

The Spare Changer

Our mission is simple: *To inform the uninformed, to entertain, and most importantly to foster pride and self-respect within and among the unsheltered homeless in Davis and Greater Yolo County. We do this by proffering something to you, our valued reader. Your donation, in this time of increased budget cuts to social services, narrows the gap between basic needs you and I may take for granted, but which remain unmet by social service agency funding and the truly courageous efforts of the sheltered and un-sheltered poor. “It is better to give than to receive,” says The Bible. We say it is even better to give something back. Read ‘The Spange’ and Enjoy!*

Homelessness: Not That Bad In Our Little City? Should It, Could It Be Gone?

As Friendly As Can Be

By Lawson
Publisher, Editor-in-Chief

They say you can take the homeless off the streets, but you can't take the streets off of the homeless. I don't know how true that is, except for the long term, hard core homeless, whose homelessness is caused and perpetuated more by mental health, substance abuse and social disenfranchisement issues, than a lack of affordable housing. I do know that I personally am struggling to make the adjustment since last December, when I was lucky enough to “win” one of the 52 affordable one-bedroom slots

here at Cesar Chavez Plaza. I'm quite happy here of course, but the subtle advantages of living out doors that have now been lost do not escape me. You see, homelessness, in addition to all the negative stuff I've written about in past issues, has its virtues as well. **Not the least obvious is the sense of true freedom from society's expectations—pressures—that normally impact us all.** I have rent to pay of course, nominally though it happily is, as well as energy bills, phone, cable and internet connections, food bills, laundry, transportation and miscellaneous incidentals that seem to pop up daily. Just like you now...At then, at the end of the day though, I can be home, watch that program I want to watch, make and eat what meals I shopped at Safeway to buy, drink that beer in bed and lock my own door before I do it. None of those

things I could do easily, some not at all, and I have missed that.

During the spring and summer months, sleeping under the

stars has become a beautiful thing, and only last night while smoking a cigarette, I could clearly see the stars and the moonlight. I am grateful I can see the moon rise nightly from my bed through my new Venetian blinds. But there is more: **I used to find it rewarding to look for a place to sleep at night, get there after everyone is gone, and get up undetected,** pack my bag and pack and be gone. The days in Davis are warm when not hot, often with a breeze, and during that time I have grown accustomed to seeing the faces and places frequented by many

others of our homeless community. And we are a community. We gather at some of the non-profit facilities in place for our use, and although I sometimes have difficulty admitting it to myself, I miss not only the staffers who have been so kind and generous to me, but the jerks that gave me grief as well. I guess I miss giving them some too. It's only been 5 months, so I'm still missing them some.

While much of the “joy” anyone can experience of not having a roof over their head revolves around the fact that California, weather-wise, is “homeless friendly,” other aspects, also alleviate the hardships of homelessness. Here in Davis, as well as in many other places, we have in place some rather comfortable places to go and receive needed services. There is the Davis Community Meals Resource Center of course, open Monday thru Friday on H Street. There, the Resource Coordinator, “Inessa” beams a shining smile to us each morning. **Talkative and yet a good listener, she happily allows us to shower, do laundry, make meals, watch movies, chat on the front or back patios and generally provides us with a place to “be”** and spend time with others pretty much in the same fix. There she gives us our mail, allows phone calls both local and long distance, and keeps our messages as well. Anyone trying to “come up,” trying to do something for themselves has great opportunity. Arguably, such a stellar facility functions as a

revolving door for some, and while it could also be argue this place, Grace House and other opportunities perpetuate the cycle of homelessness, my feeling is that “half a loaf” is better than no bread at all. We are not simply given a fish, we are giving fishing poles as it were...they have a great 18-month Transitional housing program there...**and anyone with the motivation and life skills, skills that can be taught, can improve his/her lot. Many do, many don't, and some actually enjoy their homelessness.** When you can get up in the morning from where ever, go to the RC, then perhaps to Grace House, or Central Park, or Campus or elsewhere to spend some time, or spend the day working or studying, recycling cans, or drinking a few beers, the find a place to sleep under the stars, it really isn't all that bad.

Not to paint a rosy picture, life in the homeless community *is* hard, but Our Little City of Davis really steps up to the plate from my point of view. There are many free events, food, and music opportunities. BBQ pic nics, huge screen movies and free music in the park and central plaza come to mind, but we have a good public library, not to mention the large ones at the UC Davis campus, where many of us spend time looking for work, watching videos, sending and receiving e mails or just surfing the web for fun and opportunity. I spend a great deal of time on-line myself, more so, now that I am finally housed. Ironically, I used to find

hotspots for wi-fi late at night and had many adventures I will never have now that I'm all “safe and sound,” now that I'm “snug as a bug in a rug.” (But that's cool...)

