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# HOMeward

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## From Wasteland to No Land

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The "Wasteland" is a large chunk of undeveloped land south and along the American River, east of Highway 160 and close to downtown Sacramento. This is where Oprah Winfrey's Lisa Ling found and made known to the world over 200 homeless people living in tents. Many had lived there since evicted by city and railroad police from the last "tent city" on Bannon Street December of

2007 (See Homeward Street Journal Volume 12.1). The Wasteland, un-affectionately named that by campers because of the harsh, open landscape which is muddy in the winter and sweltering in the summer, was the last recourse for people to go to pitch their tents after being harassed, cited or told to move by police or parkway rangers. The campers found a longer term refuge there,

long enough to start friendships, bonds sometimes closer than mere neighbors. Here many campers boasted that they didn't need locked doors to protect their belongings because everyone pretty much looked out for each other. Some found enough stability to maintain a job, which would have been harder if they had stayed in the shelter, because of the restrictive shelter hours and

and most would be evicted with nowhere else to go.

After the Oprah Special aired on February 25th, a media frenzy of unprecedented vigor descended upon "tent city". Local TV news crews started to come out there regularly. Soon national news sources started to flurry around the tent city. Then international media came from many countries, speaking many different languages. It became an everyday hazard for the tent city residents to be approached by press and TV and video documentarians' cameras. Some media representatives and other interested individuals embedded themselves in the situation by pitching their own tents out there. Loaves & Fishes staff (mostly Sr. Libby Fernandez and Joan Burke) were also interviewed daily or led the charge to coordinate

lack of storage for their belongings during the day. Though there was no formal organization as a whole, campers tended to cluster their tents into affinity groups, and since the area of the Wasteland is about 20 acres, there was no overcrowding or need to encroach on each other's self-determined space. This Wasteland, though home to the homeless, was later deemed "unsuitable for habitation"



Early Morning on Moving Day

(All photos this article courtesy Loaves & Fishes website)

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## Silent Victims of Foreclosure

Street News Service [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)

by Cydney Gillis  
*Real Change*

OLYMPIA, WA: Teri Herold-Prayer and her teenage son have only lived in Lacey six months - just long enough to be snared in one of the worst Catch-22s a working mother can imagine.

On April 3, a bank is going to sell the split-level home she rents in a foreclosure auction, and Herold-Prayer finds herself with two options: Tell her landlord she's leaving and forfeit a deposit of \$1,275 that she can't afford to lose. Or skip paying her March rent and put the money on another place before the bank files to evict her.

It's a miserable choice, but one

the 49-year-old state worker says she's going to have to make after discovering that her landlord, a woman who owns several properties in suburban Olympia, failed to make payments on the house and that, as the tenant, she has no legal right to end her rental agreement, which requires her to stay a year or lose her deposit.

With home foreclosures on the rise, more and more tenants are facing the same dilemma, say the Tenants Union of Washington and other housing advocates who plan to press legislators for bills helping renters like Herold-Prayer during a Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day in Olympia. In the meantime, "I'm the one that's out," she says. "I have no home, no money to move

on, and I've been lied to."

Herold-Prayer rented the house Aug. 1 after moving from Pullman to Olympia for a job in which she maps the logistics of school emergency systems. After finishing graduate school at Washington State University, the divorced mother of three - her two eldest are in college - says it took every dime she had to swing the move and pay \$1,275 each for the deposit and first month's rent on the three-bedroom home, which she found by answering a newspaper ad.

The owner seemed very friendly, she says, and the one-year deposit forfeiture clause in the rental agreement didn't seem like a problem because she wasn't

planning on moving.

In November, however, she got a rude shock: Not only did her mother die unexpectedly, but when she came back from the funeral in Cheney, she found a notice from the lender tacked to the garage door stating that the house was in foreclosure.

"Needless to say, I was extremely upset," Herold-Prayer says. "I immediately called the owner and she denied it. She'd done some refinancing and wires had crossed in the mail and there was nothing to worry about, she said."

According to the notice, there was: It said the owner hadn't

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## Silent Victims of Foreclosure

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made a payment on the house since the day Herold-Prayer moved in. She let it go, she says, but on Jan. 3 a new notice appeared on the garage door announcing the April 3 foreclosure auction.

When Herold-Prayer called her landlord to ask about that, the response was "I don't know what you're talking about," she says. "Obviously, there's been some mistake at the courthouse." Again, the owner told her there was nothing to worry about - "just completely in denial," Herold-Prayer says. But, this time, she knew better and started making some phone calls to try to find out what her rights were. But, after getting referred to the Tenants Union of Washington, she says, "Come to find out, I have none."

"Basically, they told me that I had to continue paying rent or I'd be in violation of my lease," she says. "So I'm stuck on this month-to-month [agreement] and can't get my deposit unless I'm here a year."

