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In This Issue

page 1

March For Our Lives

Solutions Pending

page 2

National News Briefs

page 5

Icy Cold Wind remembering the old overflow

SHA Housing Campaign

page 6

House of Mirrors an essay

page 7

Obituary

page 8

Homeless Resources

Volume 8, No. 3

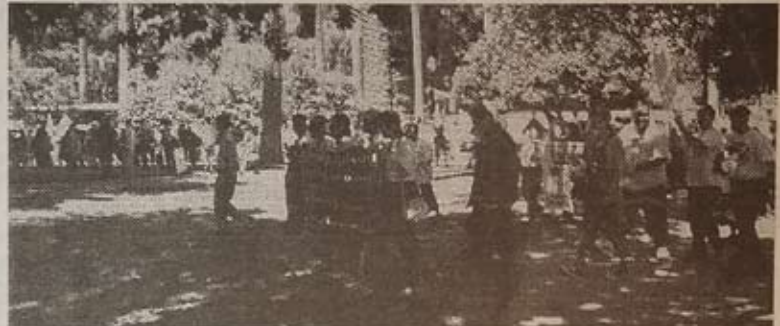
Member NASNA
North American Street Newspaper Association

May / June, 2004

MARCH FOR OUR LIVES

Staff Report

Members of the California Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign gathered together at St. Rose of Lima Park on May 12 to say "We stand united for economic human rights! Our right to healthcare is not negotiable! It is a necessity!" This action was part of a series of events throughout California aimed at highlighting violations of our right to healthcare. Many organizations and individuals throughout California have joined the campaign and were present at the March for Our Lives gathering, including such organizations as Women's Economic Agenda Project (Oakland),



Community Homeless Alliance Ministry of San Jose, SEIU, Covenant House (a recovery home), Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee, Merced Labor Party, UFCW Bay Area Coalition, Education Committee of Richmond, OASIS (a Hep C education group), California Nurses Association, students of Santa Clara University and more.

Campaign (PPEHRC) has a mission to reclaim our economic human rights that were guaranteed to us in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was signed by the US in 1948. These include the right to food, housing, education, living wage jobs and healthcare. Members of the campaign collect reports from victims of economic human rights abuses

ent organizations spoke to the crowd about the plight we face with decreasing funds for the most needy and in particular for healthcare. In the richest state in the richest country, Ethel Long-Scott (WEAP) reminded us, the 6th largest economy, and we still have poverty and homelessness. Ethel announced, "We are here to serve notice that working and poor people are coming together, coming together with a

cont. on Page 4

RT's New Route 33 Saves a Long Walk

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The Poor People's Economic Human Rights

At St. Rose of Lima Park, speakers from the differ-

Solutions Pending

by Tad of Arcata

With me spending so much time trying to bring attention to the unhoused issue, I sometimes fail to take time to talk about solutions. Solutions don't come from simply throwing money at the situation. It takes time and a commitment to solve the problem. It may take two, three or a hundred attempts, but it will always go smoother if we really give the answers a try. I realize that these suggestions are just a

few I have learned about and there are probably hundreds more that will work as well if not better than the one mentioned herein, though I like these because they address several problems above and beyond just homelessness.

First I think it is important to discuss the reasons why our laws aren't solving the problem. Corporal punishment does not end crime. The war on drugs is a classic example of where the jails

have totally failed to accomplish a single goal of the war on drugs. Why?, because you can't solve medical problems with law enforcement officers. With those unhoused, its an economic problem, and jail will not give these people jobs. We have about 4 million of ficially unemployed in this country. We have another 5 million people taken of f the unemployed numbers who still want work. Add to this the 2.

cont. on Page 3



NASNA

NORTH AMERICAN NEWSBRIEFS
 WWW.STREETNEWSERVICE.ORG

Compiled by Patty Lane
 April, May, 2004

An Ohio woman is taking on a tremendous journey one step at a time. Kim Denmark is walking across America to draw attention to welfare reform and the plight of the homeless. During her journey she hopes to gather enough signatures to get her on the floor of Congress, where she wants to present one million signatures to ask for welfare and other reforms. "I want it to come to the top of the agenda, not the bottom," she tells the Athens Banner Herald. She puts in about ten miles a day to reach her goal of 2,704 miles during her 52-month trek. She wears an orange jump-suit filled with signatures of those she has met along the way. On the road she eats and sleeps at the mercy of volunteers and

communities who have given her support throughout her trip.

On April 8, Detroit police dispatched bulldozers to destroy a shack that had been the home of Ralph Thomas, 56, for more than ten years. Thomas, 56, had an hour to gather what belongings he could from the shanty he built out of plywood, blankets, and tires on a vacant lot. "This breaks my heart," neighbor Eloise Nash told the Detroit Free Press. "Where is he going to go?" Over the years, Thomas had turned his shack into four clean and tidy rooms with a wood burning stove for food and warmth and a laundry system with a clothesline. Although his home is gone, Thomas says he's alright, and he has a place to keep his possessions. An outreach coordina-

tor for an organization that assists elderly people in southwest Detroit brought Thomas some sandwiches, clothes and an invitation to a homeless shelter. "He may qualify for some additional financial support," says David Esterbrook of Bridging Communities. "We'd like to talk to him about some long-term options."