Having my own apartment now is something of an

adjustment. I still think like I'm un-sheltered sometimes, especially when I'm alone. For awhile there I'd get hungry and think first to go out and find some free food if I had no money, or bicycle to Jack-in-the-Box, Taco Bell or Woodstock's Pizza if I did. Then I'd pass by my new Kenmore refrigerator, open it up and just laugh at my self. Yeah, getting the streets out of me is taking a little longer than I thought. I just don't have to worry about the kind and number of things I used to...but I find myself doing so just the same. I'm almost always alone at home, which is good for me, as privacy sense of identity issues impacted my attitudes and behavior more than any other, but at the same time **I spend a fair amount of pacing from living-room/home office to my kitchen back door and back, thinking what to do, where to go next;** funny, really. In the end, I'll sit at my (donated) desk, kick back on my (donated) couch, or plop on my (donated) bed and watch my (donated) TV. (Cable and beer not so donated.) It's taking a fair amount of time to relearn just how to relax, take stock of what has happened to me in the past four years or so here, and truly realize those days are over and move on. I've even begun to retrieve some of my long ago lost ambition. Homelessness

can do that to you; trust me, although it could be argued the causal relationship between the two can go either way. Something for me to think about I guess.

Do I think of Davis as being “homeless friendly?”

For reasons I’ve stated, at least in good weather, I have to say it is. Beginning this past winter, I’d have to say, and I do so with pride in our faith community and the Davis community at large, that Davis is now homeless friendly in bad weather too: **we now have an Interfaith Rotating Winter Shelter of Davis, serving meals and sheltering those in need. We’re pretty much OK now, thanks to the many volunteers; over 100 from United Methodist alone. (See April 2008 issue) Just about all that’s needed now is for Davis Community Church to open the 25 custom built Lockers for the Homeless, a project completed** on their property but suspended/delayed because of a couple of nearby neighbors’ “concerns...” Some of this concern is understandable to be sure, but in my view as a now “hybrid” member of our community, fear is the basis and needs to be assuaged.

Let’s face it: Life is largely based on perception and assumptions, and by that I mean we see and here things about people and things and based on our individual behavior and the attitudes they shape, we go right ahead and assume many truths that just aren’t accurate. **We do the best we can to make accurate assessments and take a point of**

view, but when it comes to perceptions and assumptions, mainstream communities and homeless communities are rarely on the same page. **If you see someone digging in your trash cans, drinking in your park, sleeping outside near your home**, flying a sign, lining up for donated food or clothing, what do you think? People just like you and me. What would you think if you were minding your own business drinking a beer in the park or anywhere else outside, now that it is illegal to do so, and before you know it, a cop or two just happens to stroll by, what would you think?

It’s impossible to answer the question “Is Davis homeless friendly” without

considering law enforcement of “quality of life” type infractions, how and why it’s done, where, by and on whom. According to most on the street I’ve talked to, cops are a major down side. One notable exception, made notable because it was atypical (like my own), was a fellow that plays horse shoes in Central Park and whom I just happened to come across on the way home. **I told him I wanted to write an informative, fair and (hopefully) insightful little piece on how cool or un-cool it was to be homeless in Davis**, possibly comparing it to other places I had been. I told him further I was unable to obtain pieces written by the homeless on this subject, so I would just ask around. He was very open about his response. To paraphrase, *he* said he didn’t have a problem.

He’s had some contact, even recently, and had his horse shoes taken away basically because, nearby there was a group drinking alcohol....I believe there was one or two under-aged girls in that group, so rousting them was of course understandable. I don’t think anyone was actually cited by the way. **Anyway, he said he “didn’t drink or smoke...anymore,” I think I recall, and the “cops don’t bother him.” We’re talking about a long time resident here now**, just going through some difficult times as we all are. He said it really depends on the person. The ones getting drunk, the criminal types, are the ones that have the problem with the police and they draw attention to everyone. **I was surprised to here this. It just isn’t cool to express this point of view, though I imagine many share it.** I certainly do. I personally have had half a dozen contacts with police in the last few months, ranging from calling for help, to being driven to the “drunk tank” to sleep it off and released to being cited for the dreaded BUI (Bicycling Under the Influence.) I was guilty as hell of course, riding up Covell on the wrong side of the street...at night; long story. I wasn’t out of control, I handled myself well, or so I like to believe, and there was no “personal” element in my arrests. My point is that cops are people, and they are friendly to me, if I’m friendly to them. In Davis, I want this to be typical, and it should be, and with only one or two possible exceptions, I believe it is. This column, this paper, is not about putting people on the spot, so I’m not naming

names; I'm just saying that there are always exceptions.

