set up to be a non-countable asset that wouldn't affect your Supplemental Security Income or medicaid eligibility. Unfortunately, this client had not taken those steps and shortly before I was brought into the picture she cashed it in for the full \$3500, (that was only possible since it was never fully set up). So now as social security sees it she wasn't actually entitled to years of her approx 700 in SSI. Now she has been given warning that she owes back to the SSA \$35,000. Well this client has nothing but the items with her in the Sutter Living apartment, so the burden to address this will fall on me. Today I do the proper steps to get her a true preneed burial. I use some funds to buy her much needed bras and clothing. Then I return to Social Security and report that at least from today forward she should be qualified for SSI. Likely, they will start the coverage again, she will only receive \$30 each month more than what it costs her in "patient Pay amount" to the nursing home. Of that thirty I will likely file requesting that they withhold the minimum of 10% or \$3 a month to pay off that \$35,000. So we will do our best to make sure this client can get haircuts, do some lunch outings and have the clothes and items she needs off of \$27 a month. Next on the schedule helping a client stay connected with his employer. This client has wiped down tables in the lobby for 20 plus years and is suddenly at risk of becoming unemployed. Client #2 of this day let me

know they haven't needed him at work for a few weeks now. All he hopes to work to have the things he needs is 2 - 2 hour shifts a week. After some communicating with his management, my client and his support at CMH, we find the problem was that my client would call asking, "Do you need me today?" and the new manager thought that to mean he didn't want to come into work, when the old manager had asked him to start doing that after covid when fast food lobbies were first reopening. Client #2 is back on track! Per my usual I realize the time after phone calls and emails and run over to pick up client #3 for the day. She has been my client for four years, been with her through ups and downs - she hates when I'm late. I tell her, two minutes late for 15 minutes early, is still pretty good. She says, " I don't wanna hear your excuses." From first meeting her and paying off her bed bug bills, to dealing with clutter in the apartment, to refereeing between her roommates and peers to finally having her home settled and her finances in great shape with savings accounts through the Michigan Able - we then transitioned to this tough year where my client needed multiple medical specialists, surgeries for growths and then 30 miserable radiation appointments in Muskegon. Followed by three months of confusing side effects from the radiation. We are finally back to some sort of normal, but after the March hospitalization for cellulitis, the trips to Holland ENT and multiple ER and primary care appts last month, she is grumpy about appts in general and openly blames them on me. But once I let her give me some sass we take our first visit to the physical therapists to regain some of the lost strength and she does great. It is a sunny day, I drive her home and she will likely take a long nap, because she will complain, "that was a very busy day." Off to client #4 - lives in a group home in Scottville, needs to have his prostate checked and so I do 20 minutes driving to go get him, while catching up on calls. He quickly hops in the car, though it took the first two years before he felt comfortable to ride with me. I try to talk and get to know him better, but I have found clients like client #4 seem to appreciate when I just keep them posted on myself and my family - as his experience is pretty muddled with delusional thoughts, that frustrate even himself as he hears it out loud. At the appointment we do our best through his memory, any old

records and what I have learned about his health over the past four years to understand his prostate health history. Suddenly, I realize if I don't excuse myself, they are going to do this exam right here in front of me! I jump up to step outside the room. "Please bring him back for blood work in two days" says the doctor (can't be done today for certain reasons), no problem, except that is at least 2.5 hours I need to figure out how to carve out of my schedule that has been full weeks and months out. Client #4 can head home for the day. The pile of mail, forms and emails that await me for my dozens of clients will keep me at the office till at least 8 tonight when my friends that hold me accountable will force me to call it a day :)