Herold-Prayer called the landlord again to tell her she really needed her deposit money to move, but the owner told her

she didn't need to. She's left messages twice telling the landlord's Texas lender that she's a tenant in the house, but no one has returned her calls.

Meanwhile, the clock is ticking down to an auction on April 3. Sometime before then, an attorney told her, a 20-day notice would be posted on the house and, if she's not out before that expires, the bank will probably file papers in court to evict her.

"I've never in all my years been evicted from a home," Herold-Prayer says, "and I'm not about to have this happen to me."

"All I can do at this point," she says with resignation, is "send [the owner] a letter letting her know that she has my last month's rent for March" - the \$1,275 deposit - "and I'll start looking for a new place ... I mean, what else can I do?"

The Tenants Union is seeking legislative relief for renters such as Herold-Prayer in House Bill 1942, legislation put forward by Rep. Tina Orwall, D-Normandy Park, that would give owners and tenants more notice in foreclosures on deeds of trust.

The bill would require lenders to contact homeowners and explore alternatives to foreclosure prior to filing a notice of default.

It would also give tenants 60 days written notice to move after a foreclosure sale instead of the 20 days now required by law. Another bill that's headed for House Judiciary - HB 1773 - would give tenants being evicted for no cause 30 days to move if they've lived at the property less than a year or 60 days notice if more than that.

If Herold-Prayer can't get out before the bank files for eviction, another bill the Tenants Union is supporting would help her, but its prospects are quickly fading. The Fair Tenant Screening Act - Senate Bill 5922 - would prevent court records of no-cause evictions from being used to screen tenants and allow to use the same credit report during an apartment search, preventing each landlord from charging \$25 to \$35.

The bill, sponsored by Sen. Jeanne Kohl-Welles, D-Seattle, has yet to be scheduled for a hearing.

Herold-Prayer wants to be out well before any eviction papers are filed, but says none of the bills go far enough. The legislation doesn't require the bank or new owners to honor the term of the tenant's lease, she says, and does nothing to get her deposit back now, while she needs it to move.

"It's important that, once the house has gone into foreclosure, the tenant is given that refund," she says. "That's a lot of money for many of us - that's our life savings. To take that from us and then to lead us along and lie to us I think is criminal."

"I feel like we are the silent victims of foreclosures," Herold-Prayer says of renters. "The homeowners living in the house being foreclosed on knows what's happening, but for all of us who are tenants and pay our rent every month, this is wrong."

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## The Cop and the Photo Op

Street News Service [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)

by Adam Hyla  
*Real Change*

SEATTLE, WA: The movie ended and the four boys left the theater and walked onto the street. It was 9:30 on a Saturday night outside the Columbia City Cinema.

A man called from the open window of a car parked in an alley. Where are you from? he asked. The Central District, one boy replied. I doubt that, said the man, who was sitting in the driver's seat of a black Seattle Police gang unit vehicle, the Central District's too expensive.

Come over here, the man told two of the boys. He got out of the car. What's your street name? he asked one, who had none. What, he giggled, you don't have any street cred?

He asked about their haircuts: What do they mean? And the color of their clothing: Why are you wearing so much grey? Two men with cameras got out of the backseat. They snapped pictures while the officer, the kids recalled later, began to pose. The cop, his partner, and the photographers got back in the car. They left.

The movie had been "Taken", a thriller about a man losing his daughter and fighting to get her back. On the sidewalk afterward, too, things were taken: photographs. And, adults would say later, a measure of respect.

A grandfather came and picked the boys up. "We just got harassed by the police,"

is what Yolanda Bell remembers her son, Chris, telling her when he got home. "Bell told him not to stress about the pictures; the cop, she reasoned, was a professional, and the pictures were probably only of him, and even if they weren't, they wouldn't be used indiscriminately.

Then, on Monday, on the front page of the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, came the headline: "Officers patrol front lines of Seattle's deadly gang problem."

And, on an accompanying photo essay at [seattlepi.com](http://seattlepi.com) was Bell's son and his cousin, Emmanuel, on the sidewalk in Columbia City with officer Adley Shepherd.

Three things alarmed Bell, her mother, Janiece Jackson, who is also Emmanuel's foster parent, and the leaders of the Seattle-King County NAACP, who they contacted that day.

One: people would construe that her child, great-grandson of the former pastor of the Greater Mt. Baker Baptist Church, was in a gang.

Two: that the real gangbangers would see the photo, with its caption describing two kids from the Central District on a South End street and conclude what Officer Shepherd had suspected, pitching her son into a neighborhood rivalry.

Three: that Officer Shepherd had treated these kids as bit parts in his own heroic beat-cop narrative.