By comparison, mainstreamers in Our Little City are friendly and progressive, and if we get those lockers for our homeless to them, we won't know a homeless person from anybody else, at least not to just look at them. Then it will be really friendly. Those "perceptions" and "assumptions" will go right out the window, won't they? I've seen this in slightly larger places like San Rafael and Santa Cruz and Santa Barbara and Sacramento, and much larger areas with much larger homeless populations, like San Francisco and of course Los Angeles. In my frequent "field trips" there, they all have one thing in common; lockers, so that those that are really trying to do something for themselves can start off on the right foot and not be the victim of profiling, including but not limited to police. Just everyday people get so tired of "that homeless 'look,'" it has gotten to be a "we" vs. "them" thing, and I for one do not want that here where I live. (Jeeze, that sounds sooo NIMBY!)

Jesus Was Homeless Too

By Patrick

Jesus says: "Whatever you have done (or have not done) to the least of these who are members of my family, you have done (or not

done) unto me." Wow...! I grew up here in Davis and attitudes used to be very different. There really used to not be a lot of us here in Davis. Over the years, this has changed. A recent (within the last five years) point in time study estimated that there are over a hundred of us here in Davis. It sure seems that the powers that be here want all of us to be gone and away. It seems that what is wanted is Camelot. Both the police department and the Downtown Business Association have made it quite clear that they do not want homeless folks hanging out in "their" parks or sleeping anywhere in "their" city!

We have been hassled, told to move along, and to wake up and go sleep elsewhere! Those of us who resist or question this are given tickets and sometimes arrested. I myself have been questioned on five different occasions and even searched fully on another occasion. My crime? Simply hanging out with my friends in the park! Just for hanging out in the park and watching my friends play horseshoes or Frisbee golf! Sometimes, the police even do this in a very rude fashion! Attitudes used to be quite different in the 60s and in the 70s as well. Something has happened to cause a shift in the attitudes of the police towards the homeless. I think that we must remember that we all live here...whether we are married with children, single, students, homeless, etc. We ALL live here in Davis and we should treat each other with respect and help each other out...no matter who we are.

I keep going back to the fact that Jesus is homeless...

Kudos to those that actually help us, the homeless: Davis Community Meals, STEAC, Grace-in-Action, IRWS, and the St. Vincent de Paul Society of Saint James Church! I hope and pray that attitudes will slowly change...and that we all come to the realization that we are all God's children and we are all related...we are ALL brothers and sisters under the one God, the Almighty!

"It is necessary to be strong, in order to become great; that is our duty. Life is a struggle, which we cannot avoid. We must triumph!"

-Padre Pio

Utopia for the Homeless

By Richard

When I describe quality of life for those not familiar to Davis as the Utopian enclave it is, the quality of Davis K-12 schools, as well as Davis bike paths, come to mind. Davis citizens are bright people and care about their community. Another segment of the population that calls Davis home are its homeless. Davis is a city friendly towards its homeless. Many social services exist in Davis to benefit the homeless. The Davis City Council has been favorable in its approval of programs that provide for the

homeless. The citizens of our community donate their time and monetary resources to further the work of these social services. The homeless live their individual lives in Davis without being harassed by the police. However, we as a community must work harder to reduce homelessness in Davis by adopting a community mission to end homelessness altogether.

Our local un-sheltered poor benefit from numerous non-profit organizations. These non-profits include Davis Community Meals, Short Term Emergency Action and Grace-in-Action. Davis Community Meals offers a year around emergency shelter, a cold weather shelter during the cold months of the year and a transitional shelter program to help the homeless get on their feet. **Any individual, who is willing to be “clean and sober,” and to follow rules of the facility, can have a stay in a warm bed under a roof for seven days.** A homeless person ready to work and save money towards his or her own place may apply for the transitional housing program, and be sheltered as long as they are employed and save some of their money every month, so that the person could apply the money towards a security deposit and first month’s rent. **STEAC is the non-profit organization that provides monthly food and clothing supplies for the poor** as well as coordinating with the help of community donations, a program where children of poor families are given gifts during Christmas. Grace-in-Action is the

wonderful non-profit organization that acts as an afternoon drop in center, where folks in need can stop by and get a meal and take a reprieve from the hot weather that characterizes a summer day in Davis. I would encourage readers to learn more about these non-profit organizations and get involved in the work that they do.