Lemme tell you about another yesterday, first client of the day needs to return for her second cataract to be removed. This client is in her 70s and has struggled with mental health all of her life, now her troubles are compounded by physical health needs, possible starts of dementia or maybe just the result of decades on psychotropic meds. We have managed to keep her living at home where she still has her husband, and two grown children with some disabilities of their own. I have her on the waiting list at the facility her family would trust most, just in case she has another fall as the others have produced some broken bones. In the meantime I have been able to over the course of one year use her funds to make changes to the home she so desperately wants to stay in. Some with volunteers or donations and some with her own funds. We brought in an oven where there was none, brought in better bedding and things to remind her not to try going to the second floor, and a brand new front door to replace the broken one that had plywood over the windows. Today when I arrive at 730 she is sleeping and I have to ask her husband to please help me get her dressed so we can get to her surgery. We slowly walk down the ramp, which has also since been repaired by a team of volunteers. Now at the hospital, this client knew a few of the staff at the hospital as a lifetime Ludington resident. When she was asked who I was, she told them "this is my best friend!" She continued to talk sweet to me and told me I was always there for her when she needed me. She then asked me if the doctors

wanted to hurt her or help her. She told me lately she thinks everyone is a witch and that everyone wants to hurt her. I tell her we are all here to help and hold hand until it is time for surgery and she again says, "you're my best friend," as she is wheeled off for surgery. As soon as I have that client home and resting I grab my hair cutting scissors and stop in at the nursing home to see client #2. She has been my client for 9 months. I helped the nursing home figure out why payments stopped coming from her daughter that was her representative payee for the past while. I turned in what looks like an open and shut case to the Georgia SSA, where her daughter lives. I turned in proof that all of my clients funds that were issued by social security and meant to pay her patient pay amount and use the remainder on her needs were used by the daughter for at least six months at amazon, nail salons, targets and more. Still no response from social security, but what matters now is that this client has just \$60 a month for spending and she cannot seem to stay behaved with pepsi throughout the day. There's not much I can do about how much she has to spend, but I can try to save her some money by sneaking in and giving her a quick haircut so she has \$15 more for pop. We don't talk any more about the daughter that doesn't come to visit or the son that I believe passed away. Actually we can only talk so much because she only has a few words, but she animates them well. She had a stroke super young, so she cries a lot of days, she is in her 50s and will be at the nursing home permanently. So I try to give her a haircut that will make her feel beautiful, give her that time of connection with me and I like to sing so I sing and pray for her to have peace and joy. I hug her, make sure the home has funds to provide her with pop and head out 😊 Client #3 is a drive out to Custer to bring him into his monthly psych visit at CMH, it's a pain in the butt and he will ask me to take him 4 other places on the way home. April was the end of my 4th year working with him, but I was just finally able to get him to cooperate with some mental health treatment in February. The first few years were kind of miserable for both of us, as he believed I was his enemy and a thief, so I began only visiting him with a volunteer to join me. His adoptive parents had to place boundaries on him a few years ago as well. But today we are all happy that he is



cooperating and his very low dose of meds seems to be taking away the paranoia. A few weeks ago he switched his tune and told me I was his neighbor and that he should be nice to me. So I have no problem going places alone with him now. He is sweet and tells me he plans to get a masters degree one day. But today his hair has been cut like a rag doll, his caregiver said it was how my client showed his frustration about a rule the other day. I need to keep going to his psych appts because I need to advocate for him in a way he doesn't necessarily like. I let him lead in the session talking to his doctor as he tells him that everything has been great, that he thinks he can get off the meds and do natural supplements instead. He reports no behavior incidences and says that he will be starting school here soon. I wait for the appropriate moment to remind my client of the incidents that he had with his caregiver just this week. He agrees they happened. I remind him that since he started this new med his parents report they can understand him better and he talks more about reality and less about a fictitious world. I remind him that you thought I was a thief and now you see me as your neighbor. He agrees calmly, still asks to have the meds lowered. The doctor says, I will leave the meds how they are for now, but we will talk again in a month. I give in to getting him hot chocolate, with coconut milk cause if he had more funds he would be a health nut, he says. And of course a stop at the super cuts is necessary. Then I take him home and he insists I come back out tomorrow :) Forgetting that I had scheduled a 6pm appointment for a quote to have client number one of this day's bathtub removed and a brand new shower installed, I roll in 5 minutes late for that. Her driveway is pretty out of control but that also has since been helped by the volunteers that spent a whole day cutting down trees and removing fallen tree trunks. The salesman offers a full solution that would remove the mold and things down to the studs, and install a shower that won't require this client to be lifted in and out of the tub, increasing her safety and chances of staying in the home, not to mention the benefits for her daughter in a wheelchair. As of today I have counter offered on the price explaining how much could come from the family's finances and how much Blue Hat Ministries will contribute asking if their company could come any lower on the price and