Two men are facing charges after a brutal attack on a homeless man in Louisville, Kentucky. Police tell WAVE-3 News that Clifton Dale Agnew, 53, was sleeping in an alley behind a Salvation Army shelter when two men attacked him. After punching, kicking, and beating Agnew with a trash can and a crock pot, the men then allegedly stripped the homeless man of his clothes and sodomized him with sticks, boards and bottles. He was then stabbed repeatedly. Agnew suffered head trauma, broken ribs, and a lacerated colon and rectum. At one point his injuries appeared so severe that investigators were preparing murder charges. His condition is improving and he remains hospitalized. Friends of the victim say he posed no threat to anyone. The shelter's director is calling for more to be done to protect the homeless. "That's the reason we need the Salvation Army and other overnight shelters," says Brenda Mattingly. She hopes the community shares the outrage she feels. "We feel everybody here is an asset to our community and are worthwhile people. We don't see a dividing line as to who should be protected and who shouldn't."

A former Vanderbilt University football coach is using his own life experiences to help homeless people in Tennessee get back on their feet. Fred Pancoast volunteers his time in Nashville, teaching classes once a week to help down-and-out men and women learn how to rebuild their lives. He tells The Tennessean, "All of us have had our tough times in life,

and I've had mine. A lot of people have helped me and I want to help back." He begins his life skills classes by asking his homeless students to open up about their lowest point. Eventually he gets them to describe how they got there and then brainstorm a list of ways they can escape from their situations into better, more productive lives. His students "absolutely love him," says Charles Strobel, who started the campus as an outreach ministry for the homeless in 1995. After Pancoast's class, many go on to take classes in computer and job skills or earn their GED.

An annual count of homeless people in and around Denver, Colorado finds there are fewer people homeless but 43 percent of them are children. According to the survey children represent a growing percentage of homeless people living in motels, emergency shelters or other temporary housing in metro Denver. The count also found 60 percent of all homeless people lived just outside of Denver. While the number of homeless in the county is down this year, the survey revealed 8,668 people are homeless, 43 percent of whom are under the age of 21. "Some of the homeless children live in cars at night. Some are in shelters. Some of them are in schools, but don't know if they're going to be at the same school the next day," Metropolitan Denver Homeless Initiative president Tom Luehrs tells the Denver Post. The survey also counted 2,442 people in transitional housing, where they may remain for six months to two years. Luehrs says housing costs and unemployment remain the leading cause of homelessness. Homeless advocates say while the overall count of homeless people may be lower, their requests for help from homeless women and families are not.

A recent community march in Raleigh, North Carolina focused on ending homelessness. The rally came a day after city leaders announced their own 10-year plan to end homelessness. Supporters of the plan tell WRAL-TV of Raleigh-Durham-Fayetteville that the city's 10-year plan is a progressive commitment, but critics say 10 years is way too long. The plan consists of two

points: focusing on sources of hardship like domestic violence and drug abuse, and allocating more money to shelters. "The situation is much harder today because a lot of jobs are going overseas, and mass immigration has taken a lot of entry-level jobs," homeless Vietnam veteran Ritchie Hammond tells WRAL. Raleigh Mayor Charles Meeker remains optimistic the city can actually end homelessness. "It's an attempt to try and solve the problems of the homeless person," Meeker said of the plan.

Aboriginal housing advocates from across Canada met in Winnipeg recently to search for solutions to homelessness. Native leaders say the number of aboriginal people in Winnipeg has increased over the past decade and it hasn't helped that 10 years ago the government stopped investing in programs that built low-rent homes for urban aboriginals. "Because of the lack of housing in Canada, the lack of social housing, the lack of affordable housing, it's very frustrating for them," says Larry W. Ercherer, who runs an emergency shelter. He tells CBC that waiting lists for existing properties have long caused an increase in the number of native people living in motels, shelters and on the streets. A random sample of around 350 homeless people found that over 75 percent of those in shelters, requiring intervention or on the streets were aboriginal people.

Meanwhile, elsewhere in Canada, the city of Ottawa will receive \$17 million toward ending homelessness as part of the National Homelessness Initiative started in 1999. The money will be granted over two years. "Canadians coast to coast have identified homelessness as a major concern," Defense Minister David Pratt told the CBC. Funding to continue the program was allocated in last month's federal budget, but it requires a locally designed plan. The city of Ottawa did approve a plan that includes \$11 million for capital development projects, \$4 million for services preventing homelessness and aiding the homeless, and \$2 million for research and working with other local service providers.



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Solutions Pending

cont. from page 1

million people joining the work force every year, and almost 4 million unhoused and you have an economic crisis that, in pure numbers, is worse than the great depression. If you add to this the 40 million people living below the poverty level, and the 70 million Americans who don't have the medical insurance needed to protect them from a catastrophic illness, and you end up with ever increasing homeless population.