Over the past few years, concerned citizens and members of church congregations have volunteered to form the Interfaith Rotating Winter Shelter of Davis (IRWS). Planning meetings were held and presentations given to church congregations in Davis. After church congregations came on board to participate in numerous capacities, IRWS was able to begin hosting members of the homeless community during the winter of 2007. The IRWS was able to get members of the homeless community off the streets during those cold months. The demand for shelter is always present, year around. I cannot forget to mention the volunteer work of **Food not Bombs. Every Sunday since the mid 90’s this organization has been active in serving a Vegan meal for the homeless in Central Park.** Many members of the homeless community attend this meal. On a side note, Davis Community Meals hosts a free meal for the homeless twice a week, and the Help and Education Leading to Prevention (H.E.L.P) , an undergraduate club at UC Davis, provides dinner for the homeless once a week. **The Davis City Council has been instrumental**

in its support of the homeless as well. It allocated funds for the support of the Cesar Chavez housing development which has gotten some of the homeless off the streets. The Council has approved the existence of the Davis Cold Weather Shelter operated by DCM, and even supported a student planned “Homelessness and Awareness Day” at UC Davis in 2007. Give credit to its members for the support they have provided for homeless programs.

Something has to be said about Yolo County as well. Yolo County has put in all of its resources and mind power in trying to expand Prop 63 (Mental Health Service Act) throughout the county. Basically, Prop 63 is a California state legislation piece that has mandated the development of infrastructure all over the state, geared to mental health outreach, for those who do not have health care. All over California, counties are struggling to implement Prop 63 because there is a labor shortage of people willing to be outreach workers for the mentally ill going without treatment. Bureaucracy makes the implementation of otherwise wonderful programs that benefit populations like the homeless move at a snail’s pace. Unfortunately, bureaucracy is needed to provide accountability for the effectiveness of any program. Citizens of Davis provide assistance for these resources assisting the homeless in numerous capacities. Davis citizens attend non-profit

organization fund raisers and provide monetary donations to support the work of these organizations. These ompassionate people volunteer their time so our non-profits save money it doesn't have for paying employees. Funds they do have can be applied to fixed operational costs of keeping the doors of non-profit agencies open, like rent and utility bills, and as simple an expense as paper.

The police in do not harass the homeless intentionally. It is standard procedure for the Davis Police Department officers, as well as officers of other police agencies, to take a person who has a warrant out for their arrest into custody. This is something that California law mandates. The police do not have much choice in the matter. What I do not support are police officers randomly going up to a homeless individual and doing a warrant check on a person just because they look homeless. This does not occur as frequently in Davis as in other places like nearby Sacramento. I have seen this first hand and I even have great video of this on my cellular phone. Ask me and I would be happy to show you the video sometime! **There have been a few allegations where people have seen police officers of the DPD sitting in their vehicles and monitoring the homeless population at the park with binoculars, and looking for violators of the Open Container Policy.** I personally do not think this is ethical because the homeless are easy targets for an Open Container Policy violation.

The police department should think of other constructive ways of dealing with Open Container violators. On a positive note though, the Davis Police and Fire Department respond rapidly whenever a homeless person is having a crisis.

The most friendly gesture Davis could do for the homeless without a stable level of income is to provide them shelter year around.

This is what I have in mind: An intelligent and eager UC Davis undergraduate student could incorporate a non-profit organization that is geared around subsidizing the rental fees of the homeless who do not have a stable level of income.

This undergraduate would work with Davis businesses, wealthy philanthropists like Bill Gates and other UC Davis students to raise funds for such an organization's mission. The organization would apply for grants provided by national non-profit foundations.

If a homeless person needed income to be housed and did not have a job, the organization could step in and pay the rent of the person who does not have a stable income. Of course the organization would need to work with the homeless person trying to secure that job or to apply for social security. This organization would instantly get homeless folks off the street while they work towards getting a stable income source for their housing. **Such a program would be most beneficial for people that are able to live on their own but on a waiting list to get into a**

transitional housing program. The organization could even add mental health referral assistance for the homeless who secure housing with this program. Clients for the program would have to meet the criteria of being able to live on their own and have a stable level of income afterwards. (After the organization gets them housed and subsidizes their rental fees for a certain amount of time.) This hypothetical organization would help get people housed now, and help a person find a stable level of income if they can work. If they are disabled, the organization could help them apply for Disability or SSI. **Such a program is needed even with the homeless social services already in place.** I believe students are capable of running such a program. Housing the homeless year 'round should be a priority for Davis.