Bell, a self-confessed worry wart who rarely lets her 15-year-old son get around town on his own, took a copy of the article and dissected its contents, reading reporter Casey McNerthney's story about the ride through the South Precinct that night. It mentioned that Shepherd was raised by a single mother.

"What does he think I'm going through?" she says.

Early in McNerthney's description of the events of the night, she points out that if handled wrong, the situation could have turned deadly in seconds.

"What these gentlemen don't understand," she says of the reporter, the photographer, and the cops, "is that the situation has been handled wrong, and it's been deadly for years."

James Bible, president of the Seattle-King County NAACP, have requested a meeting with P-I management over the article.

At Bell's request, newspaper staff took down the photo of her son the day after the article's publication. P-I reader representative Glenn Drosendahl wrote an e-mail to Bell and Jackson saying that, while the story did not explicitly state that Chris and Emmanuel were gang members, "in deference to how others may see it and to your request, we are taking the photo off our Web site."

"A family member explained what was going on there," he told Real Change,

"and we were receptive to their concern." The men with the cameras were following accepted journalistic practice, he says, in which any person out in public is fair game.

Bell, Jackson, and the NAACP's KL Shannon note that other young people's pictures are still online, and by implication they are being described by one quote, from Shepherd, about nine-gang related fatalities last year: "All the killings around the neighborhood, they're all connected to our little knuckleheads."

"He owes this young man [Chris] an apology and the other three boys an apology" for the incident outside the theater, says Shannon. "And he also owes the community an apology. What he did lacks integrity."

"It lacks professionalism," adds Jackson. "He used them as a stepping stone, to show the community, [which is] complaining that the police aren't doing their jobs behind the shootings, and he's stepping on these kids to show that they are."

Bell says Officer Shepherd has already changed her son: "They have defamed his character and his pride and changed his demeanor." As they passed a police car three days after the incident on the way to a meeting with the NAACP, she notes, he sat up straight in his seat and watched the car go past.

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# EarthLinks – a New Season to Grow

Street News Service [www.streetnewsservice.org](http://www.streetnewsservice.org)

by Ashley Inman  
Denver Voice

DENVER, CO: Every summer a garden, tucked behind an unpaved parking lot and gray warehouse buildings on the 2800 block of Larimer Street, overflows with flowers. Yellow gourds hang from thick green vines like water balloons. Plants, strewn with flowers, wind their way across trellises, cascade down the sides of raised beds made from old railroad ties, and peek up between stepping stones thoughtfully lain in the fertile soil to protect anything living from being trampled. "GreenFingers Peace Garden - Jardin de la Paz," is hand-painted on a sign anchored in one of the beds, alluding to what this secret garden is doing the middle of an industrial neighborhood in Denver.

GreenFingers, a micro-economic development project and pre-employment program, is one part of a triad that forms EarthLinks, a nonprofit organization founded in 1996. EarthLinks engages homeless, at-risk and low-income persons in the Denver area by cultivating relationships with nature and with other people to create a sense of community. The three programs that fall under the EarthLinks umbrella are the Garden Project, Day Trips Into Nature and GreenFingers. Flowers and vegetables are grown in the GreenFingers Peace Garden by EarthLinks program participants. The plants are harvested, dried and used to decorate items, made by the same participants, and sold to help the organization generate funds. Partnered with St. Francis, a day shelter for the homeless; The Gathering Place, a drop in shelter for women and children; and the Empowerment Program that provides support services to women experiencing poverty or homelessness, EarthLinks offers the homeless an opportunity to get out of the city and into nature on Day Trips into Nature every Thursday. It's quite literally a breath of fresh air for over 67 people who are currently enrolled in the two-year program at

EarthLinks, designed to equip participants with job skills, self-confidence and resources that will enable them to better their life situation. Beyond creating a refuge for people who live on Denver's streets to connect with nature, the unique organization fills the homeless and impoverished community with hope.

"The purpose is to bring excitement, wonder and amazement to people who are downtrodden," says Bette Anne Jaster, a cofounder and the director of EarthLinks. "They have it in them, it just needs to be stoked, re-kindled a little bit."

## Reap and Sow

EarthLinks began in 1996 by Bette Ann Jaster, a Dominican Sister of Hope, and Cathy Mueller, a Sister of Loretto. After decades of working with the poor, they noticed a deep need and longing for connection and belonging from the diverse community they served - EarthLinks is their answer. Jaster, who draws from her naturalist training as a Dominican Sister of Hope, believes that we, as human beings, are related and connected to the earth. Jaster and Mueller know that, over time, lessons drawn from nature enable people to realize their own strengths and they can gently discover for themselves a deeper meaning in life.

