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Off the Hook: How the Canadian Government Backed Out of Housing

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by Sean Condon
Street Corner

VANCOUVER, CANADA:

On a cool summer night with a view of the sun setting behind Vancouver's North Shore Mountains and the light reflecting off the Burrard Inlet, Frank Vrajopich lies comfortably on his sleeping bag in the Downtown Eastside's Crab Park reading a newspaper. While Vrajopich has been homeless off-and-on for almost three years, he says sleeping outdoors in the scenic Crab Park is an improvement to living in a bed bug-infested hotel in the Downtown Eastside, Canada's poorest postal code.

"You go nuts," says Vrajopich. "I was getting bit every night. You can't protect your bed good enough to make it stop. I would have bites all over my legs. I couldn't sleep."

Last year Vrajopich was briefly living in the Burns Block, a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) hotel at Hastings and Carrall, before being evicted with the rest of the roughly twenty tenants on just an hour's notice. The Vancouver Fire Department had gone into the building for a routine inspection, but when they found fire exits blocked and extinguishers empty, they quickly shut it down and forced the tenants to seek shelter.

The sudden closure of the Burns Block has become symbolic of government inaction to Vancouver's housing crisis. Since coming to power in 2001, the current Liberal provincial government has invested little in housing, pushing most of the responsibility onto the private sector. With "hard-to-house" tenants filling up the Downtown Eastside (many drug addicts, mentally ill or both), land-

lords have allowed buildings to deteriorate to the point where they have been shut down, in the process cashing in on gentrification by selling them for millions to ambitious developers.

The municipal government, in turn, has done even less to enforce bylaws that would require landlords to make repairs to dilapidated buildings. Vancouver's housing situation has gotten so bad that someone like Vrajopich, who is looking for clean and safe housing, would rather sleep outdoors than in the often violent and infested housing that does remain available in the city.

But while community activists and opposition politicians in Vancouver have staged protests against both the provincial and municipal governments, very little attention or blame has been put on

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Sit in a Park - Get a Ticket!

by Marc Brandes

SACRAMENTO, CA: Muir Park, the two-and-a-half acre park at 16th and C Streets, has recently changed from a public park to a "children's playground". I am not referring to the small fenced area within the park which surrounds the swings and climbing apparatus

but the whole square block! What does this mean you may ask. Simply this; if you enter the park without accompanying a child you could be cited by a police officer for violating a city code. Simply stated, Muir Park is no longer a public space.

How did this happen? The Parks Department and the Sacramento City Council, spurred on by the Alkali Flats Neighborhood Association, decided to change the designation of the park after holding a series of community meetings in the last couple of years. The Parks Department spent 600 thousand dollars to add additional climbing apparatus for children, as well as installing a pathway around the soccer field, which they call a "trike track". They also added some tables under the elm trees near 16th Street and call this the "summer camp area". They even went so far as to weld metal figures of children playing right into the park's perimeter fence.

Now that the whole park has "children's amenities" throughout it's entire 2 1/2 acres, they are saying that adults without kids should not be able to use the park. This logic has so many flaws that it is laughable. First of all, the basketball court and soccer field, which certainly can be used by kids, are also facilities that are used by adults. The "trike track" (I have yet to see a tricycle in the park) is also a walking and jogging track.

The real reason the City and the Parks Dept. made these changes is that they simply do not like to see poor folks hanging around the park, whether they are behaving legally or not! I have even heard residents and business owners say this publicly. There are many laws regarding alcohol and drug use in parks; and folks who violate these laws can be cited for these infractions, so it isn't just behavior that is being targeted.

This is not the first time that the city has abused its power to keep folks out of this park. About 10 years ago when the city built the perimeter fence around Muir Park, they also installed a coded gate at the entrance. This meant that a person would have to call the Parks Dept to obtain the code to enter the park. As well as being blatantly discriminatory, this policy was a total failure, as very few people at all used the park.

If you believe strongly as I do that city parks are public spaces, such as libraries or public beaches, which should not be restricted in anyway, then please contact the following people and let them know how you feel: Councilman Steve Cohen 808-7003; Janet Baker, Park Operations Manager 808-8234; Mayor Heather Fargo 808-5300.



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Taken Off the Street

Street News Service
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by Peter John Meiklem
The Big Issue in Scotland

LONDON, UK

Leanne Russell is a small, sad looking woman, in a multi-coloured patchwork coat. We meet in Edinburgh's St Giles Cathedral, a festival in full swing on the Royal Mile outside, but today the street performers — who usually make the capital a happy place to visit — seem out of place. Russell has a story that is hard to listen to, the kind of tale that makes smiling difficult.

Ten years ago Russell, now in her 30s, was taken to a stranger's house after being offered a place to stay (she was sleeping rough on the London streets at the time). There, she was imprisoned in a tiny room, held captive for four months and was repeatedly raped by the man she believed had wanted to help her

"I was homeless," Russell explains, "living in Soho, and it was getting cold out. One day a man approached me and said I looked like I needed some help. He said he had a flat and a spare room I'd be welcome to use. It didn't click for me that I could be walking into danger."

The first night Russell watched TV, happy to have found a warm place to rest. She chatted to her new host, swapping life stories and telling jokes. It was only later she realised that some of his questions, an innocent-sounding enquiry about her friends and family for one, had a dark underbelly.