consider it a donation to disabled adults. This is an absolutely necessary life improvement and I hope to be able to show you before and after pictures at next year's dinner :) Luckily my assistant, Lacey was in the office for a few hours today keeping up with mail, paying bills, emails and fielding the clients that love to stop by and say hi or feel they absolutely need another few dollars and can't wait till their next payday, not to mention fixing "broken" cell phones or scheduling for more doctor appointments. And my financial part time help Kristina was there keeping all our many check books balanced, filling out annual paperwork for the court and social security on each client that must balance to the penny. Our faithful volunteer, Pat, will come help us file all this mess tomorrow as she reliably volunteers in the office twice a week. I can head home, good thing my husband is used to cooking dinner.

Lemme tell you about yesterday.

As I sat to write this speech, the actual yesterday went like this. Immediately after dropping my kids at school I took off driving through the rain to Muskegon to pick up my client that now lives in a semi-independent housing apartment there. She has been my client for 1.5 years, when I was first appointed I didn't even meet her until she was arrested for an incident to do with mental health and drugs. She spent six months between jail and Kalamazoo psychiatric hospital. When she was released was the first time we truly meet besides one visit at the jail and the rest over zoom. I was able at that time to begin her social security disability application. She and the family had tried multiple times in the past and failed at this process as it is tedious and time consuming. At that time social security warned me it would take over 6 months to get a response. During that time I provided as much support as I could getting her established with a primary care doctor and trying to keep her engaged with Community Mental Health. However, about 5 months into the waiting time I had no choice but to petition the court to have her hospitalized for mental health treatment again. But this time after one month in a good hospital and then a group home for those coming out of hospitalization. We had found the appropriate housing situation where staff ensures meds are taken, provides support groups, provides

transportation for groceries and appointments and encourages people living there to find work if possible or continuing education. We knew that her finances should be just a few weeks out. Knowing this was a great place and that she would lose this opportunity, due to a timing issue with social security and would likely become homeless during this time very likely putting her back into old addictive habits and off of her new stable baseline of mental health, Blue Hat Ministries put ourselves on the line to cover costs that would get her into this apartment that she wouldn't have been able to afford for the next few weeks to a month or two while waiting on social security. She has been there these past six months and is now able to pay all of her own bills as her social security finances did come through and came through with a back payment of nearly \$15,000. Naturally, my client wanted all of the money that moment, but my agreement with social security is that I will help the client spend or invest the money in a way that sets them up for success. This yesterday I drove down and spent 9 hours with my client finding a good reliable car that will allow her to get a part time job again. The weeks leading up to this and the day of was full of working through her real desire to get a rusty old truck she could take 2-trekking all summer, but she eventually conceded that a car would have better gas mileage, hopefully last more years, serve the purpose of getting her to work.