A goliath billboard with the word "Homeless" spelled out in a mosaic of tiny photographs of people is perched above a gate that separates westbound traffic on Larimer Street from the dusty parking lot and warehouse buildings. Two middle-age men, Paul Smith and Alan Duran sit at a card table, situated in the warm late-morning sun about 75 feet below the billboard with a group of three other EarthLinks participants. Mounds of dried gourds cover the table, dozens more lie on the ground beside it, overflowing from cardboard boxes stacked on folding chairs.

"I almost didn't come last week because I was

depressed about my life situation," says Duran as he carefully draws a quarter-sized peace sign on the side of a speckled gourd. "But I did, and as soon as I got here, it changed everything - my outlook. I'm so glad I came. I love it."

Duran offers Smith the gourd and Smith proceeds to drill holes along the pencil marks with an ancient-looking, hand crank tool. When he's finished, a kind and tired looking woman cuts lines between each hole and out pops the peace sign. The gourd's quarter-sized hole is sanded until the ridges are smooth, then the "fluff" is scraped out from inside - viola! A birdhouse!

Adult men and women who are homeless or low income (earning less than \$10,000 per year) are hired by EarthLinks to grow plants in the GreenFingers Peace garden. Participants learn how to harvest and press flowers, which are then used to decorate other sellable items like candles, vases, bowls, bookmarks and cards. GreenFingers was the last of the three programs at EarthLinks to come to fruition, and did so as a way to eliminate barriers for people who wanted to become involved, but couldn't. People could not help with the Garden Project, or enjoy Day Trips Into Nature, because they had to meet their basic needs - mostly looking for work and finding food. Today, vegetables are grown in the Peace Garden to provide participants with snacks before the workday begins; during winter months, volunteers bring food. The items GreenFingers participants make, including the birdhouses, are sold to generate enough revenue to pay participants a modest stipend of \$7.10 an hour.

Although Denver is known nationally for the abundance of services catered toward meeting the basic needs of the economically poor and homeless communities, EarthLinks fills a niche that is unique. Some organizations, like the Women's Bean Project and Denver Urban Gardens, offer similar activi-

ties, like gardening, craft making and pre-employment programs; however,

EarthLinks' intent is unlike any other. "EarthLinks has chosen to work through other nonprofit organizations who are serving this population. We respond to specific aspects of the need for beauty, belonging, and new options, so our services complement the other organizations," says their Web site.

Although participants outline personal goals when they initially enroll with EarthLinks, the programs "success" is not measured in numbers. "Everyone who comes in arrives with a different set of challenges they need to overcome. It's about getting to know each person, the barriers they face and working with them to overcome the obstacles," says Kara Bajdas, the GreenFingers project coordinator. "Sometimes we lead, but it's more like we're walking next to them." If program participants reach their own goals, the program is considered successful not only by the staff of five and their funders, but by the person who actually enrolled in the program.

Such basic activities, like gardening and hiking, have a profound effect on participant's lives when coupled with the pursuit of fulfilling the not-so-basic needs of someone's soul.

"EarthLinks has helped me out a lot," says Smith who's been involved with EarthLinks for over three years. "It's like my second family. I have a new respect for flowers and life." Smith holds up two gourds marked with peace signs that share the same stem, like two cherries.

"Look," he says to the group, "Neigh-birds!" Everyone laughs.

## Flutter by

The Gathering Place is quiet on this particular Thursday morning. A few women check in at the welcome desk and a few sit waiting in the lobby area that smells like fresh paint. The organization's new brick building is impressive and is a day-time refuge for hundreds of women and children who are experiencing homelessness or poverty. Classes held in the rooms of this building range from knitting, photography or creative writing to GED programs and computer training. The women here are working toward self-sufficiency; however, empowerment is a better word for what they embody. Today, the morning sun filters through large windows illuminating blocks of the soft green colored walls - a subtle reminder that spring is coming and summer will soon follow.

Mary Ann Raboum and Liz Shuler, each gripping a thick walking cane in their left hand, stand near the entrance of the Gathering Place waiting for Bette Ann Jaster to arrive. Raboum is wearing a blue baseball hat that loosely covers her silver hair. A large gold brooch dangling with thin sparkly chains, orange lacquered roses and a vial of perfume is pinned onto the crown of her cap, weighing it down in front so the flat bill rests on the frames of her thick glasses.

Jaster and an EarthLink's volunteer take about a dozen

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Supporter Display

# Wasteland continued from page 1

media visits and interviews. Before all this media fuss, though, the Sacramento Bee had covered the tent city and had endorsed the tent city concept in three separate Editorials (plus one more recent endorsement in April), and the Sacramento News & Review endorsed the tent city concept years ago and more recently on February 5.