After Russell and the man had talked for a while, he showed her to the room. "And that was where I was kept for the next four months of my life," she says.

Exhausted, she fell fast asleep. It was only after waking up she realised something was wrong. "There were no fixtures on the walls," she recalls. "The windows had been covered over there was a mattress on the floor. I thought this will be fine because I wasn't thinking of it as a prison. Then I started feeling pretty bad, realising I was in a dangerous situation. I hadn't told anyone where I was. I started panicking."

The next night, her kidnapper entered the room and raped her. The same happened the day after, and for nearly every night over the next four-month period. After a while, Russell began to think her life was over so traumatizing was her ordeal.

"I remember two guys sitting next door watching Match of the Day," she says. "I remember feeling scared, hoping for extra time so he wouldn't come in and attack me again. Over the next four months, I spent the nights being raped and the days just trying to recover on my own."

It is only now, 10 years later and after

Homeless people in Britain are increasingly vulnerable to cruel and exploitative crimes. Peter John Meiklem meets a woman whose harrowing trauma of capture and rape lasted four months

weekly therapy sessions, that Russell feels able to talk about her experiences.

"For a long time people would ask why I seemed to drift through life or why I haven't got solid foundations. I would stay silent and they would guess other reasons."

Remembering today it is the small details that seem the most vivid. Not the horrendous reality of the sexual assaults carried out on her but the mundane details of her imprisonment: a daily diet of soup, baked beans and white bread, the sound of football supporters making their way to the match outside her boarded up window, the daydreams she would fall into to get through the day.

Russell hadn't planned to end up on London's streets. The first child of an international businessman (she has two younger brothers), Russell had grown up in English language schools all over Europe and the US. A graduate of more than one university, her future looked bright, assured even.

However, life didn't turn out that way. After finishing a master's degree in politics, she was flat broke and took work as a personal assistant. A new flat was a perk of the job but didn't last very long. Russell's boss was an alcoholic and she couldn't cope with being "an employee half the time and a rescuer the rest".

Scared away from homeless hostels by their reputation for hard drug abuse and violence, she found herself living rough.

"It dawned on me that a great education doesn't land you a fabulous job. I had nowhere to go. My family were all overseas and assumed I was fine since I said nothing. I was so worn down I was vulnerable to anything."

It was in that desperate state her kidnapper found her.

"Looking back on my experiences, there was a room prepared to lock somebody up in, and it just happened to be me. It could have been anyone. He was looking for somebody vulnerable and it took me a long time to realise this was something he had planned. For a long time I thought it was a chance event."

Only once during her ordeal did

Russell try to escape. Her makeshift prison cell had no radiator on the wall and the cold soon made her ill, so ill she convinced her kidnapper she needed hospital treatment. They went to an accident and emergency unit she'd been in before but, too terrified to think straight, she was unable to say anything to the doctor who examined her. Russell's terror meant it was the last time she'd try to get away

While she was being held captive, police raided a neighbouring flat using batons and dogs (she assumed for drugs). Her kidnapper told her the dogs would rip her apart if they got into his flat. Russell's thoughts turned almost unbearably dark. "I thought I was already dead," she says.

When Russell, now a student again, speaks, her voice is thin. She has decided to go public to confront the level of denial she sees in Britain today. Russell thinks too many want to keep their eyes shut in the hope the bad men will go away.

"People really need to open their eyes because traumatic situations don't always happen abroad. They happen in our own country as well. I have recently heard a number of stories about captives going free, even now it's hard to hear these reports. I get so upset when I see missing people or missing children stories because I can only imagine the worst."

After four months locked in her room, her captor told Russell to get washed and dressed because they were going out. Scared, she did what she was told and was taken to Heathrow Airport, where the man let her go. She fled and, once sure she was free, decided never to report the kidnap and sexual assault to the police.

Years later, more able to deal with what happened to her, Russell believes she suffered, and maybe still suffers, from Stockholm Syndrome — the psychological condition where a kidnapper's victim becomes emotionally attached to their captor and, as past cases have shown, will actually defend them after release.

Certainly, her feelings towards her kidnapper, who during her ordeal would repeatedly declare his love for her still seem a little confused.

"He seemed for half the day to be religious and for the other half to be evil. I couldn't make any sense of it."

The man, from north Africa, would tell her horrible stories about his part in a civil war that had torn his country to pieces.

"I felt a lot of the abuse he was doing to me was justified because of the trauma he lived through when he was younger. But I know now that it is not an excuse to hurt people."

Today, still fighting with the demons her ordeal created, she realises her decision not to go to the police is a

hard one for many people to understand and for some, even to believe.

"People get angry when you tell them about it. Nobody is equipped to hear about this level of abuse and they don't want to hear about it. People have trouble holding on to the idea that something this horrific could happen."

Even though Russell thinks she knows her kidnapper's first name, she is still questioning whether to go to the police.

"I've seen umpteen cases get off due to loopholes and I don't trust the police or government to really do anything. I think, due to the length of time that's passed, they won't care. Part of me still feels that police are more interested in busting a drug ring than helping a woman, who is being held within throwing distance, to safety."

One fact she still struggles with, and is still deeply hurt by is that nobody during the four months of her captivity reported her missing. Listening to her, there is still the voice of an angry youngster, feeling let down by those who should be closest to her. "Maybe by telling this story I'll encourage families out there to check on each other more. People need more than an occasional card — being out of sight doesn't always mean that people are fine."

