

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!

Profiles Encourage

Homeless The Hard Way

By Lawson
Publisher, Editor-In-Chief

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 toiletry too, go 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 unsheltered 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 the letting of oneself 'go' that defines the negative stereotype?

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?

Community

By Laura

Whether people like to admit it or not, homeless people DO exist in Yolo County, and they are an important part of our community. Perhaps, when you pass a homeless person by, you avert your eyes and ignore them, trying to pretend they don't exist. We've all done it. Sometimes it's just because we can't be bothered; other times it's too hard to think about being part of a community that doesn't take care of its members. Looking at someone, smiling at someone, talking to someone makes us acknowledge that person as a fellow human being, and sometimes, well, it's just easier to pretend that certain people- especially unsheltered homeless people- just aren't part of our community. I'm glad to be part of The Spare Changer, and I think it's a great way to help build community here in Yolo County. It forces those of us who are a little sheepish about this whole homeless "problem" to take a moment and make contact with the unsheltered members of our community. Hopefully, the Spare Changer will be a place where the homeless can share their experiences and give a human face and voice to the homeless of Yolo County!

'Spanging'

By Jessica

When you see people on the streets asking for money do you think that you should maybe consider giving money? **Not all homeless people are fraud. Most homeless people go out and ask for money so that they can afford food.**

Yes, you can use resources given to you such as the Food Closet, an organization that gives homeless people an opportunity to get a weeks' worth of food. Once you go through that food you cannot go back for 30 days. I just found this out today because the director of the DCM mentioned it I occasionally see people going to buy beer with their money and it angers me. No, wait, it *saddens* me because watching what alcoholism can do to a body made me realize that it takes you nowhere in life. Not all homeless people drink, and most homeless people became homeless because of false opportunities, or just because they had nowhere else to go.

Society needs to accept this part and realize the real issues. Homeless people are fighting to survive. Striving for something else, something better out there, but while they are thinking about their future dreams and what they want in life they need you to help and have a little bit of compassion. I had a lot of people buying me sandwiches

when I was on the streets, or just a loaf of bread, **but food is food and without it we can't survive.**

Editor's Note: *I thought I would visit with a few folks in town and hear what they had to say. If they were un-sheltered or sheltered but homeless, I asked how they became homeless and how the rest of the community treated them. If they were social service providers, I asked if they give or would give a cash donation to a panhandler, personally, and if so, why, and if not, then why not? In general, the responses were animated, and as intriguing as they were surprising!*

First and Foremost

By Doc and Blondie

I'd wish to thank each and every person who has given donations to Blondie and me and read **The Spare Changer**. I have chronic back-pain, which is made worse by having to sleep in the cold, damp, and sometimes uneven ground. The meds don't help much, and the best medicine in the world is a nice hot bath and sleeping in a real bed. Unfortunately, this isn't covered by Medical, but it *has* been, by you who support **The Spare Changer**.

Sometimes I *can* get enough for a room! THANK YOU!!

Editor's Comment: *You are both welcome!*

Recently, your generous donations

have enabled me to get a second hand bike with a trailer and a trunk that locks so my stuff is safe and I don't have to carry everything on my back! This helps me tremendously!

I have applied for

SSI but it will be *months* before I even get an answer. I hear they will automatically reject 90% of the applicants the first time, but usually get it on appeal. Most of my adult life I have had minor back problems, and have been homeless for 10 years and *re-injured* my back in 1999. That time the damage was major and permanent I'd always done physical labor and home health care but because of that I was unable to work. Since I couldn't work, I became homeless and despair set in. **I felt like I had no place to go and nobody even cared except Blondie, my poodle. She has been my comfort throughout my darkest times and so giving up my dog is not an option!** I'd rather sleep in a vacant lot with my dog than in a mansion without her. I'm hoping to get a cheap van or motor home when I get my SSI, as my needs are simple. I believe in the philosophy: "Live Simply So That Others May Simply Live", so a motor home or something like a VW camper would be perfect for