Ann Williams, Bee photographer  
Cynthia Hubert, Bee reporter  
On Assignment at tent city

Soon after the whole world became aware of the tent city in Sacramento, land-owners (SMUD, Union Pacific Railroad, and a private trust) made known that they wanted to have the campers evicted from their land. The Railroad police said that it was unsafe for people out there because they crossed the railroad tracks to get to services, so the Railroad would have to fence the area to prevent people from crossing the tracks (even though the entire U.S. is full of railroad tracks that are unfenced and crossed daily). SMUD also said that they wanted to fence in their land because it was not safe for people to live there.

The city reacted to a light being shown on a blight in Sacramento as an unfavorable reflection on their city leadership. But the very fact that the media most favored visiting Sacramento for this popular symbol of our depressed economy, was the fact that our city had allowed homeless people to settle for awhile in one place. Sacramento city leadership

may have received more approval than they imagined throughout the world for their humanitarian lack of strict enforcement of their anti-camping laws (which most US cities have in some form).

Before this media spotlight on the Wasteland tent city, Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee, Loaves & Fishes and Francis House began a Safe Ground Campaign to have city and county sanctioned campgrounds where homeless people could pitch their tents legally and with basic sanitation, water and some services. Mayor Kevin Johnson seemed willing to explore the subject further and even mentioned the fact when he was campaigning for Mayor. But the City Manager and most of City Council were strongly opposed to even talking about it.

Mayor Johnson convened a task force on March 13 to specifically address short-term solutions for the current residents of the tent city area. Several "Safe Ground" proponents advocated allowing

people to stay at the tent city, at least until there was enough housing for everyone or other sites were provided where they could pitch their tents in peace and safety. A tent city committee was formed along with several other committees that would address housing, shelter and other options, but the tent city committee has yet to meet.

Over the course of several weeks the City identified around \$1 million in new funding sources that would help keep the winter shelter open until July 1 with added amenities, and fund at least 40 more permanent shared housing opportunities for tent city residents. The shelter, normally holding only 150 beds, added a modular unit with 50 more beds, with some of the beds dedicated to couples. Other improvements for the shelter included a new manager, later wakeup times, some kennel runs for dogs, storage space for possessions that the owner would be able to keep there during the day, and other improvements. Many of these improvements may have been inspired by some of the campers that testified at a city council meeting on March 24 about some of the problems they had with the winter shelter. Many of the advocates congratulated the City of Sacramento for this extra effort towards helping more homeless people, but reminded City Council and task force members that there will still be over 1,000 people left without shelter or housing, who will be left with no other option than to sleep illegally outdoors.

As the modular unit came on line at the winter shelter, so did the official eviction process by the city and railroad police, who handed out eviction notices to many of the campers on the Wasteland area and what campers call the "Snake Pit" area, which is just west of the railroad tracks.

People were given several days to move their camps.

However, before the eviction deadline, the previously donated dumpster was removed, making it nearly impossible for campers to do their own cleanups. Officials complained to the media the first and second evening of the new shelter expansion, that most of the new beds were still vacant. They may

Meanwhile, many campers had relocated onto that land. Supporters held vigil out at that piece of land to make sure there were no arrests or citations given out, and if there were to be arrests the supporters wanted to go to jail first. Police promised not to arrest anyone Thursday evening and Friday they said that they weren't going to arrest anyone in this eviction process.



The Movers Arrive

not have considered that the tent city residents were too busy trying to pack and move their possessions for two days. Sure enough, around day three or four the shelter reached capacity.

Previous to eviction day, some advocates thought that people could just move up river to the land owned by the private trust since there was no talk of evicting people coming from the trust. But the city and county got permission to evict people from that parcel by the owners.

On eviction day, May 16 (Thursday), the bulldozers, garbage trucks and many white buses full of orange vested workers descended upon the Wasteland. Campers were distraught. Most packed their belongings and carried packs and bags on their backs, on bicycle carts or took advantage of a few people with trucks. Police seemed civil and offered to arrange for a county truck to help in moving possessions to other locations or to take

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Loading a County Truck



Cleaning out the "Snake Pit"

## Wasteland

to a storage area that had been arranged

Everyone was finally forced to leave by having their possessions thrown away in garbage trucks. If they refused to move their things or arrange for the county truck to take their things to the designated storage area. After the tent city was mostly vacated, the media silently slip off to other new sensationalisms.

But what happened afterwards to all the promises of finding housing and shelter for all those tent city residents? At least 50 people were able to get into the shelter and some may get into other housing opportunities. The city said they were committed to finding housing options for 150 of the tent city residents within the next several months. Meanwhile, the majority of those homeless people that lived on the Wasteland and the Snake Pit area are currently without housing or shelter because there is no more available. And the other homeless people who lived outdoors elsewhere (over 1,000) are still without housing or shelter options.

The shelter, though highly improved, is only available until July 1, at which time as many as 200 people will be forced to live on the streets. The promised storage area turned out to be a large shipping container where the possessions of the campers who did not go into shelter were stored without any identification tags, making it hard to reclaim possessions, and somewhat easy to claim other people's possessions.