Hunger and Produce Culls

By Doug

Food co-ops are often born in hard times. People who are only just getting by as workers or farmers have banded together, each contributing a little capital and as much business as they could, to build a cooperative business. The Davis Food Co-op was born in flush times, when "whipping inflation NOW" was supposed to be an issue. Now we think of the Seventies as pretty good old days, and the founders of DFC as "a bunch of hippies with a

cash register.” But promoting access to healthy food has always been part of what members wanted to see DFC accomplish.

Those at risk of hunger learn that there are ways food is wasted in our economic system.

A co-op operating inside capitalism cannot change that. Shoppers like to experience abundance, and value top-quality breads, fruits, vegetables, and cheeses. All these things get less attractive as they age, and few like the sensation of getting the last old product from a shelf or bin.

The DFC has, for many years, tried to connect our waste (that isn't spoiled but can't be sold) with those who can make something of it. **Food Not Bombs and Davis Community Meals both make regular pick-ups of produce culls.** Packaged food that is past its sell-by date but still edible sometimes goes to the Yolo County Food Bank.

I think homelessness usually results from a number of factors. So it usually takes more than one positive change to put a person back into a home. Cooperation is no panacea, but it can be part of positive changes. **I interpret the Food Co-op's Ends as pointing us to improve access to healthy food,** support community improvement and empowerment, and promote dialog that educates

us all. We don't “endorse” *The Spare Changer*, but if you learn something by reading or talking with a vendor, then perhaps we're all moving towards those goals.

Editor's Note:

Doug Walter has worked at the Davis Food Co-op for nineteen years. He's volunteered for the Whole Earth Festival for twenty-six years. Not only that, he has performed as a dancer at fairs and festivals for twenty-five years. All this has taught him something about service to others and about enjoying himself.

Davis Police Officers: Homeless Unfriendly?

By

Steven Pierce, Assist. Police Chief

This is not an easy question to answer. Like most situations, the answer depends on your point of view. A fair number of homeless people would say “yes,” the cops in Davis don't like the homeless and frequently (and unnecessarily) harass us. Conversely, some citizens who live near certain parks in town, or who live/work near the downtown think the police are too friendly and don't take a hard enough stance on what they perceive to be unacceptable behavior on the part of the homeless. The police

officer does not really think about whether he/she is being friendly. **To the officer responding to complaints of homeless activity, it is just another call for service that they must try and find a solution to.**

The Davis Police Department's mission statement reads: “*The mission of the Davis Police Department is to attain the highest quality of life and security for all who live, work, learn, and visit in the City of Davis. We do this by working with the community promoting safety and reducing crime.*” There is no exception for our homeless citizens. In other words, we are as committed to serving the homeless community as we would any member of our community.

It is the last part of the Mission Statement that often times brings us into conflict with the homeless – “**We do this by working with the community promoting safety and reducing crime.**” We teach and encourage citizens to call the police if they see something they think is suspicious or possibly illegal. Sometimes, due to drug or alcohol impairment or mental illness, the behavior of homeless people is seen as criminal, bizarre, scary or can make others feel uncomfortable. This is particularly true when the other person is with their children in a park. Inevitably this leads to a call to the police department.

It is not the intention of the Davis Police Department or its employees to criminalize homelessness. However, when we receive a call for service requesting an officer investigate drinking in public, intoxicated people in a park, loud and vulgar language or “suspicious” behavior, we will respond and investigate. Our purpose is to keep the peace and, when needed and appropriate, enforce the laws of the State and the City ordinances. **However, it is our sincere hope that making an arrest will not be necessary.**

All the responding officer is seeking is compliance and cooperation. We train our officers extensively to know the difference between the letter of the law and the spirit of the law. In other words, what is intended by having a particular law, not what the actual words are written into the statute. **Depending on the totality of the situation, it is our general practice to start at the lowest level of enforcement -- a verbal warning.** However, after repeated calls and no compliance, the officer must escalate their efforts to gain compliance with the law. This typically results in citations and/or arrests. Making an arrest or citing someone may seem to be unfriendly. **Nevertheless, our expectation that a homeless person will follow the law is no less than what we expect of every community member.**

Our goal is to seek long-term solutions to a problem. If warning people and seeking voluntary compliance is not successful or if arresting/citing violators is not successful, then we will work to change the overall environment. **For example, we will remove benches and tables; we will cut back bushes and shrubs; we will do what it takes to make the area less desirable for criminal/bad behavior.** These are the same strategies we employ in addressing most problems: burglaries, robberies, loud parties, or traffic issues.