The police are not employed to fight crime associated with homelessness. Trash is one of the big concerns of people living in our parks and public land, yet the local Ranger Bob stated under oath in court that he never gives littering tickets he mostly just gives camping tickets. When people are ticketed for non-crimes like sleeping, then you have eliminated the fear of committing other crimes. You also take away the unhoused sense of community. Just a few years ago the unhoused felt pride living in such a liberal place as Arcata. They tended to at least mention to one another what this community considered acceptable behavior. Now it is the ones who seem to pride themselves on doing unacceptable behavior who inhabit so much of our town. If you have to have homelessness, and with no solutions you do, then you should strive to have the coolest, greenest, Arcatan type of unhoused you can get.

Many of the people who come through Arcata are young people facing the worst unemployment situation in modern history. These people are yours and my children. They are basically good kids, who like Mayor Omelas, come hitch-hiking into Arcata, because they heard we were different. It seems to me if you have these fertile minds, eager to learn sustainability, environmental consciousness, alternative energy, human rights and peace activism, and you send them away complaining about Arcata fascism, then we have not only done a great disservice to these young people, but perhaps to all of mankind as well. All famous money changers will tell you - the trick to making money is: when life gives you lemons, make lemonade.

The most obvious problem we seem to have with the unhoused is the small groups that hang out on the plaza. I say this is obvious, because of the amount of attention given a really small segment of our population. We have a downtown cop, who's only job is to keep these people moving out of town. I personally believe the Plaza is a much less enjoyable place since the street musicians have been run off. We have several hundred citizens who want a place they can play their drums and enjoy each others

company. If this was a, for the people, by the people type city, we would have a place for these people to go. The down side of this idea is that some of the people who now come to Arcata to spend their money in the plaza businesses would go to the new park instead, as this is our biggest attraction. We look everywhere for "tourist attractions", yet we don't see what is right in front of us. The small coastal town of Mendocino make their tourist dollars from being the town that hippies built. When are we going to stop saying that our economy is the results of Pacific Lumber and HSU, both who predominately hire from outside the area?

A few years ago I was traveling through a town named Paris Texas. A warehouse was converted into a thrift store, a cardboard recycling station, and small rooms, both dorm style and individual rooms. The system worked fairly well. People would come off the streets, live in the dorms until a room could be emptied or built for them. They worked collecting the city's used cardboard, baling it and loading it on trucks. About fifty people were employed and housed. I believe we could do the same thing, maybe utilize that boondoggle transfer station we built on Samoa. I envision a curbside recycling program that uses homeless, bicycles, and our recycle station. Two or three employees who pick up trailers loaded with tin cans, mayonnaise jars, newspaper, etc., while the homeless workers get to keep all CRV recyclables and tips.

Pot holes seem to bother Arcatans more than anything. The 60-70 thousand dollar a year we pay for each police officer is just the tip of the iceberg. That doesn't include their gasoline, the court costs, their overtime and other costs to maintain a police force. We have three homeless police in Arcata right now. Two "Park Rangers" and a downtown patrol officer. The national average is 90 thousand dollars a year to dress a police officer and put them in a patrol car. People could be employed by the city as temporary labor to spend this police money fixing pot holes, picking up trash, cleaning storm drains, etc.

Camp sites are another obvious answer we need. Currently it is illegal to sleep in Arcata if you don't own, rent or have permission to be on land. Thus if you are unhoused and fall asleep you're a criminal. We today, need places for people to live until things get better, or this permanent housing they promise becomes a reality. Camp grounds could reduce many of the problems we now consider a problem. People could pool their meager resources, cook com-

munally and have those other 16 meals a week that the Endeavor does not provide. This would reduce the number of people begging for alms on our streets. The person flying a sign and making 50 thousand dollars a year is an urban myth. The truth is most people beg for hours and only make about 10 dollars a day. The shelter in Eureka actually gives out literature encouraging people not to give homeless people money. Homeless people need things just like everyone else. People donate to a shelter that takes the lion share from every homeless person, who gets a general relief check, to pay for a shelter that can't even house that many people. Then with their hand out they have the audacity to tell you not to give money to those less fortunate than yourself. This would be a good place to point out that most homeless never dreamed they would be in this condition.

The police, when I was in Phoenix once, had an incentive program for courteous drivers. When an officer saw a kind driver they would give them money. It probably failed due to the overwhelming number of drivers. There are only 2-3 hundred homeless people in Arcata on any given night, they break bread together every day. An incentive program would be the talk of the unhoused community. These people would never be able to pick out the city employee who could go out and give some polite respectful panhandler once a week, a crisp twenty dollar bill complements of the city. Would it work? Yes, proactive peace officers are the only types of policing that work. Knee-jerk, reactionary law enforcement officers are why the crime rates are out of control. When arrests equal promotions, in the police force, the probably of graft and totalitarianism increase. But when we have police who believe that jail is the last resort and only for as long as it takes to protect the rest of society, then they gain our respect, thus creating mutual aid and our cities become easier to police and thus safer for everyone.