The Safe Ground Campaign has lost some serious ground. Not only is there no where people can sleep legally, there has been increased reports of harassment from law enforcement. We hope this isn't the beginning of the "tough" part of the "tough love" Mayor Johnson promised. Most of the people from the tent city are still homeless and still outdoors but now without a neighborhood, without the simple provision of stability or protection from the elements with a simple tent structure to sleep in. They and all the others without shelter still need a safe and legal place to sleep until there is enough housing for everyone. They still need Safe Ground.



by Paula

A Safe Ground Rally was held on the south lawn of the State Capitol on April 21, 2009. It drew an attendance of over four hundred people, including several advocates from other parts of the state.

The rally was sponsored by the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee, Loaves & Fishes and Francis House. It began with a bit of music by Jackson Griffin, an opening

prayer by Bishop Soto and a few great speakers: Greg Bunker of Francis House; Mark Merin, attorney; Plaintiff Connie Hopson; and Paul Boden, Director of the Western Regional Advocacy Project.

Shamus Roller, Director of Sacramento Housing Alliance, read a letter written specifically for the rally by the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. There was a shout out from the other cities represented.

not wanting to get arrested to stay on the grassy area. About 25 people lined up with sleeping bags in front of the south entrance to the State Capitol, willing to get arrested. However, they didn't get arrested and left later that evening. It might have been due to the surprise visit from Senator Darrell Steinberg who was seen hugging protesters after his short impromptu speech. State police were seen putting their plastic handcuffs away after his appearance.



Blocking the South Entrance

The rally ended with a call to action from Joan Burke urging people to support and advocate for safe and legal places for people to camp until there is enough housing for everyone.

Then Sr. Libby invited those who had committed to doing civil disobedience to come forward and for those



CA Senator Darrell Steinberg

### The 2009 Homeless Count

The Sacramento County Dept. of Human Assistance Homeless Programs (DHA) performed a count of homeless people in Sacramento County on January 27, 2009 during the evening hours.

There were 711 people living in emergency shelters; 895 in transitional housing; 1,194 people were found to be living outdoors; 472 people identifying themselves as homeless were staying that evening in alcohol and drug treatment facilities, hospitals, Sacramento Mental Health Treatment Center and the Jail system. Total of all homeless people counted that evening were: 3,272. Using a formula it is estimated that there will be 4,910 people homeless over the course of the year 2009.

There was a 4.6% increase in homelessness since last years count (not counting the 472 people in the various institutions and hospitals). There were 72 less unsheltered homeless counted this year compared to last year's count. There was a 31.13% decrease in what is termed "chronically homeless" or people with a disability that were homeless for more than one year or have experienced several episodes of homelessness over several years. This decrease may reflect the special focus of our county-wide 10 Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness.



On the Capitol South Steps

# The Conventional Universe

by Chongo

We can see to the edge of all light. This is our light horizon, lying approximately fourteen billion light years away, in every direction. A short distance beyond it lies the Big Bang, which could be considered being the very edge of space, as anything further is contained within the depths of the Big Bang itself. The Big Bang was once right here, when it lay right here, long, long ago. Right now, that edge is still present, but no longer present right here anymore. Rather, although it still lies at the Big Bang, as always, that edge lies where the Big Bang is located right now, far, far away, in every three-dimensional direction, from here where it was once, then, long, long ago.

In the meantime, between then here long ago, and now there far away, approximately fourteen billion years have elapsed. Being the same Big Bang here then, as there now, puts the Big Bang at two very distant regions, and logically, at every point in between these two regions as well, during the entire course of the Big Bang's displacement from the one distance very near to us, here, then, to the other distance, very far from us, there, where the Big Bang lies now. All the while, the Big Bang has been happening, unceasingly, during the aforementioned approximately fourteen billion years, just as it constantly happens always, with each and every moment that passes, and, just as it will continue to happen, again, unceasingly, for eons of moments to come. As it constantly happens, one individual moment followed by another, the Big Bang constantly recedes from us in every direction at once, at nearly the speed of light.

Giving it a little thought, one realizes that our equally distant displacement in three spatial directions from the Big Bang now, is somewhat analogous to being at the center

of a sphere in three dimensions, like, for example, at the center of the sphere of a soccer ball, with the Big Bang forming the surface of that sphere like the inflated skin of a soccer ball would - ignoring of course, temporarily, that the Big Bang is very small, while the skin of a soccer ball is very big compared to its tiny center. Taking this one step further by translating the Big Bang's approximately fourteen billion light year spatial displacement into elapsed years across time, we find ourselves here, now, at an equally distant displacement in a fourth temporal direction, from time's edge also, being approximately fourteen billion years removed from the Big Bang here then, and by implication, equivalently distant by any equal combined space and time displacement thereof. In other words, we seem to find ourselves, quite inescapably, in the center of what might be interpreted being a sphere in four directions, like a soccer ball with an additional dimension of depth. But, what does that mean? What would a four-dimensional soccer ball physically be? How would it differ from a three-dimensional one.