Unfortunately, homeless people must do things in public that non-homeless people can do in their homes (e.g., have open containers of alcohol, sleep, bathe, and meet with friends); their whole life is out there for any passer-by to see. **But, if we could get one message out to the homeless community, it would be that when (if) you are acting in a way that brings great attention to yourself** (e.g., aggressively panhandling) people are going to call the police and we will respond to investigate. That is what the community expects of the police.

Being homeless in Davis is hard. Being a cop in Davis is hard, too. In both cases, the community knows we are here. In

both cases, the community frequently does not understand who we are and what brought us to where we are. And, in both cases, the community frequently tries to avoid contacting us. While we may not always be as friendly as the homeless community would like, the Davis Police Department is not trying to make being homeless any harder. Officers from the Davis Police Department are ready and willing to help the homeless with referrals or if they are a victim of a crime. Please don't hesitate to ask a cop for help.

Editor's Comment:

I think Assist. Chief Pierce's very candid comments should be required reading and made available at the non-profit facilities most often frequented by the sheltered and un-sheltered poor. Perhaps the local officers could take a peek at it too.

Sleepless in Santa Barbara

By Richard

Most of the time I live in Davis, but on my last day of spring break 2008, I spent the night on Santa Barbara's streets to gain an idea of the quality of life that the homeless face. What better way to learn about homelessness than to put yourself in their shoes? I am writing about my experience as a college kid being homeless in Santa Barbara for a night, and the poor quality of life I experienced.

My journey to Santa Barbara began on a cold Friday morning. I waited anxiously for my Amtrak train from Davis to San Jose, where I boarded a bus which after 6 hours of departure, landed me in Santa Barbara at 9:30pm.

The bus ride to Santa Barbara was nice

except for the fact that the bus was full of Spring Break Revelers anxious to begin their Margarita shots in Santa Barbara! The bus stopped in San Luis Obispo which was an interesting experience. Our bus passed through the Cal Poly San Luis Obispo campus- a nice campus in a quaint college town like Davis, but with hills in view for miles and miles to the east. After some time on Highway 5, the bus pulled into Santa Barbara. My first course of business was to look for a place to stay. I tried the Santa Barbara Hostel where I discovered that the 20 dollar a night stay in the dorm facilities, was beyond my economic reach because of my failure to make reservations ahead of time. Then there was the old "Hotel Santa Barbara" which is considered a, well, not so good hotel. **I walked around for a bit to find a place outdoors where I could make camp for the night. I hurried toward a bush along a creek bed to discover whispers in the bushes as I walked closer.** I didn't like what I was hearing, so I ran on in haste! I walked to a skate park and found a place to lay down- sleeping bag and all. I went across the street and ordered myself a medium Pepperoni pizza. I read a little about homelessness in Santa Barbara on my laptop via

the Wi-if in the pizza shop. I discovered that homeless deaths as a result of cold exposure were an occurrence during some times of the year in Santa Barbara. Some of the homeless there have jobs that do not pay a high enough wage that meet costs of living, so some have to sleep in their vehicles which is allowed in empty parking lots, and regulated by the city. Somehow these homeless individuals make life work for them, though a struggle.

At about midnight, I left the pizza shop and walked to another

location. I could not sleep at the skate park because many kids were skating. I walked behind a restaurant to discover that a homeless person beat me to a perfect sleeping spot. Of course, I moved on. As I was walking on the opposite side of a street, a homeless guy who was on the hunt for food looked at me and howled at me and pointed! I kept walking as a police car passed me and the howling homeless man. At this point I was shaken up but still enthusiastic about sleeping in the great outdoors. I walked into a park which was empty, or so it appeared. I went to the very back of the park into a corner under some bushes and laid out my sleeping bag. I went to sleep but kept waking up every hour at the first sound I heard. That night I had no REM sleep. At 3am, I woke up to a homeless man with a light or something of that nature in his hand. **He had seen my sleeping bag and he was peeking at where I was sleeping. When I looked at him, he hid behind a**

bush. He then started walking towards me! I instantly grabbed my backpacks and threw them over a brick fence. I leaped a good five feet with my sleeping bag in hand over this fence and made a crash landing on the ground. I ran as fast as I could into what I thought was a field. It was 3am and was very dark. My legs became soaked in a wastewater creek all the way up to my waist! The water smelled like sewage. I grabbed a branch and pulled myself out of this creek with all my strength. I made it across the creek but lost my new white Adidas hat and sleeping bag in the purpose. I crawled myself through an opening in a fence behind the Santa Barbara Waste Water Plant! I was pissed off and scared for my life. I ran and then stopped to change into a dry pair of pants.