If you come early to farmers market, you will probably see the police rounding up and running off the unhoused. I say don't run them off, invite them to take part. Maybe a zone just inside on the grass where poor people would be allowed to sell their wares on a maximum area, say 100 sq feet. Make the selling of produce not allowed to protect our organic farmers from the cleaver cheat, but make it free so people could earn money to help them live. Making wares and selling them is honest work. These people are not going to get rich with a 10 by 10 blanket worth of stuff. They live hand to mouth, so

all they make will be spent right here in local businesses. If a homeless person gets a dollar he is going to spend it. He doesn't as a general rule hitch-hike to Ukiah to spend it. He supports the local economy regardless of what he spends it on.

We have always been a responsive community. We have started to look for answers to so many problems that are of global consequence. This is just another opportunity for Arcata to shine and show the rest of the world that problems can be solved. The Urban institute did the most in depth study of homelessness to date. They asked "case managers" what homeless people needed to get off the streets and they answered: more case workers. When the same question was asked to the homeless and ex-homeless their answers were jobs, a living wage and affordable housing. I don't think we are too smart to see the writing on the wall. The economy is going into the crapper. They are trying to stop it using the very techniques that put it there. Deregulation and trickle down economics may increase your averages, do to gross inequities, but for most of us they just turn brother against brother for less and less crumbs that are left over.

The prophets of old said that what you do to the least of your brethren you do unto God, but I say what you allow to happen to the least of you brethren you do unto God and eventually yourself. Together Arcata can go forward, but if we believe that left to itself the business interests that have so permeated our governments, local and national, will do the right thing, in lieu of the cheapest or easiest thing is too naive. We must all scream for local solutions, before we realize that we are the next to be standing in the homeless line.

Peace be with you. Love eternal

(Tad is a homeless advocate. He goes only by the name Tad, because of sagacious religious convictions. Any addition of other names, he has renounced, is strictly the editor's pharisaic Karmic peril and not that of the reader or the lucubator. The views expressed are Tad's, and not necessarily those of the paper, its editor, its staff, the city of Arcata, its civic and religious leaders, Herod, John Ashcroft, or Randy Mendoza. All contents are the personal property of the universe and can not be copy righted.)



March For Our Lives cont. from page 1

vision for economic rights!"

The gathering created a deep solidarity and the conclusion was only the beginning of a day of activism. All attending formed a single-file line, holding banners and signs, marched from the itty-bitty park to join a legion already assembled at the state capitol. When arriving at the west steps of the capitol, another program was underway. The March for Our Lives continued around the Capitol along

larger, some smaller). The PPEHRC members continued walking in line and organically made it to the end of a much longer line made up of the other assembled groups. Groups got into line behind, also. And the much larger march proceeded towards L Street and then towards the west side of the Capitol to join the already in progress program. As the marchers arrived they interspersed into the awaiting crowd. And our mighty small groups

for a Fair Budget" (the title of the day's event). After a wonderful lunch many went to lobby inside the capitol building.

Michael from WEAP reported, "The California PPEHRC entered the Capital along with poor people from across the state—many of which came all the way from the most destitute areas of Los Angeles—as part of a direct action against the cuts that Donna Arduin, the State Finance Director, is making in Medi-Cal, Healthy Families and every other service that has provided the bare minimum of public assistance to low wage workers and poor people. She has specialized in cutting the public support system from state governments in Michigan, New York and Florida. Now, Schwarzenegger has brought her immoral slash-and-burn science to California to eliminate the last remnants of a system intended to guarantee the most basic access to a dignified life. No demands were met, but the event furthered the critical process of unifying poor and working people around a common vision of economic human rights. People from Los Angeles, San Jose, Oakland, San Francisco, Richmond, Sacramento and many other places joined together as we shouted down the halls, "Donna, Donna, shame shame shame! Stop using the poor for political gain." We also chanted in her of fice, "Economic Human Rights! That's what we're fighting for!" [Max Biddle (SHOC)



reports that Schwarzenegger has backed down some on his cuts to healthcare, seemingly in response to the demonstrations.]

If you feel your economic human rights have been denied to you and would like to join the endeavor to hold our government

accountable, come to the SHOC office (located at Friendship Park in Loaves & Fishes) and fill out a documentation form that we will send on to the United Nations. For more information contact Paula (SHOC) at (916) 442-2156.



N Street. When arriving at the east end of the Capitol, low and behold, there were a dozen or more assembled groups, such as the PPEHRC affinity group (some

became a mighty multitude. All together, representing diverse populations, the old and the young, to demand in unison our right for healthcare and "United



...sometimes a step backwards is progress...

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Welcome to HOMEWARD:

Please help us make a difference!