Yesterday we got the car registered and insured - taking far longer than I planned but well worth it for our client!! In the middle of all this yesterday, on top of multiple phone calls and emails I kept up with on my phone, I had to make time for a zoom appointment with CMH. Though the timing was terrible I felt I had no choice as another of my clients who has lived at an adult foster care home for over 13 years, was given a 30 day notice to find new housing and care as the home feels they have no choice but to close down due to staffing issues. Sadly, the number of group homes continues to decline in a time when we so badly need more built. I desperately don't want to see this client have to leave our county or at least the Mason, Oceana, Lake area. So client one will have to eat the lunch I buy her and look at a few cars without me while I get the staff at the group home to put client #2 on this zoom call to get him reconnected with services at

CMH, all while texting to apologize to client #3 (and his friends) that I will indeed be late for tonight's birthday party (which I am driving everyone to lol). This last client's housing and care plans are still up in the air. What I know from experience is that step one is to make sure that the client is receiving every single program or voucher that their condition qualifies them for. Step 2 start calling through the extensive list of homes I have compiled from Frankfurt to Muskegon because openings are so sparse. And then Step 3 pray like crazy and keep talking with lots of people, hoping that the connections I've been able to make over the years will help client #2. Anyways, after the car for client 1 and the call for client 2, I had to high-tail it home from Muskegon because I had a client who was eagerly waiting to celebrate his 40th birthday with my family and a few of his peers! As I was hours later than expected my clients said I owed them a pizza - which I gladly bought them as we bowled for their first time at the new Stix bowling Alley. So that is a glimpse of what my days often look like.

I know this is maybe a lot to take in, but I am so grateful for the opportunity to share about all the different hats we wear at Blue Hat Ministries tirelessly working to help these unique, special and valuable people that have been entrusted to our care. Tonight if you decide to make a donation we will be incredibly honored and grateful and keep in mind that your donation today and through the year will be matched up to \$50,000. But as we grow and desire to support more people and make lifelong and meaningful connections for them we are hoping you will consider partnering with us in other ways as well. We are in need of connections, we are in need of people to spread the word about what we do. We are in need of people that would serve on our board of directors and head up committees that would enable me to keep spending the majority of my time with the clients I feel so called to and less of it on paperwork, networking and fundraising. I want to thank Brad Reed for noticing what I was doing and taking it upon himself to spread the word to many of you and for having the idea of a night like tonight.

To end the night here I want to share the lyrics of a folk song with you that I listen to often and reminds me of who I want to be and don't want to be in this life. It helps me think, helps me pray,

helps me better grasp things that are ungraspable like why one person could have so many hardships in their life and still eventually learn to trust again. If you find the slip at your table you can follow along a little bit. I plan to read through these words and add my prayers and thoughts to them. And then there are a few of my friends and family that have practiced and we would like to sing this over you to end the presentation part of the evening.

The words say:

**"I don't want to have feet of stone.**

**I wanna follow this river of life, where it will have me go."**

I ask for forward movement, willingness to help even when things feel hopeless, continually putting our hand to the plow hoping to make life in our corner of the world a little better, especially for those in forgotten populations.

**"I don't want to have feet of stone."**

**"I don't want to have a dagger tongue.**

**I don't want my words to be a weapon, but a healing balm."**

It can be easy to complain about what systems are lacking and what bad deals clients got from families that let them down, but we desire to bring new life through our speech and actions, not putting down things that have come before but bringing together efforts of many well intentioned individuals and organizations.

**"I don't want to have a dagger tongue."**

**"I don't want to have a heavy mind.**

**I don't wanna hold these thoughts that are chains of iron."**

That we would have compassion for those with mental illness. Not fearing them for their differences but extending love recognizing the life time burden and hurdle this is for those that battle it.

Especially for those who have a combination of cognitive disability from birth or due to aging in combination with mental illness and confusion. We pray their burden be lifted be it through medicine, life changes or the impact of community acting as family.

**"I don't want to have a heavy mind."**

**"I want to have eyes of love.**

**Count the beggar mans life precious as my own.**

**Offer my back for my brothers load."**

And I ask for grace to carry a load that I could easily say is not mine. That a community would come together to lovingly and graciously see the worth in all individuals. Seeing their value and loving them enough to support them - especially those that will require support for their entire life. It is one thing to carry someone's burden for an event, it is quite another to carry them over the years and to love them as friends and family, whatever role they hope us to fill or hat they need us to wear.

**"I want to have eyes of love."**