I made it out to the front of the Santa Barbara Rescue

Mission. I walked towards the Amtrak Station and sat down. Five minutes later, a scary homeless man in Army pants and boots wrapped in a blanket, took a look at me and kept walking. That was my sign to keep walking. I hurried towards Denny's. I came across another homeless man dressed in a biker leather jacket picking up trash and slamming it into the garbage loudly. He was talking in a robotic sort of tone. I got into the first taxi I seen. The taxi driver told me the homeless person making all the noise by slamming stuff in the trash was acting out of his ordinary and suggested he took some PCP that

evening. When I got to Denny's I pulled a soiled twenty dollar bill out of my pocket and told the cab driver to wash his hands well after touching the soiled bill! Who knows where the water on the twenty dollar has been. The cab driver just stared at me and I slowly exited the cab. I went inside Denny's and walked to the restroom in order to scrub my hands which stunk like sewage. I sat down at the booth and ordered breakfast. The waiter looked at me as if something was not right! **I asked him if I could stay in until the sun rose and he said "sure" as long as I did not fall asleep at the booth.** It was 4am. I paid for the breakfast with more sewage smelling cash.

At 6am, I walked to a laundry mat and washed all my clothes including my shoes. I should have washed my smelly money to. I walked to the pier for some sight seeing and to see the local homeless population first hand. I seen some homeless people congregated in the park I ran from the previous night. I went to the scene of my sleeping bag and white hat stuck in the sewage ditch. I cursed and said "no way am I going back into sewage". I ate breakfast on the pier and caught my Amtrak train home. Outside of the Amtrak station before my Amtrak train arrived, I encountered a person with a 24 pack of Bud Light sitting on an Amtrak station bench drinking and crying. I did not intervene though I should have. On the train I learned that the lack of being able to hire people for

mental health outreach as well as a shortage for Santa Barbara mental health funding was hurting the ability of case workers from outreaching to the local homeless population in the Santa Barbara's parks .

What did I learn from this adventure? I learned that being homeless even for a night has its struggles and a person is stereotyped just for being homeless. It is difficult to find a "safe" sleeping place outside especially if you are alone – unless the person sleeping outdoors is whiling to sleep in a yard, or in a rural area. Merchants do not like money that smells like sewage. Being homeless is not fun even in the short term and it deprives you of sleep. I worried for my safety until the sun came up! All night I only ran into one police car and I only heard one siren from an ambulance downtown. Either no one in the homeless population residing in downtown needs help or social workers are not whiling to do outreach in the middle of the night. **During that night, I encountered several homeless folks who seemed to me to be Schizophrenic in some form or on a mind altering drug. These people need our help. For the homeless that want to sleep outside, they have to worry about their safety and the other inconveniences of being homeless. I only know of a few homeless individuals who like being homeless. There is the other group that would like a place to live and another group that are mentally ill to the point that they live off of a**

general survival instinct and avoid public interaction. This latter group represents the ones we have to help the most. **As soon as I my parents picked me up from the train station, they asked me why I smelled so bad!** I just said it was a long story. If they really want to know they can read this article like you.

Homeless the Hard Way

By Lawson
Publisher, Editor-In-Chief
(Reprint May 2005)

It seems only yesterday that I turned my back to the world. I thought the world, its people, and *their* concerns, were not worth my trouble. I was here to make the planet a better place, and I wasn't getting any help. I had Utopian Dreams and the world and its chaos and pain sabotaged them! Maybe it was youth and frustration that did it. To give up on it. To lose Faith *in* it. As I reflect on this notion today, I can't help but believe I turned my back to the mirror of my own life instead, and in this process, gave up on myself. I was sixteen going on six.

If life is about choices, then I have certainly made some tough ones. Really tough: A roof over my head, or paying personal debts, or day-to-day living expenses like food, a textbook, transportation, or the phone bill. Often it was a place

to stay indoors, without the trappings of living a 'normal' looking lifestyle, or the even more problematic choice of living without a key to my own door or, in its place, food, transportation and cash for the predictably unpredictable. **We are not talking about luxuries here; this is the tough choice of having my own place and nothing else, or something, and nowhere to have it.** A house but not a home, so to speak, or defaulting on the rent in order to enjoy the trappings of reasonable living, *but only by foregoing that rent*, and thus 'choosing' to be homeless. Some choice, eh?

And, no getting around it, helping others financially has often gotten me into trouble.