Inevitably, the kidnapping had a devastating effect on Russell's mental health. After escaping, she was admitted to a mental hospital for anorexia. Today, she carries a small rucksack with books, toiletries and other things someone would need if, for some unexpected reason, they never made it home. Even with counselling (she still sees a private psychiatrist), Russell doesn't like leaving the bag behind when she goes out. She has it by her side as she speaks to me.

When Russell disappeared, nobody knew where she was. There was no family expecting her home for tea. She was an easy target. In a country where an estimated 210,000 people go missing every year her story is a chilling reminder of what, in the worst of all possible worlds, can happen to the homeless.

Russell knows little can be done to guard against men with intentions as evil as her kidnapper. Plenty though, she argues, can be done to minimise the number of people left in such a horribly vulnerable position.

"There needs to be more information on what to do if you become homeless. When I ended up on the streets, I didn't know where to go and all I had was the advice of the people around me. I know better now. All I can think of is I lived when I didn't think I would."

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Off the Hook continued from page 1

the federal government. Although every other country in the G7 (the seven richest countries in the world) has a national housing strategy of some sort, Canada stands out as the only one that does not. Last month Statistics Canada reported the federal surplus had risen to \$8.4 billion in the second quarter, and despite the fact that the number of homeless in Vancouver and many other parts of Canada has doubled in just a few short years, the government refuses to allocate any new money to housing.

"We are a huge country geographically and what the feds have said is that [housing] is a regional matter it's a local matter, it's not a federal problem," says Martha Lewis, executive director of British Columbia's Tenant Resource and Advisory Centre (TRAC), "which is amazing because the federal government has the money in large enough sums. This is especially shameful because in every other country it's the central government that gets into housing. We don't have any other [countries] that have just dropped this like Canada."

The federal government's escape from housing has been a long slide over the past three decades. While housing was never delegated to either the provinces or the feds in the country's Constitution (if you needed a house in 1867 you would just chop down some wood or grab some mud and build one) the federal government accepted the bulk of housing duties and by the early 1990s had created 650,000 units of housing units that housed more than 2 million people.

But this model began to disintegrate in the 1990s when the conservative Mulroney government cut \$2 billion in housing. In 1992, Mulroney officially assigned housing to the provinces in the controversial Charlottetown Accord, but this Constitutional amendment was defeated in a national referendum. However, it didn't stop the federal government from backing out of housing and in 1993 the liberal party government announced it would stop funding any new affordable housing and would leave it to the private market to provide.

"The good news for about two-thirds of Canadians is that the private markets are in fact delivering," says Michael Shapcott, a researcher and policy advocate for the Toronto-based Wellesley Institute. "The bad news is that for one-third of Canadians, and in particular for about one in five

Canadians who are in "housing core need", private markets aren't able to offer affordable rents or ownership. Vancouver is probably the best example of a home ownership market that's gone crazy. Not even having a good job is going to get you into a good home in Vancouver."

According to the Canadian Real Estate Association, Vancouver is the most expensive housing market in the country, with the average home now costing \$591,722 – up 14.2 per cent from the previous year. It's not much better for renters with the average two-bedroom apartment in Greater Vancouver costing \$1,045 a month. Add a vacancy rate of just 0.3 per cent and even if you can afford a place, you may not be able to find one. Vancouver's soaring real estate prices, coupled with the provincial Liberal Party's cuts to welfare access, has resulted in Vancouver's homeless population doubling in three years. From 2002 to 2005 the number of people found sleeping on the street and shelters jumped from 1,000 to more than 2,000. Many homeless advocates say the number is now much larger and the Pivot Legal Society predicts the number will reach 6,000 by 2010, just in time for the Winter Olympics.

But as bad as the situation is in Vancouver, it's a terrible trend that is occurring across the country. The National Housing Initiative estimates there are 150,000 homeless in Canada, but some homeless advocates estimate the number is as high as 300,000. Nowhere has homelessness exploded as quickly than in Alberta, where an economic boom has meant housing can't keep up with population growth. Homeless counts found 3,436 people without home in Calgary and 2,600 in Edmonton. In Ontario, where homelessness has been a long standing problem, there are more than 9,000 people homeless in Ottawa and anywhere between 20,000 to 30,000 in Toronto.

"It really does underline that we've got a cultural attitudinal problem in Canada," says Gordon Laird, author of 'Homelessness in a Growth Economy: Canada's 21st Century Paradox'. "Our self-image of a social democracy is not at all in line with what's happening on the ground."

Laird's comprehensive study for the Calgary-based Sheldon Chumir Foundation for Ethics in Leadership found that since the federal government got out of housing in 1993, it

has cost Canadian taxpayers \$4.5 to \$6 billion a year in social services. The government of British Columbia's own statistics shows the average homeless person costs taxpayers roughly \$40,000 a year (for using social, health, police services and emergency shelter). But if the government built housing it would only end up costing taxpayers \$15,000 a year (including the cost of the building the homes). Laird's report advocates that Canada follow in the footsteps of the United Kingdom and the United States, which have put "Housing First" strategies in place – with varying levels of success. This summer Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Blair announced his government will build three million new homes by 2020.