Homeward Street Journal has been publishing since 1997 as a non-profit project of the Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee, which is a part of the Sacramento Housing Alliance. The paper's mission is to alleviate miscommunication between communities by educating the public about housing and poverty issues, and by giving the homeless a voice in the public forum. Homeward also informs the homeless of shelter and occupational assistance, and acts as a creative self-help opportunity for those individuals who wish to participate. The opinions expressed in Homeward are those of the authors, and not necessarily the Sacramento Housing Alliance or SHDC or Homeward.

Submissions and Editorial Policy
We welcome any participation or contributions: Articles, poems and other writing can be submitted at our office in the Louvec 5 Fishes complex, or mailed to the address below.

All writing submitted for publication will be edited as necessary, with due respect for the authors' intent. The editors will attempt to consult with an author if changes are necessary, however, the paper will go to print with the story as edited if the author is unavailable.

All Letters to the Editor must be signed to be published. If the writer wishes to remain anonymous s/he should so state, but the letter must still be signed.

Poetry and graphics will not be edited, either the paper will publish the submission or not.

In submitting articles to the paper, authors give their permission to print their submissions in accordance with the above stipulations, as well as publishing excerpts on Homeward's webpage and possible reprinting in NASNA member papers, with due byline. Any requests for stories outside the above three will be referred to the author.

Subscriptions are available with a \$15 contribution. Make checks out to SHDC.

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For information please call: 442-2156

The paper may also be E-mailed at Homeward2@yahoo.com

excerpts from the paper are published on the web at <http://users.comcast.com/~shochose>

THE COLD ICY WIND

by Lillian

People nowadays are very grateful for overflow. They appreciate the warmth and safety that they find there. Living on the streets isn't what it used to be. There's more danger out there than before. Overflow has come a long way from what it was 12 years ago when I had occasion to stay there one winter night.

It was a very cold, windy night. "The winds were the strongest, fiercest winds that I had ever experienced in my life." I kept thinking over and over as I struggled down 12th St. on my way to winter overflow at the Salvation Army. Several times that late afternoon, I had huddled against buildings unable to move with the ferocity of those winds. The chill of the wind was unbearable. I had thought that my warm winter jacket and sweater would do the trick and keep me warm. I was wrong. The chill entered into my tired bones and it was hard to make myself move but I had to make it to the Salvation Army. I kept thinking over and over. I had to go for the warmth and protection. I had thought that on the coldest and windiest day in Sacramento that the Salvation Army would let the people wait indoors for the bus.

I was wrong. After a long arduous walk which had

required all of my will power to complete, I arrived at my destination only to see others huddled in front of the door. When I asked to be let in on account of the weather I was turned down. This is Christianity? I thought to myself. I joined the others and we did what we could to help protect each other from the piercing icy chill of the wind with tears streaming down my face and prayers pouring out of my mouth for I feared for my life as did one or two of the other women there. The howling of the wind created an eerie sound that night. The men had positioned themselves in front of the women and that created the first relief I received that night. The hours crept by.

I reflected wondering why I had decided to stay this one night at overflow when I remembered that it was because so many of my acquaintances had complained about the conditions at overflow and I felt led to see for myself if it was that bad. My own friends were sleeping outdoors keeping warm. They never went to shelters, preferring to shelter themselves out in the streets. I knew that whenever they were, they were warm and enjoying life. I kept thinking, what a fool I had been not to have stayed with them. And then I thought, my troubles were over. I was on my way to a warm indoors place where I

could rest these weary bones and console myself.

Wrong again. When we arrived at the building, we were housed directly in front of two huge doors where the receiving and loading was done for the trucks. The horrible wind had followed me to my bed, with one difference: every now and then when the trucks would fill that empty space we would have a few minutes of relief. It wasn't until late that the door was closed and we finally were freed of that fierce icy cold wind.

The help that were assigned to giving us our beds and seeing to our needs were people who had formerly been homeless themselves. They talked to us in a demeaning and arrogant manner. It reminded me of the way guards treated prisoners in the ball and chain prisons of the south in movies I had seen. Only this time, it wasn't a movie, it was my life and I was frightened. I thought, why do people have to be so inhuman to a person simply because they haven't a home to sleep in? No wonder my friends refused to go to any shelters!

Appearances have changed and there have been a few improvements, but people's attitudes are much the same. Moral of the story? Sacramento, don't give up!

The Golden Rule (It's true in all faiths)

Brahmanism:
This is the sum of duty. Do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.
Mahabharata 5:1517

Buddism:
Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful.
Udana-Varga 5:18

Confucianism:
Surely it is the maxim of loving-kindness: Do not unto others what you would not have them do unto you.
Analects 15:23

Taoism:
Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss.
Tai Shang Kan Ying Pien

Zoroastrianism:
That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself.
Dadistan-i-dinik 94:5

Judaism:
What is hateful to you, do not to your fellowman. That is the entire Law, all the rest is commentary.
Talmud, Shabbat 31a

Christianity:
All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets.
Matthew 7:12

Islam:
No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.
Sunnah

-courtesy Elizabeth Pool from www.aimanac.com

Affordable Housing Believers Test Petitions in Elk Grove

SHA Press

In an effort to enact a Fifteen Percent: 5.5 and 5 affordable

housing policy in Sacramento County, Sacramento Housing Alliance members have taken to the streets.