Blondie and me. We could be comfortable and happy! All of my stuff safe! And I could sleep out of the weather in a real bed! I really love the Davis community and I want to stay here. It's the people... the business owners; even the cops treat me with dignity and respect, not so common in other places. Just because I don't have a home yet doesn't mean I don't care about the community: I never leave trash around or camp in the same spot more than 2 or 3 times. In other towns, like in San Diego, I've been kicked out of coffee shops even when I was a paying customer, or not allowed to use the bathroom. **Some places are trying to legislate homelessness out of existence:** I have gotten tickets for "illegal lodging", which meant taking off my backpack and sitting on it! Once about 6 of us were sitting in a public park and were asked to move. This "selective" enforcement of laws targeted homeless people—"No Loitering" signs by a public bench actually meant, "if you don't look homeless you can sit there, but if you do, you get a ticket." I've gotten bogus tickets for stuff like "Illegal Lodging", "Camping", "Loitering", etc., for \$300, and then been told it's only a local city thing and they won't extradite from out of town. This is legalese for "Get out of town or go to jail and lose your dog", and my dog Blondie is my *life*, the most important thing *to me*.

Sometimes I think Blondie is the only 'person' on Earth that truly loves me unconditionally, so when I get harassed like that, it's time to hit the road. This is why I hadn't been able to apply for disability before: It's a long process that needs me to have a steady address.

Once again, thanks. I can't even *begin* to express my gratitude to **The Spare Changer**, to the Davis citizens, to the business owners and even to The Cops, for helping us and most of all, for treating us with courtesy and respect."

Editor's Note: *That one touched me, this one too!*

Name Withheld By Request

"**I have spoken** with the editor of **The Spare Changer** and he understands why I have had to withhold my name. I am not a felon, and have had the opportunity to travel everywhere and see every thing I have ever wished to see. I am also very well known and feel, to myself, that I am a household name in Davis."

I have been homeless since 1977, and sometimes-bad things happen to good people (as this has happened to me.). However, with-in the homeless community, with all my travels, I have met good people that knew not where to turn, or find that proper listening ear. For this reason alone I chose to be homeless and to serve mankind. I have a

unique position in our society, where I have met three presidents and seven governors.

I do feel blessed. I'm doing *something* right. Right? And speaking of blessings, even the editor-in-chief of **The Spare Changer** (as of this morning) informed me that a person in the homeless community made a donation to him to help **The Spare Changer** in its mission. And yes, Lawson had a 'sparkle in his eye'! And yes, I felt the same way! Many thanks and gratitude to this homeless person, for giving so freely from the heart.

You can see from last month's issue of '**The Spange**', and from what I'm saying here, the philosophy of the homeless person is generally one of warmth and kindness, even if it is hard to find a hot meal, a change of clothing and a roof overhead to stay out of the weather. (It's almost a religion). Some people do say 'Get a job' when the homeless are seen on the street asking for change. I do have a job, but if it wasn't for the Moms, Dads, and children of our society I would never have been able to go 'dumpster-diving', pick up cans, find food to eat, clothing, and a safe place to sleep when it's not raining or snowing. So, in closing, I believe that I owe all the Moms and Dads and Children in Society something beyond measure, as

well as those in the homeless community that know right from wrong; And to **The Spare Changer**, for coming into being. Thank you Lawson, for a dream come true. Good luck with every Breath, "Print", and Read.

Editor's Comment: *I don't know what to say... but how about this, from a Davis woman who has also struggled.*

J.A.:

"Well, how *I* became homeless in Davis began before I moved here. I've lived in Davis about ten years and I've worked here most of that time. But starting about twenty-five years ago, I've had a series of back injuries. I found from the initial injury that I couldn't support myself on disability payments. I've injured myself several times over the past twenty-five years by working to pay the medical bills. In order to keep working, I paid for my own medical care from my savings, which meant I didn't really have any savings before long; it was being spent on medical care. I would have been out of work if I had accepted the workman compensation. This would have cost me my housing, and eventually did.