Most of us ordinarily spend our lives imagining shapes purely in three dimensions, or less, exclusively. So, how precisely does a round sphere manifest itself in the greater complexity that four dimensions allow, given that we are normally confined to thinking of a sphere in three dimensions alone and on the whole have no exposure at all to hyper-dimensional shapes of any kind? How do we imagine conceptually, the universe in the four dimensions that it really occupies, minimally, without reverting to the far simpler image of celestial bodies afloat in an vast three-dimensional extent, nested within serially grander ones beyond our light horizon, ad infinitum "unto mystery?" To answer, we must ask yet another question first, about exactness and

precision. It is a very necessary question to ask, as it will answer the original question of how round in four dimensions manifests itself in our seemingly three-dimensional world.

The question we must ask is this: When we use the word universe, what is it exactly that we mean with our use of the term? We must ask this question of exact meaning, because the precise association that applies to the term "universe" may vary, according to just what we intend with our use of the word, and furthermore, may require special rigor stringently enough to fit rigorous scientific standards. The simple answer that the universe consists of space and time in every direction, along with all that fills it, although well enough as a general reference, may not be as precise a meaning as we might imagine it being, because it may not express the strictness that the rigors of science predicate. Trivial as it may seem, an accurate understanding of nature, as expressed in its physics, even in purely conceptual descriptions exclusive of math, requires an exact understanding with respect to an equally precise meaning for the term universe, or we are left with little more than the vague illusion of understanding in place of its actuality.

Now, in order to clarify in the precise terms of science just what is meant by the term universe, it is wise to start by considering the most recent evolution of the term, with respect to an important discovery available to us, that Einstein did not have available to him at the time he was using the word; although this important discovery seems to have only barely escaped his notice. Remarkably, it was he himself who identified the concept that ultimately led to this great discovery, as expressed in a value that he introduced into his equations, called the cosmological constant.

Apparently, Einstein added the cosmological constant to his relativity equations, setting its value appropriately so that these equations would yield a simple, static, "flat" universe, which they would not have, without incorporating it, and further, fixing its value immutably. This was an image of the universe consistent with the widespread, conventional notions of Einstein's era. Then, the conventional picture of the universe was pretty simple. It included only our single galaxy alone, suspended eternally, in a flat otherwise empty space extending infinitely in every direction. Consistent with long-standing tradition, conventional notions left any questions of either origin or destiny, altogether beyond the realm of scientific inquiry. To the contrary, astronomical observations and scientific scrutiny of them would eventually demonstrate that long-standing tradition and common convention were not well founded at all in nature's far-better-established realities.

To his ultimate regret, by embracing the ease of the simplistic, convention of the day, to the extent of adjusting his equations accordingly, Einstein mistakenly failed to recognize, that is, failed to recognize before someone else did first, that a static universe was a universe that could simply never be. Upon review of Einstein's adjustment to his relativity equations, a man named Friedmann proposed that the then common notion of a finite, static universe, lying eternally in an infinite and flat, space, without any scientific consideration for finite temporal extent with respect to either origin or destiny, just like Einstein's specification of a cosmological constant that results in such a simple universe, required infinite precision, and, because of this, was plainly impossible. This left solely dynamic solutions as viable possibilities in nature, eliminating all hope of any unending permanence

for the cosmos. According to Friedmann, space and time were no more flat and infinite than their measures were universally absolute for all (a direct contradiction to relativity). In a word, our universe HAD to be dynamic. And so it was, as subsequent scientific exploration would demonstrate, conclusively.

Not long after Friedmann proposed a dynamic universe as the only kind of universe possible, an astronomer named Edwin Hubble validated Friedmann's conclusions through his observations of what were then called nebulae. Using a star of known luminosity (brightness) as a "standard candle," Hubble determined that these nebulae were actually other galaxies, just like our own Milky Way is a galaxy. With this achievement, Hubble secured his name as legend in science, with what was among the greatest revelations ever made in astronomy. Hubble had discovered the existence of other galaxies besides our own. In so doing, he revealed the dynamic character of our universe, irrefutably.

What, exactly, it means for the universe to be dynamic is the subject of the next science article, and the two that follow it. It is not as simple a notion as it might, at first, seem to be.