But despite the fact that other Western governments are making housing and homelessness a top priority, Canada continues to buck the trend. Aside from getting out of building housing, in 1996 the federal government downloaded the management of its housing stock to the provinces. In 1998 it amended the National Housing Act, which governs the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) and changed its priority from creating affordable housing to providing mortgage insurance. The change has been extremely profitable for the CMHC, which runs an annual profit of more than \$1 billion and has accumulated profits of close to \$5 billion. But because of the change to the Act, this surplus can't even be reinvested into affordable housing.

Housing and homelessness problems festered in Canada until 2005 when the federal New Democrat Party (NDP) agreed to prop up the minority Liberal government's budget if it cancelled corporate tax cuts and put \$1.6 billion into affordable housing. The deal didn't fully go through before the 2006 election and when the minority Conservative government came to power under Stephen Harper they tried to cancel the deal. Luckily most of the funding had been pushed through and \$1.4 billion ended up going to affordable housing across the country. But since then, the Conservatives have done little to nothing to address the problem.

Aside from offering a \$200 million a year tax break to developers to build affordable housing, the Conservatives and Harper extended the Homeless Partnering Strategy for another two years (\$270 million per year) and kept

the funding in the Affordable Housing Initiative at \$1 billion a year. But the problem is that this simply maintains funding at the same levels that existed in the early '90s, even though the problem is now 10 times worse. Housing advocates are now hoping to take advantage of the international movement to build more housing and force the government to create a national housing strategy.

"We have had some limited funding for homelessness initiatives, but we're not seeing any commitment from the Conservative government even towards the Olympic commitment that talked about building 3,200 units of housing [in Vancouver by 2010]," says NDP Vancouver East MP Libby Davies. "But it's very hard to convince them it's a pressing matter, which just floors me because if you don't have enough housing for people you're creating so many other problems and issues. Now we're approaching real crises in this city especially as we approach the Olympics."

An interview request with the minister in charge of housing, Monte Solberg was not returned and his press assistant sent a short message stating the government's achievements, which were just the programs started by other levels of government. If the Conservative government does not initiate some housing strategy expect Vancouver and Canada's housing problem to get drastically worse. This will cause more suffering for the people who will be out on the street and will also cost taxpayers millions more in dollars.

Back at Vancouver's Crab Park, Frank Vragopich settles back into another night in the park. If it rains, he'll slip in underneath a nearby trailer. If it gets cold, he'll add another blanket. Vragopich had some housing earlier this year in the more upscale West End, but again was attacked by bed bugs every night and felt it was better to just go back outside. He makes his living topping off his disability cheque by returning bottles and cans and will keep looking for housing, if only the government would build some.

"I want to live in government housing and not just another shithole with bed bugs," says Vragopich. "It's a joke right now. The federal government has a billion-dollar surplus and I'm sure they can spend a small amount on housing. It wouldn't hurt. It's bullshit."

Common Health Problems Workshop

SACRAMENTO, CA: "Common Health Problems, the Shelter and You" was the title of a "Health Care for the Homeless" all day workshop held October 2. This workshop was designed to benefit homeless services workers and homeless residents by educating them about some of the more typical health problems in our community.

Included are summaries of the various workshops given that day. The information is not to be taken as medical advice. If you have one of these conditions or think you may have been exposed to a contagious disease, you should definitely get your medical advice from a doctor and not from this article.

Diabetes

The first workshop was about Diabetes presented by Dr. Keith Andrews. Diabetes mellitus means abnormal metabolism of carbohydrates (sugar and starches). There is Type I diabetes (shortage of insulin) and Type II (insulin resistance - more genetically related). Also related are hyperglycemia (high blood sugar), and gestational, drug related and pancreatic diseases. Insulin hormone is made by the pancreas and it pushes sugar in cells and then scoops the rest of the sugar out.

There has been a dramatic increase in the risk of diabetes among people born in the last 10 years. Some antipsychotic drugs heighten risks. There's slightly higher risk among males compared to females. The highest risk ethnic populations in the U.S. are African-American, Hispanic, Asian, and Native American. Quitting smoking reduces risk by 50%. The most important risk factor is Obesity higher risk among apple shaped bodies vs. pear shaped obesity.

Those diagnosed with diabetes should have their vision and kidneys checked by the doctor regularly and have sores checked immediately. They should guard against nerve damage and be careful with foot care, examining them daily. Their sugar levels should be carefully regulated.

Hypertension

Dr. McKee gave a presentation on hypertension (high blood pressure), which is the result of persistent high arterial pressure. It makes it more difficult for blood to travel from the heart to major organs and can do damage to the vessels and arteries of the heart, brain, kidneys and eyes. Hypertension can cause the walls of the heart to thicken causing heart failure, strokes, vision problems, plaque, hardening of the arteries, and kidney problems.

Blood pressure is read measuring the maximum (systolic pressure - when heart is pumping) over the minimum (diastolic pressure - when heart is resting). For example, normal blood pressure is 120/80 while 140/90 is high. Factors that increase the chance of high blood pressure are diet (high salt and/or fat intake or excess alcohol); lack of physical activities; being overweight; a family history; pregnancy and being over the age of 40. African-Americans have an inherited higher risk; also, some psychiatric medications will raise blood pressure. Measures for controlling blood pressure are losing weight, a diet with less fat, avoiding salt and caffeine. People with hypertension should also eat more fiber; get regular exercise; stop smoking; learn to relax; and take medications with regular medical check ups.