Because my strength was failing me, my work was adjusted to accommodate, but then my 'hours' were cut. Finally, I was laid off.

After that I supported myself by early distribution of my IRA, with penalties, until *that* was gone. Then I sold off every thing I had in a series of yard sales. I became homeless soon after. Fortunately, I got hooked up with Inessa (Davis Community Meals Resource Center Coordinator) through a friend that had lived at the shelter there. I made a call, and she gave me... a *lot of numbers!* Ultimately I was able to get into a different shelter right away. She also steered me to Food Stamps, and to Y-Chip, county medical care for 'the indigent'.

Over the last year and a half, I've lived in shelters. I only found two of them available to me here in Yolo County, so for a while I had to shelter in Sacramento. During that time I lost my food stamps and medical coverage since I had moved to another county.

I've been in the DCM Shelter for a year now. With help from staff here, I was able to get legal help with my application for social security disability, which would not have been available had I not had the support of the DCM. The lawyer said that without the referral from DCM, she would not have accepted my case. I just starting getting social security benefits this last month

(March), so now I have an income, and can look for permanent housing. The DCM staff is also helping me with lists of affordable housing and references. It's been a long haul, but the people here have given me support and the hope of being self-sufficient again and no longer homeless.

Editor's comment: *You Go Girl!*

Jamie:

"In the United States it would be very rare for me to give someone money and the reason is, there are so many social services here for people that are poor and/or disabled that I feel there is no need. The other reason is that in my travels all over the world, Thailand, Russia, all over, I have seen people missing *limbs*, and those who are *elderly*, and I will give to money to *them* very frequently."

Editor's Comment: *Hmmmm...*

Name Withheld By Request
"Have I ever given money to a panhandler?

Yes, I have. I generally DON'T, but I have. It really depends. What they need. If they have a... story. Just depends on the person."

Editor's Comment: *Same here!*

Inessa:

“Sure I do, but not to my clients. I was just in Berkeley, you know? There are a lot of homeless. *A lot* on Telegraph Avenue! I gave change to a bunch of them. I really like to give food. Once one night just before Thanksgiving, I saw this homeless man sleeping in a little cubbyhole area between Longs and Safeway here in town. Well, we always make a lot of food for Thanks-giving, and I put some aside just for him. The next day I brought it to him. He was very, very appreciative. When I visit Berkeley, and when I go to the Farmer’s Market in Davis, I usually give money to the violinist and other musicians that have their cases open. I feel like they are working for it, and that they have earned it. I can’t help giving some to the kids too.”

Editor's Comment: **Wink and a smile**

Courage

By “A Youthful Mind”

Courage... what is courage? To some, it could be jumping out of a plane or doing that stunt that your friends won't do. To me, courage is so much more than that!!! I really haven't lived on the streets myself. I mean, I am 17. I haven't lived life to the point where I would live on the streets. I have, on the other

hand, been out of the house and on the street a couple of *times*. Not for more than 3 days tops. There are men and women who live their lives like that every day. And to me, merely being able to survive on the streets, alone, is a big deal. People take it is all in and still go about there lives like there is nothing wrong. Saying they had their chance and they blew it. Well I am here to argue against that view. Again, I am only 17 years old and I have not lived a homeless life or any life for very long but that doesn't mean that I am not observant. I watch these people. Not only are they nice, they can help you and they do to their best extent. I can't even *say* ‘they’ because the homeless are *people*. “One nation under God” actually *means* something. **They may not look the best or live in the nicest house or drive the best cars** for whatever reason, but the homeless have more courage than most people I know. Thank you for listening to me and taking this all in, and for continuing to buy this paper. And for more than one reason: not just helping out a fellow homeless person, but for helping a fellow human.

Giving

By Patrick

A well-known proverb states, "It is better to give than to receive." I have an inquiring mind and I wondered what type of giving

would be the best. People who are on the street have often asked me for spare change. I feel guilty when I give and guilty when I do not. When I give, I know that often times, the money will be used for alcohol or other drugs. When I do not I give, I feel guilty. Because I *have*, and a brother /sister of mine does *not* have. I believe that giving is much more than just a monetary type of giving. We have within, a true self and a false self.