People have a bad habit of violating my expectations, of letting me down. Perhaps people who had crossed my path in life had lacked vision; or failed to foresee their inability to honor commitments, or their willingness to honor them. Perhaps I'm the one who lacked the vision. It's hard to know. **And yes, there had been times when good drugs and bad women clung to me like black on tar**, and contributed to my 'decisions' to live a homeless life. But in the final analysis, surviving life is all a matter of not what we do, but more, how we do it. I shower and shave daily, my clothing clean if often wrinkled.

My backpack carrying everything, (a good

sleeping bag, two changes of clothing, canned food and can opener!) and toiletries too, go [everywhere] with me. Laptop. Cell phone. The whole nine... But this isn't easy, this trying not to 'look' homeless. It takes some work, but it's do-able.

What we need are lockers! With near 24-hour access, we could do our studying, look for our jobs, or keep the jobs we have, without pushing a cart or carrying our world on our backs and stigmatizing ourselves. Seem impossible? (Maybe not Lockers For The Homeless In My Back Yard, but....) *It's certainly possible.* We do have resource centers like the DCM and Grace In Action in Davis, and although neither have safe and secure space to provide lockers for us now, **I cannot over-emphasize their importance to the community in terms of what they do provide to both sheltered and un-sheltered alike:** I can stay clean, do laundry, and make meals. I can receive phone and written messages and mail. Someone is always there and happy to give an encouraging word, or just listen, when that's what I have needed the most. **It would be so much easier to just let myself go. Not care how sheltered people see me. Not worry about what they may think.** Pretend I don't care if I smell (thank God for anti-perspirant in summertime Davis, eh?) or look out of place. I could play the role, look the part, and fit the 'profile' of a homeless man.

Sadly, isn't it letting one's self 'go' that defines the negative stereotype that, one that so many of us have consciously or, over time, unconsciously 'decided' to do?

That's the easy way out I think, and it's a pity really, self pity mostly, because the resources are out there. We don't have to fit the profile. We don't have to confirm the biases and prejudices of those who see 'the homeless' as blight. **If we look like we are trying to do something for ourselves, with the support we have here, it seems to me our community will embrace us.** And inspire us, as it has done me. I'm facing the mirror of my life again. It *has* been homeless the hard way for me, but I think it's just as temporary too. What do you think?

Editor's Comment: *I penned this column 3 years ago almost to the day. Quite a lot can happen in 3 years. I am comfortably housed now, we have a Rotating Winter Shelter and Lockers for the Homeless have been built, though not yet in use. Cesar Chavez Plaza, with its 52 truly affordable one-bedroom units, opened his past December. Some. Of these new tenants, like me, came right off the streets. We're better off, much better.*

**I Stink Therefore
I Am**

By Lawson
Publisher, Editor-In-Chief
(Reprint May 2005)

This old one is another personal favorite of mine

I don't mean to go all existential on you, but when you smell

somebody who looks like he hasn't showered in weeks, well then maybe he hasn't. The guy (or gal) could use a little charity true, but there is nothing un-cool about proffering a bar of soap or more useful, a stick of your favorite anti-perspirant. **It's tough Community Love perhaps, but our olfactory brain has a right to defend itself from attacks in public places like the library, Starbucks or one of the local movie houses.** We want our homeless to return to mainstream society, don't we? Of course we do! While there may be the risk of ourselves offending by this "proffering" perhaps, but I think once we've gone on our way, the recipient will take the gesture (along with a couple of bucks!) If "Cleanliness is next to Godliness," then we are doing a little more of God's work when we take steps as individuals, to assist the unsheltered poor in this fashion. **Keep in mind that 'the homeless,' particularly the unsheltered homeless, do not choose, per se, to be offensive.** Sleeping in clothing and sleeping bag or under blankets that carry the stench of mildew and the great outdoors makes the need for showers, and barring that, the liberal use of anti-perspirant, all the more necessary for someone living unsheltered on The Creek, The River, or between Long's Drugs and Safeway. It's just a matter of fact that chronic homelessness, by choice or not,

forces many of us to forget how Mainstream Society suffers too. Years of homelessness take away the sense of self, one's Identity, or much of it. **What is left is the bag, the blankets, the unkempt look and the smell of dirty socks, over-ripe underarms, oh and bodily hair,** that looks like a badly botched electro-shock treatment. It's a gradual thing; an evolution of sorts. Yet before too long this is 'who' the person is. At least how we see him and by proxy, how he sees himself. And this is the danger to him or herself, as well as to The Community: *Acceptance* of this as being "the way it is," that there is "nothing to be done about it," or that nobody would care if there were. I care. And so does my nose. How about you and yours?