HIV/STDs

HIV and STDs "101" was the title of the third workshop, presented by Karen McDonald from the Dept. of Health and Human Services. Sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) are passed by transfer of infected fluids or from direct contact with a lesion, sore or infected tissue through oral, anal, and vaginal, and sometimes other contact. Sometimes STDs have symptoms and some don't. Some can be cured and some can't. The bacterial STDs are Chlamydia, Gonorrhea, Syphilis, and Trichomoniasis. (These can be cured but can re-infect). Currently Sacramento has the second highest rate of Chlamydia in California and Gonorrhea

is fourth highest rate. Viral STDs are Human Papilloma Virus (HPV), Genital Herpes, Hepatitis B and HIV.

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) infects T cells (a type of white blood cell that fights infections). The virus reproduces very quickly infecting more cells and impairing the immune system. It becomes AIDS when life-threatening complications occur. People get HIV from unprotected sex with an HIV positive person, sharing needles and body piercing and tattoos. Sexual transmission is highest with anal sex, but it also transmits through vaginal and oral sex if there are micro tears on the tissue. Prevention includes abstinence from sex and IV drug use (sharing needles), and using condoms or dental dams during sex (with non-oil lubrication to prevent rips). Check expiration dates on condoms; don't leave in the heat or wallet, and if put on the wrong way, throw it out and use another. Another preventive measure is to avoid alcohol and drugs because they are conducive to risky behavior. They now have a rapid test for HIV that only takes 20 minutes and you can take that test at the Clinic at 1500 C Street (this clinic allows anonymous testing). HIV tests measure the amount of antibodies, which takes 2 weeks to 6 months to appear, so HIV would not test positive if it was contracted within that period.

Asthma

The Asthma workshop was presented by Priya Patel, the lead pharmacist with the Sacramento County DHHS Pharmacy. Asthma is the third leading cause of preventable hospitalizations in the United States (500,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths a year). It is a chronic inflammatory disorder of the airways, inflaming or swelling the lining of the airways or bronchial tubes. The surrounding muscles become tight, which makes the airways narrower. It also produces a thick mucus. The exact causes are unknown, though it does run in families. Triggers are environmental conditions (such as heat or cold), allergens, irritants (such as smoke), medical condi-

tions (such as colds), and exercise. Treatment includes infection and environmental control and medication. Drug treatment uses a quick relief inhaler and long term control (used daily and not effective for episodes already in progress). Ms. Patel demonstrated the methods for using inhalers and peak flow meters.

Hepatitis A, B & C.

'Hepa' means liver and 'itis' means inflammation (Latin medical terminology). The most common cause of hepatitis is alcohol. Although there are over 100 causes, when it is caused by a virus it is named "hepatitis" followed by a letter (such as "a", "b" or "c"). The liver filters toxics in the blood, recycles hemoglobin and makes key proteins.

Hepatitis A (HAV) is spread by putting in the mouth anything that has come in contact with stools, so washing hands is very important, though water or food can be contaminated in areas of poor sanitation. There is a vaccine for HAV or immune globulin is given after exposure.

Hepatitis B (HBV) is transmitted through direct blood to blood contact, unprotected sex, un-sterile needles and from a woman to her newborn during delivery. It is 100 times more infectious than HIV and if a person is infectious it is determined through a blood test. Only one out of ten adults will get rid of the virus after a few months; some people who get Hepatitis B never recover. There is a vaccination for HBV and it is important for infants to get vaccinated because they may be at greater risk. There is also a treatment to prevent severe liver disease.

Hepatitis C (HCV) is spread by blood to blood contact and can live in dry blood for up to 4 days. About 25% of Hepatitis C patients will clear the virus on their own. 41% of incarcerated people are infected with HCV. HCV is not passed through sex unless there is blood present. Sometimes there are no symptoms. There is no vaccine but treatment works for many people. To prevent infection don't share needles, don't touch anyone's blood or objects that might have blood on it, use bleach to clean blood spills and use condoms.

Bugs a Threat at Hospitals, Shelters

By Patrick Reis

SEATTLE, WA: When Donald Morehead first came to Seattle in February he needed a safe place to spend the night. He found one at a bed in a local homeless shelter, but he got more than he bargained for. During his stay, he contracted a flu-like illness that made him sick for more than two weeks and sent him to the hospital twice.

The next time, Morehead says, he'll think twice before staying in a shelter. "You hear people coughing all night," he says. "I don't think I'll go back."

But shelters aren't the only service facilities where low-income and homeless people are at risk of contracting disease; the evidence is mounting that hospitals and clinics are dangerous places to be. A recent government study detailed how one bacteria, Methicillin Resistant Staphylococcus (MRSA), killed more than 18,000 people in 2005, a quarter of whom

became infected while in the hospital.

MRSA (pronounced mer-sah), like other drug-resistant bacteria, is believed to have been created by the improper prescription and misuse of antibiotics. When antibiotics are prescribed for viral infections, against which they are ineffective, they kill some, but not all, of the germs with which they come into contact, leaving alive those germs that are drug-resistant. A similar process occurs when patients fail to take the entire course of an antibiotic prescription.

MRSA's initial symptoms, small red bumps, seem fairly innocuous. If left untreated, the bumps become deep, painful abscesses. The bacteria can also burrow deep into the body and create life-threatening infections in the bones, joints, and lungs.