Ethan Evans and Brian Augusta spent an hour on Saturday, May 15th, at the Wal-Mart in Elk Grove talking to shoppers and gathering signatures on a letter to the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors. The team collected dozens of signatures in a short time from a generally receptive crowd.

were handed out to all who passed by.

"This was a fun and easy way to volunteer and help get more affordable housing in Sacramento County," exclaimed Brian. "I really enjoyed talking to people about this program. It showed that these is growing support for balanced affordable communities."

The SHA does not itself provide or manage housing.

You may call for info: (916) 442-1198

Annual Membership dues: Standard, \$35; Low-income, \$15

Organizations: Full, 0.1% agency budget, Associate, \$100

Send donations to:

Sacramento Housing Alliance PO Box 2430 Sacramento, CA 95812

The message is simple: "We are trying to have more affordable housing built in Sacramento County. Will you sign this letter asking your supervisor, Don Notolli, to require that 15% on new housing be made more affordable?" Fliers detailing the policy and giving contact information for the supervisor

The stage was well set with an ironing board complete with colorful banner reading "Affordable Housing". The Sacramento Housing Alliance will continue this petition signing effort. If you are able to volunteer, please call the SHA office at 442-1198.

Joining SHA

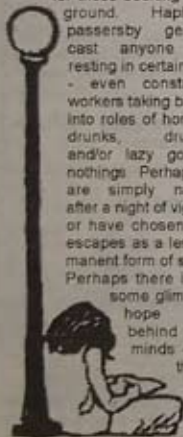
The Sacramento Housing Alliance is a network of concerned citizens which promotes decent affordable housing for low income households and homeless people through advocacy and participation in public discourse.

House of Mirrors 24071M 70 92NOH

by Kathleen

Why is it okay to relax with martinis every evening in the comfort of your home, yet not OK to be a "drunk" now that your favorite chair is in a park, your bedroll, tarp and other possessions stashed in your car? Why was it socially acceptable to be "retired" - until you got it, was forced to spend all your assets, including your home - even at a loss - to become totally dependent on some government accommodation the last crop of public officials promised and current politicians canceled just as your paperwork was being finalized? Suddenly you are homeless, wondering how it happened in this great country of - who's? What of the countless released from institutions with no guidance, no help learning to function in the outside world. And then there are the veterans. Why is it so profoundly noble to be a World War II veteran, yet Viet Nam vets who, under greater risk, fought and died for the same freedoms, opposed the same evils, are still shunned.

Looking at this ever-growing social dilemma can seem overwhelming, though typically dismissed with complacency or a "blame the victim" mentality to ease the consciences of those more fortunate (so far). At times the homeless feel their only function is that of a stepping-stone for those seeking higher ground. Haphazard passersby generally cast anyone seen resting in certain areas - even construction workers taking breaks - into roles of homeless drunks, druggies, and/or lazy good-for-nothings. Perhaps they are simply napping after a night of vigilance or have chosen other escapes as a less permanent form of suicide. Perhaps there is still some glimmer of hope hiding behind their minds - hope they will



wake up, discover they have returned to their "real" lives. Perhaps his/her previous identity included being a college professor laid off just prior to tenure or a cashier who, after 20 years of loyalty, was replaced by someone willing to accept less pay. And what of the elderly and/or disabled, at the mercy of fixed incomes, landlords demanding it be three times the rent? How many safe, livable apartments rent for \$227.10 per month? Almost over-night you are labeled "throwaway" for whatever reason, this diversified group ranging from newborn to ancient, criminal to saint, from all nationalities, religions, and socio-economic strata, is one of the fastest growing sub-populations in the United States and, also, the most socially vilified, publicly abused. Why is it so difficult to offer encouragement, friendship, when such consideration could reduce the chasm, keeping both sides at odds so intensely? Is it fear of peering inside a house full of mirrors and recognizing the eyes that stare back from infinity?

I look into those places where souls are expected to touch, even for a brief moment, sometimes I see nothing looking back, so retreated that even the individual seems to question where he or she has gone. Others appear to have a void so overwhelming it could vacuum my own existence in, such as it is, and I am torn between my need to offer comfort and some abstraction of self-preservation within my own individual being. Perhaps, if I tarry for the briefest moment, I too, will get sucked into what could be considered a highly contagious mindset. Nonetheless, my thoughts cannot help wandering to those roads I can only imagine these people may have traveled to get where they are now - some laying under trees, some under tattered blue plastic tarps, each attempting to stay dry - all hoping to avoid arrest just for being homeless. I wonder what keeps some going, what forces their eyes open each day, knowing the view has not changed, assuming it never will.

Yesterday I watched children

playing in a park, some squealing as they slid down endless turns of tubes, others swinging high, toes stretching to touch treetops. Another group seems in a different world of imagining, transforming themselves into firemen and policemen. Parents sat on benches, proudly smiling at their children's obviously limitless potentials.