(From THE HOMELESS INTERPRETATION OF QUANTUM MECHANICS, by Chongo in collaboration with Jose. To see all the books and prior science articles that Chongo has written, go to [chongonation.com](http://chongonation.com), and click on "Science Articles." Chongonation.com is a web site dedicated to educating those who have least opportunity for learning the scientific foundations that describe nature (accurately). Chongonation.com provides, in addition to its science articles, books that allow such opportunity, in lay terms, without any math. Simply go to the [www.chongonation.com](http://www.chongonation.com) home page and click on either "Nature" or "Products & Prices" to see the different books available.)

# EarthLinks

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homeless and low-income people on Day Trips into Nature every Thursday. Once a month, women from the Gathering Place sign up for the much-coveted excursion. Before Jaster is able to walk through the heavy glass doors, a group of eight women, including Rabourn and Shuler, swarm around her like birds to a feeder. The room, which was still only moments before, is now buzzing with twittering voices and giggles from the group of women.

"I didn't sign up, but I'd like to go!" says one woman to Jaster. "I wrote you another poem. I'd like to read it at lunch," says another as she waves a piece of notebook paper covered with blue hand writing in the air.

The trips offer participants time away from their daily struggles and trepidations by taking them to places where they can experience nature. People tell Jaster where they would like to go or what they would like to learn about and Jaster suggests trips they might enjoy. Really, the participants have control over the places in nature they visit - it's a group effort.

Jaster leads the group outside to an old, sturdy 15-passenger van. "Tighter

your fist as tight as you can," she says. Each woman does. "Now, very slowly, begin to relax your palm, then your fingers. Can you feel how difficult it is?" Rabourn makes sounds of exhaustion and the women laugh with her. "Your hand is like a cocoon. Now relax it a little more, and slowly it opens up and reveals a butterfly!" Smiles coupled with ooohs and awes of imaginary butterflies fluttering from their hands almost drown out Jaster's final instruction. "Think about what keeps you tight in your own life and today practice letting it go."

About thirty minutes later, their big blue van pulls into the parking lot of the Butterfly Pavilion in Westminster. The women, led by Jaster, wind their way through dozens of young children who are also visiting the Pavilion, into rooms lined with aquariums full of spiders, bugs, snakes and other crawling creatures. The women, who press their faces onto the glass cases, are equally excited if not more so, about what beings live inside each display than many of the school kids.

"Oh look!"

"I've never seen anything like that!"

"Look at this one!"

They wander through the exhibits of insects, lobsters and fish into the butterfly pavilion. "Oh my goodness!" says Rabourn as she walks into the bright, dense tropical garden. The air flashes with brilliant colors and is alive with a soft energy that silences the group for a moment with awe. They wander through the forested room, coats tied around their waists, looking up toward the sky.

"They are like kids exploring," says Jaster during an interview later on. "The point is to wake people up to enjoyment, realization. It's to try to give them new experiences so they say, 'Yeah. I'm a regular person. I may be homeless right now but I have something to give. It's a give and take. They get to be students and they get to be teachers.'"

"It looks like it's part of the tree," says Rabourn as she points out a camouflage moth resting on a branch to a group of school children passing by. "But it's actually a butterfly, see!" The kids look closer and as each of them see what Rabourn is pointing to they join her enthusiasm and point the insect out to other passers-by.

"Their vision of the world and their part in it can grow, renewing their energy, their sense of connection, and their dignity," explains the EarthLink's Web site about Day Trips into Nature.

### New season

Today, brightly painted, broken pots and regal looking scarecrows made from recycled toy dolls are subtle indications of activity in the barren-looking garden plot at 2828 Larimer St., one of four urban gardens in Denver that EarthLinks tends. Later this summer, purple and white blossoms will be picked, dried and used as embellishments for the EarthLinks product line. In March, volunteers and participants begin to prepare the gardens for a new growing season.

"So that people who are struggling and going through hardships have the chance to get up and get out and move. Move their body, but move their soul or move their insights to see new things, new vistas as well as tiny lichens," says Jaster.

By June, the plots will once again transform small sections of the concrete, glass and asphalt urban landscape into a fruitful, lush garden where dozens of people will also begin to transform their lives.

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## Obituary

∞  
**Curlon Proulx**  
d. 6/10/08 aged 52  
of cancer

∞  
**Robin Bishop**  
d. 2/18/09 aged 34  
cause pending

∞  
**Evangeline Oatis**  
d. 2/21/09 aged 45  
cause pending

∞  
**William "Bill" McGrath**  
d. 2/26/09 aged 59  
cause pending

∞  
**Pamela Jimenez**  
d. 4/7/09 age 50  
of infection

∞  
**George Eiserman**  
d. 4/11/09 aged 57  
cause pending

∞  
**Edward Tobias**  
d. 4/26/09 aged 53  
of cancer

## Bob & Spencer

# The **HAPPY** Homeless Guys



by Scott Valentine & Mike Diaz