The emergence of drug-resistant bacterial infections is particularly distressing for the homeless, who often lack the proper

sleep and nutrition to maintain a well-functioning immune system. And a shelter, a crowded room full of surfaces that come into contact with dozens of hands nightly is a good incubator of disease.

"The best way to avoid getting sick is to wash your hands a lot, especially before you eat, go to the bathroom, or come in from a public place," says Heather Barr, a public health nurse. "Of course, homeless people don't always take that option. They live in public places, and there aren't enough public bathrooms."

Of course, for Morehead and many others in his circumstance, the alternative to shelters is spending the night on the street, an option with health risks of its own. After one night on the street, Morehead says, he woke up with his back and shoulders burning and was covered with red bumps that, after two visits to the emergency room, he discovered to be bug bites.

Shelters are well aware of the limited

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choices for the homeless and are taking steps to reduce the incidence of infection. Barr advises that any frequently touched services, such as counters, doorknobs, keyboards or sinks be wiped down with a bleach and cool water solution once every four hours. "One of the best things to do, and one that a lot of shelters have done, is to put hand sanitizer near the entrance. That way, people leave their germs at the door," says Barr.

"Hand washing is important not just for yourselves, but for others as well," Barr says. "Health is communal, and when you take care of your own health you help the people around you."

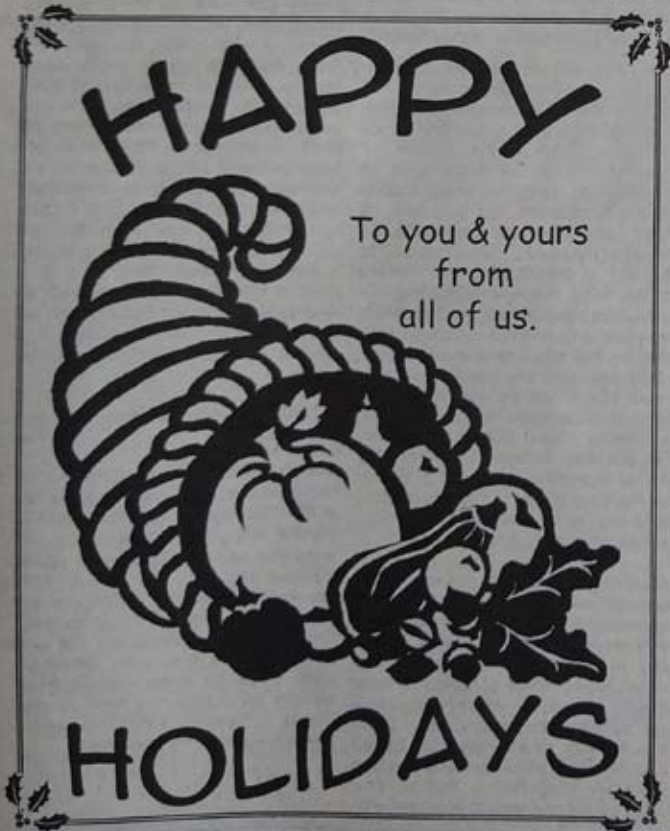
But for Morehead, health conditions in shelters aren't so much a matter of what happens inside, but out. "We can't get to the doctor, we don't get health care," he says. "Without that, of course we're going to get sick and get each other sick."

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Introducing Bob & Spencer - The **HAPPY** Homeless Guys



By Scott Valentine & Mike Diaz © 2007



We Have a Brand New Wiki!

Homeward Street Journal has a brand new Wiki! SHOC's got a Wiki, too. "What's a wiki?" you might ask. It's an internet site where an organization or group of people can post information for sharing with other members and/or with the world wide web at large. We're using the sites as inexpensive websites (they're free!).

In case you miss an issue of Homeward Street Journal, you will be able to go to our wiki and view past local articles (select "Articles Archives"). We probably won't be putting in articles of Homeward from before our last issue, 11.5. Homeward's wiki is: <http://homeward.wikispaces.com>

Sacramento Homeless Organizing Committee's (SHOC) wiki will highlight SHOC's history, purpose, activities and an events and meetings calendar. It is hoped that this site will help our community become more involved in homelessness issues and provide the public with more information about SHOC. SHOC's wiki is: <http://shoc.wikispaces.com>

The Many Perspectives of Nature

by the homeless science writer
Chongo

We see a single world, one based upon a very narrow range of conditions, and what is important for the sake of understanding nature's space and time measures (relativity), one based upon a very, very narrow range of speeds: slow ones (ordinarily). As a result, we see only a single, common perspective of the world, and (again, ordinarily) none other. It leaves us with the image of a 'single', all-encompassing reality, a reality unique to a single, fixed set of universal measures alone, a physical reality with a single, all-encompassing, common set of distances and angles for mapping anything and everything, anywhere and everywhere, a single set of whens and where's, and none others but this single set alone. This singular image of reality that we utilize in everyday life 'seems' to match perfectly the single world that we find ourselves existing in. Unless we have a basis for imagining differently (to be clear a basis for imagining more richly), we, perhaps unknowingly limit reality's measures of space and time to this simple, single image. Nature, however, is never constrained by our lack of capacity to imagine it accurately, and indeed exists independently of the limitations of our imagination, despite any lack of capacity (or desire) on our part to imagine as richly as nature does (or for the sake of understanding nature accurately at least to try to imagine as richly).