Today I look at adult visitors to a different park where the homeless gather during the day to visit, shower, eat. I look at their drawn, leathery faces and hanging, tattooed canvases of skin. I try to picture them as children - their frizzed braids, disheveled clothes, skinned knees, untied shoes - giggling and screaming, running and playing with other kids. What springtime hopes and dreams of adult adventures did they, as children, imagine as their bodies lay on newly mowed grass, their souls soaring across blue skies on whimsical creature clouds. I look at them now, collapsed on browned, used-up lawn. Skies are as grey, colorless as their thoughts. I wonder if family, childhood friends know or care where they are, what motivates them to continue what, for some, appears to be a tolerable existence, for others a nightmare for which there is no resolve. I hear mostly nicknames, wondering if there isn't some clue to that person who used to be, possibly that person who might have been. Or is the true nature of such disguise just what it suggest - a means of separating the domain of current reality from the illusionary world previously fantasized? Might it be a connection to that small part of the original self to refuse conscious identification with this current reflection in the mirror?

I remember a long walk one evening - a walk that took me from one realm of possibility to another - reality, unconnectedness. I had been afraid of my destination after listening to rumors as people directed me to the "safest" place. My apprehension rose as I got closer to the escalating sound of carts squeaking and banging against curbs, blacktop irregularities. Homeless men and women were

gathering at the church steps to settle in, hoping those more fortunate would have enough respect for God's House to leave them in peace for one night. Little did I realize those to be feared were not the homeless. It was cops, teens on bikes at 3:30 am, armed with eggs and rocks, a pious do-gooder I had seen before, publicly demonstrating compassion toward the homeless, now cursing them from his car under the cover of darkness.

There is one man - one whose image still, for lack of a better term, haunts me. The first time I saw him he had already bedded down for the night. His long hair was past disheveled, his salt and pepper beard blending with the grey and smoky brown locks gathered around his face in much the same way a muffler would be and serving the same purpose. Through the layers of clothing his tall, thin frame was almost disguised. He pulled his sleeping bag up around him after giving me a gentle but authoritative welcome to the steps, suggesting I claim a place quickly as he glanced over his shoulder. His eyes escorted me to the space behind him, the top step up against massive wooden doors. Without words he let me know I would be warmest, safest there. With a John Wayne smile, he let me know he and God would protect me.

In the morning everyone moved slowly, each at a different speed, after semi-sleeping on the penetrating cold slab of gray marble that made me think of cemeteries and grave markers every one understood the requirement to "disappear" shortly after dawn so as not to offend, lose privileges. While making sure all evidence of his own presence had been erased, he also quietly observed each other person, cleaning up after them without protest whenever necessary. The few times he did speak, it was in a most respectful, unobtrusive way. Having completed his morning tasks, he adjusted his sweat-stained cowboy hat, picked up his gear and what appeared to be a cane. Not until he walked away did I notice the bony bent leg that had

failed to reduce his monumental stature. What had happened?

Is there a solution to this country's ever-increasing homeless population? I do not know. An import challenge, even before exploring solutions for our homeless population, might be eliminating fear - fear of differences, fear of sameness, fear of individuality, fear of monism. Fear seems most nourishing to the degeneration of civil thought. Perhaps we, as a nation, could initiate a new concept of anti-platitudes. We could stop searching endlessly for absolution, at times blaming victims rather than correcting injustices perpetrated against those outside the "norm". An effective plan might include eliminating the compulsion to categorize, stereotype, and accept that we are all square pegs, not needing the confusing anguish of being forced through endlessly shifting, overlapping round holes. We could offer respect for each individual's uniqueness and appreciation for shared similarities. There is a Native American legend, handed down from the "Peacemaker", that calls people to seek individuality while, seemingly paradoxically, choosing a path that benefits all Mother Earth's people (McFadden, S., Legend of the Rainbow Warriors, pp. 29-35).

We all have individual and shared lessons of life. Different orientations, religions, races, cultures, and their common grounds are gifts to share, combine and add to, enhancing the life of each person brave enough to experience such diversity and acquire such knowledge. There are both risks and benefits to such an encounter. But the advantages make the adventure worthwhile. Walking a mile in the shoes of a homeless person could offer profound insights into not only theirs, but our own lives. For instance, have you ever asked yourself, if you were forced to spend one night living on the streets, where would you sleep? Where would you go to the restroom? Where would you bathe?

It seems for more courageous to consider one's vulnerabilities while continuing to hold both hands out, than to punish the less fortunate simply because they reflect issues most feared from within ourselves. Perhaps each of us could come to understand, accept that we are all invaluable parts of the greater whole - all complimentary, all enfranchised. And we, as individuals within a united nation, could feel secure as we meander through our House of Mirrors, knowing the people looking back are all familia.