Through meditation and prayer, we can get in touch with our true self. When this happens, we know in our heart, body, mind, and soul that God does loves us indeed. This love is what we should try to give away. God showers us with grace and we should let this grace flow through us to others. We should give this grace to others. The question is...how? When we start to see The Holy One is all, then the solution of how to give and what to give becomes apparent. I myself, do lots of volunteer work. This helps me to step outside of my self and to focus on giving to The Holy One Who is present in all others I meet. It is my strong desire to let all know that God does love us and that He showers us with much grace. It is quite a paradox indeed that sometimes in order to give, one must receive. Perhaps we let

someone do for us a kind act...something that we could have done for ourselves but let someone else do it so that they can experience the joy of giving. Perhaps we accept a gift so someone can experience the joy of giving. Perhaps we let someone give of himself or herself.

Let us, when we pray next, pray for the wisdom and understanding to realize how to better give. Let us pray for a new and different attitude about what to do when someone asks for a monetary handout. Let us all give of ourselves so that we can come to complete realization of the master giver... He Who gives us the ultimate gift!

Joy and Peace until next time!
Editor's Comment: *Amen to that!*

"I like poetry that makes me think. I love poetry that makes me feel!" -Lawson 2005

Capture My Home

By Rayshell

So close to home
It's every where I go
Capture me
So that I see
Courageous belief
Admit me!

To the blank sense
That set me free
As I go
Shall I ever know?

The place that showed me how
Forever would I go for now

To see the remains of the place
That seemed to bless my
Dignity
Of everything that I would see,
That reminded me

Home sweet home to be
Let me shine on supreme
Can't you see home is
everything?

Home is what life means to me
Bring back the simple things
Let freedom ring
Let the people sing
Let the people sing!
Bring home back to me!

I Stink Therefore I Am

By Lawson
Publisher, Editor-In-Chief

I don't mean to

GO 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 uncool 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 un-sheltered 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 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?

Homeless Humor as you walk away....

By U&A

You know you've
been homeless
long enough
when the garbage
truck is your alarm
clock and the recycle
truck is the snooze.

You know you've
been homeless
long enough
when someone asks

you “what's your
sign?” and you say, “
Will work for food.”

You know you've
been homeless
long enough
when your dog's
clothing looks better
than yours.

You know you've
been homeless
long enough
when
you find more ticks on
you than your dog.

You know you've
been homeless
long enough
when you go to the
dumpster with a
shopping cart and a
shopping list.

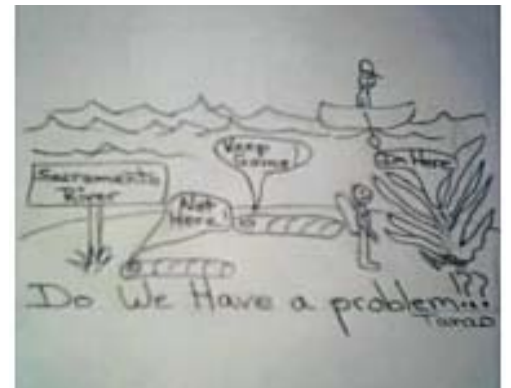
You know you've
been homeless

long enough
when you're so poor
you have to save up to
be trailer trash.

You know you've
been homeless
long enough
when you carry your
bedroll and your office
in side your backpack.

Next issue:

Affordable Housing:
What is it? Where is



it? Why can't I get
it?

Opinions expressed in The Spare Changer are those of the author and not necessarily those of the publisher.

Suggestions? Opinions? Gripes? E-mail to: thesparechanger@hotmail.com Thank you for your continuing support.

The 'Spange' is in need of a newer laptop, a high capacity printer, and printing supplies. Contact us by E-mail regarding donations. We look forward to meeting with you!