This single world and its single set of measures we perceive constitute the geometry of what we might appropriately call our common-sense intuition. We depend tremendously upon our common-sense intuition and its corresponding single set of physical measures, for everything. Minimally it is how we calculate the motion of our own human actions, and, because it seems to be so effective, it is also ordinarily (unless we understand more valid models, like relativity, for example) what we imagine nature using (for measuring, mistakenly believing that all measures are universal). Indeed, unless we have discovered otherwise, we can imagine little more than distorting the existing set, but only with respect to a more encompassing grander absolute set. Again, unless we have discovered otherwise, we can hardly help thinking that what we see and the corresponding distances and angles that we perceive is the way the world (which is to say, the way that nature) 'is', regardless of the vantage point applied. But, our individual reality and the single set of measures that it incorporates are no more representative of 'all of reality's measures, than is what we observe individually universal to and for all. To understand nature

accurately, specifically, to understand the relativity (which is the 'inseparability') of nature's space and time (and ultimately, its gravity), we must first ignore the construction of measures that nature normally provides, this being our common-sense intuition, so as to make room for a much better one, 'better, by virtue of being far more accurate.

According to science, and specifically according to physical science (that is, physics), the measures of our single reality are not universal, nor can they be applied to the entire universe as whole. They are, in fact, just one set of valid measures, among many, many other equally valid (though not equally convenient) sets of measures, including the actuality of many other simultaneous 'nows' besides our single one. This fact introduces an extremely important point to understanding how nature really 'works.' Different 'nows' (simultaneous moments when it is the same exact moment in time in every direction at any distance) dividing all reality between many pasts and many futures, with not a single one ever being universal, makes what is past and what is future wholly a matter of one's individual perspective. (Although it is not important here, it is noted that one's perspective is wholly dependent upon and altogether unique to one's motion. As one's motion changes, so does the set of measures applicable to space and time, which is what one's perspective is, change also.)

The local environment, that for which our common-sense intuition was selected to accommodate, ordinarily never includes anything other than very slow speeds (when compared to the speed that light travels) and very short distances (considering the immense distances existing in the universe, indeed, even within our very solar system), for that is how things ordinarily move in our world (the scope of space that we ordinarily perceive), slowly (even our fastest things move slowly when compared to light) and very, very near. As a consequence of most motion occurring near us and this motion always occurring at slow speeds (again, according to the speed of light), our common-sense intuition quite naturally leaves us equipped with a single absolute notion for the measure of space and time, distances and angles, as is appropriate, in a world where light moves millions of times as fast as the fastest other things moving (these 'things' always being anything that is made of matter). Because it moves so very fast, light allows us to 'see' these things made of matter while they move — or while they don't — using light, of course, as that is precisely what light does: it allows us to see the motion of matter, or the lack of it.

In so doing, it leaves us with the illusion of a single, common perspective for the entire universe, shared by all existence everywhere, which is simply untrue.

For each of us, the individual inhabitants of this seemingly singular world, a single set of measures, a single perspective alone, is enough for our common-sense intuition to be satisfied that a single geometry accurately describes all of the geometry there is in the big universe, just as we might be convinced that our individual image of the universe encompassing its full extent; but, it does not even begin to, nor does or can anyone's. As a matter of actual as well as historical fact, it is logically (or, if you wish, physically) impossible to describe the measures of the universe using any single, fixed set of distances and angles, even locally, like in some of our smaller commonplace appliances like a television set or computer, accurately enough for engineering anything using modern electronics. (A founding father of modern physics, a giant whose name is irrelevant, tried and failed.) To put it bluntly, nature, clearly and simply, irrefutably and unquestionably, cannot possibly correspond to a single, fixed, absolute set of measures, but instead, absolutely must correspond to many as many as there are distinct motions in the universe! (meaning its entire history not just a small temporal portion of that history).

The single set of measures constituting our common-sense model of reality, unless it understands that time is inseparable from space and hence that, according to the Theory of Relativity, there are many sets of equally valid measures, many equally valid perspectives, not just one, is flatly less than representative of nature's measure. Nonetheless, to the end of perpetuating the motions of the living machine sustaining our conscious mechanism, less-than-representative-of-nature's-measures as it may be, this single perspective is ordinarily spectacularly effective — provided that it can be ignored for the sake of understanding nature's ways accurately. Most significantly, it can be acquired independently of any formal instruction, which is a feature far more significant to the holder's survival than is its ability to model electronics or gravity accurately.

According to relativity conventional, common-sense intuition — at least the conclusions it would ordinarily make with respect to the universe's geometry — is (again, ordinarily) usually very flawed (except, of course for local motion of matter — ignoring electrons and particle accelerators). But, given a sufficiently open mind, this flawed intuition can correct itself and become incredibly insightful — that is, provided one is prepared to abandon alto-

gether, embracing some of the most fundamental cornerstones of one's very thinking, for the sake of replacing them with new, more correct ones. This is what makes learning relativity the most important step in understanding nature, at its heart, in a true way. Ignoring our common-sense intuition is what makes learning relativity, though conceptually the simplest step, usually the most formidable obstacle one must overcome in order to begin to understand nature in the deep and sound ways that science does. We must ignore that which we can hardly imagine not being true, in order to understand (ultimately as part of a larger picture) what 'is'. It is a step that one cannot elude, without eluding the understanding itself. Luckily, this is not as overpowering as one's conventional intuition might (again, ordinarily) imagine. All that is required is genuine willingness, and most importantly, an open enough mind — which introduces an absolutely critical point to successfully learning science accurately: if one feels that they are 'willing' to be open minded, yet unwilling to abandon their common sense for the sake of accurate learning, then they will find that they are simply not willing enough.