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Continued Display

In Fond Memory of a conversation held with Elliott Dawkins: 1959 - 2004

James Stehcon

Having returned late to my current residence, a rather trying day at SHOC now behind me, I was soon to lounge to a local daven and begin some "stillness appreciation". How was I to know, at that time, that upon waking the next morning, I would soon discover that one of our good friends had earned the dubious distinction of gracing the front page of the Sacramento Bee Metro section, tragically not an accolade, at that.

I allude, of course, to the person now perished we knew simply as 'Elliott' - trench coat Elliott, that big, tall guy over there in the tan trench coat, brown cowboy hat and "ZZ tops" shades - you know, that one cool guy that talked and nodded to everybody coming into Friendship Park.

I was given to consider, that morning, the reality of the absolute horror, sadness and regret our poor comrade must surely have briefly experienced, as he comprehended the futility of any attempt to escape his impending doom.

My wife has since held my head as I've cried; been patient with me as I've worked through this declaration, made this familiar experience (yes, familiar) so much less painful to endure, and yet...

I, too have since ironically recalled a conversation between Elliott and myself in the presence of a certain memorial wall - one largely unknown by the analogous masses, yet a poignant testament to the ultimate cost and genuine risk of a meager existence in Sacramento, California.

Of about an hour and a half in duration, our observations, contemplation and discussions covered a grim plethora of relative subjects to the river rock, basin-and-fall, Sacramento homeless memorial at Loaves & Fishes' Friendship Park.

Elliott's verbiage was articulate and precise; witty and flashy, managing seldom to injure or cut. Our topic was generally the recognized names, circumstances of their deaths, and how he'd "probably end up with my name added to th' gosh-darn thing, too!"

"Your not go'n anywhere any time soon, Bucko." I says, "Why, at the rate that wall's fillin' up, they'll be plum outa room in no time, an' you'll hafta stick around 'till they can scrounge together enough change to build another wall."

How true I now know the jest was, as I consider some chilling statistics...another name added roughly every two weeks; about one a week just as of late December, 2003, to date.

A cautionary word to any who might automatically assume that because it involves the poor, the indigent, the destitute and the homeless, that it necessarily stands to reason that ALL the deaths were

"junkies who's time had finally come". In truth, the documentable greater majority of the names of my friends and acquaintances represented on this wall resulted from circumstances and instances having, on their part, absolutely nothing to do with such rabble. Notably, 60% have died of complications relative to the combination of ailing health, and the pitiless requirements of eking out an existence at the base of the social cast.

In point of contrast, for most of you who are now reading these words from the relative security of your desk, kitchen table, or bus seat, I am confident that the death of someone you might know occurs in your lives at a very infrequent rate, the individual seldom derided for their circumstances or choices. Too, memories of the faces of your now dead friends, family or coworkers will continue to be very real reminders of people you knew, liked and loved. The faces of the folks I've had the privilege to live amongst, and share the burden with, who tend to pass away at rates YOU would surely find disparaging, are no less real to myself, nor the minority group known as "the homeless".

Down here, amongst such a (necessarily) close knit community, even the deaths that are attributable to natural causes, take on a heart wrenching aspect, as the corpses are found most often alone, abandoned, utterly dismissed. Their memories compete for my attention - it's just that there are so many of them now, to consider, that that point alone begins to manifest a pain of its very own.

Lastly, I am made saddest by the deaths of my friends who are murdered by miscreants - so far from any family, friend or champion. These Fellow Americans - many of whom, like myself, are veterans, find themselves alone, destitute, socially despised, slandered and defamed, harried, harassed, hazed, badgered, jailed and ticketed for having NO place to lay their head - of ALL the dastardly crimes. Persecuted, beaten, robbed, killed and poisoned, these people should therefore now become worthy of legitimate refugee status, one could compassionately conclude.

Native Americans, African Americans, Tutsies and Hutues, Jews and Shiites, along with a whole host of other persecuted peoples can all attest to the FACT that social terrorism is most easily perpetrated upon those groups deemed "of no consequence or value" by closed-minded charismatic up-starts with nothing better to do than inflict misery upon other human beings, whether the perpetrators be individuals, groups, agencies or institutions.

"...that ALL men are created equal", indeed! How utterly avoidable, the majority of the over-all misery we're beset by, and all this knowing He's coming back soon, too...

Obituary

Bruce Thornton
d. 12-23-03
natural causes

Jeff Boone
d. 1-22-04
homocide- shot in back

Rhonda Hite
d. 2-29-04
prolonged illness

Donald Walker
d. 3-7-04
suicide

Albert White
d. 4-2-04
natural causes

Matthew "Caspar" Excoban
4-21-04
suicide in jail

Lou Matthews
d. 5-3-04
natural causes

Johnny Buckskin
d. 5-13-04
natural causes

Micheal Stahl
d. 5-12-04
stroke

In Memory of Doug Butler

February 18, 1954 - April 9, 2004



Doug worked his way off the streets and out of addiction to become Executive Director of Clean & Sober here at Loaves & Fishes. He spent the last years of his life trying to help others out of the trap he escaped from. He died suddenly of a heart attack, and though his passing was a shock to all who knew him, he died doing the work which was his calling and his love. He will be missed.