In the next science article, we will explore in the simplicity of one dimension fewer than our own just how nature can have so many different perspectives (as a fixed set of measures), in what is this, our very very single world. We will do this by learning the basics of relativity and how, according to it, spaces and the perspectives that correspond to them tilt! (and ultimately bend). How nature can have so many unique perspectives is very easy and simple to understand when seen as Einstein (the discoverer of relativity) saw them, but only provided that one has, as Einstein did, a sufficiently open mind! This is a must. If one does not, then such an idea as spaces tilting and bending will seem simply 'unbelievable', despite its enormous impact upon our modern world.

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(From RELATIVITY IN A NUTSHELL, by Chongo in collaboration with Jose. To see all the books that Chongo has written on physical theory, go to chongonation.com, which is a web site dedicated to educating those who have least opportunity for learning the scientific foundations that describe nature (accurately). Chongonation provides books that allow such opportunity, in lay terms, without any math. Simply go to the www.chongonation.com home page and click on either 'Nature' or 'Products & Prices' to see just how many books are available.)

Employer Cutbacks Blamed for Rise in the Number of Uninsured

Street News Service
www.streetnewsservice.org

Street Roots Staff Writer

WASHINGTON - A record 47 million Americans did not have health insurance last year while the percentage of children without insurance rose for a second consecutive year according to US Census Bureau data released at the end of August.

The census data showed that 8.7 million American children were uninsured last year — 1 million more than in 2004, according to the data.

The census data found that, compared with 2005, the number of uninsured Americans rose 5 percent last year to 47 million, due in large part to cutbacks in employer-sponsored health coverage. It also found that 11.7 percent of US children under 18 lacked health insurance, compared with 10.9 percent in 2005.

Nationally, the percentage of uninsured children had fallen over a five-year period beginning in 1999 because of the expansion of Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program, or SCHIP. Medicaid generally covers people living below the official income poverty line, set at \$20,650 for a family of four.

But in the last two years, according to analysts, those two safety net programs could not keep up with the steady national decline of private, employer-provided healthcare plans. In 2000, nearly 66 percent of children nationwide were covered by those programs, compared with fewer than 60 percent last year, according to census figures.

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Loaves & Fishes Holiday Needs List 2007

General Needs: Sleeping bags & blankets (new and gently used), bath packs/day packs, regional transit passes, toilet paper, band aids, combs and brushes, fast food restaurant coupons, small toiletries (soap, shampoo, conditioner, lotion), Vaseline, chapstick, cough drops, toothpaste and toothbrushes, gift certificates (Target/ WalMart/ Safeway/Raleys), bicycle tire repair/patch kits. Also needed are Adult sized knit hats & gloves, sweatshirts (large thru xlg), tube socks, reading glasses (no RX), new underwear (men & women all sizes), sweatsuits (large thru 3x) are needed. Children need knit hats & gloves, baby bottles, diapers (all sizes), baby wipes, sweats (all sizes), jars of baby food and non-soy baby formula w/iron.

Christmas Stockings: Each year, as part of their holiday meal, Loaves and Fishes offers each guest a Christmas stocking. The community can participate by providing stockings (apprx. size 14-16 inches and 6-8 inches wide) with the all of the following items:

- McDonalds \$5.00 Gift Certificate Books
- One pair of new socks, one size fits all
- One set of stretch/knit hat and gloves
- Disposable razors (for adult stockings only)
- Pair of shoelaces
- Chapstick
- Toothbrush and toothpaste
- A deck of cards
- Travel-size toiletry items (lotions, Vaseline, conditions, shampoo)

You can made deliveries to their warehouse at: 1321 North C Street. Warehouse hours before Dec. 15th are 7 am to 3 pm Monday thru Friday. Warehouse hours after Dec. 15 to 24th are 7 am to 4 pm Weekdays and weekends. Its best to deliver from December 12 thru December 21. Monetary donations can be sent to: PO. Box 2161, Sacramento, CA 95812

Obituary

Sheila Sherell Green
d. 8/11/07 Age 44
of cancer

Charles Seaver, Jr.
d. 8/16/07 Age 52
cause pending

Robbie Ann Robinson
d. 8/23/07 Age 44
of natural causes

Survived by a sister and a son
to many friends, Robbie was a
former Homeward distributor

Vernon "Brad"
Dangerfield
d. 8/31/07 Age 48
cause pending

Fred "Hite Bear"
Iqolte
d. 9/1/07 Age 26
hit by train, Davis

James Snow
d. 9/2/07 Age 62
of cancer

Roberto Hernandez
d. 9/24/07 Age 59
of natural causes

In Memoriam Sr. Maria Fitzgerald, PBVM

12/20/1939
to
7/1/2007



Sister Maria Fitzgerald was born in Ireland, where she became a member of the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary. In 1990 she began working with Loaves & Fishes, and in 1991 began the Jail Visitation Program. She served as its director until 1999, when she became Loaves & Fishes' first Development Director, a position she held until 2002, when she returned to Ireland. She passed away in County Cork, Ireland after a seven-month struggle with cancer this last year.