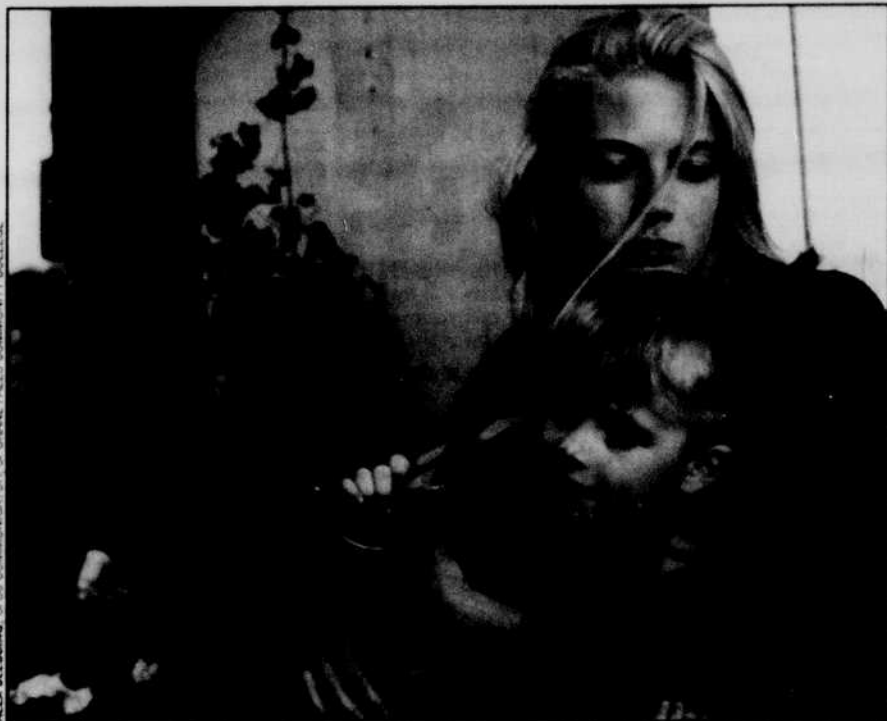


SUPREME SACRIFICE

Homeless students see degree as key to future



Kara Beach, with her son, Dane, struggles to earn a college degree and a secure future.

Carol Brunoe doesn't have roommate problems. She doesn't have to haggle with a landlord about rent. And she doesn't have to face parking hassles.

But then Brunoe, a student at Oregon State U., doesn't have a house either. She's homeless.

And she's not alone.

Homeless college students across the country are sleeping in campus buildings or slumbering in their cars because they can't afford a place to live.

Although the number of homeless students is likely small, and they won't appear on a census report, the recession appears to have increased the numbers of students who regard a roof over their heads to be a luxury they can't afford.

Jobs to help pay for college-related expenses are harder to find when unemployment is high. Faced with budget cuts at the state level, many public universities have hiked tuition drastically. And financial aid offices report increased demand for financial aid, especially from students who are unemployed and returning to college to get a degree. To some, tuition and rent are becoming an "either-or" proposition.

In Florida, the problem seems more acute. During the winter the homeless population increases as people move in from out-of-state.

But in 1991, Carrie Meek, now a congresswoman from Florida, sponsored an amendment that exempts homeless students enrolled in adult basic or job preparatory education from paying fees for instruction. The amendment passed.

"The problem is worse here, but we're more aware of it," says George Young, vice president for Student Affairs at Broward

Community College in Florida.

For Brunoe, it was her second try at graduating from Oregon State. Thirty-two years was a long time to be out of school. She saved some money for tuition, and she thought she could get a part-time job to take care of food and housing. And maybe she could get financial aid.

But she didn't find a good job, and she wasn't eligible for financial aid. When her money ran out, she slept at the library, cafeteria or the Native American Long House.

"Most of us are aware that having a college degree gets us a better job," Brunoe says. "... some people are determined to change their lives."

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Brunoe was strapped for cash during fall 1991 and spring 1992. "Half the time I got incompletes because I didn't have enough money to buy books or notepaper," she says. Her friends bought food at the cafeteria, ate some and then said they weren't hungry anymore. "They were trying to save my pride," she says.

She could not afford to rent a place, so she stayed on campus after the buildings closed at 9 p.m. "You see, what you do is hide until everybody is gone and then crawl in somewhere and go to sleep," she says.

Among favored hangouts of homeless students are libraries and student lounges, which stay open late. Some students, though, make do with whatever's available. Ed Merrill slept in his car during the fall of 1991. Merrill, a senior in fish and wildlife science at OSU, lived in his 1977 Scout,

which he parked at the football stadium.

When the weather got cold, Merrill got sick and had to go to the student health center. The housing director let him stay in a dormitory for two weeks and pay for his stay later. "The community needs to be aware that there are people who are less fortunate," Merrill says. "[The less fortunate] need people to direct them."

Merrill should finish his degree requirements within a year. "I'm going to be in a position where basically I can write my own ticket. At least in my view, it's worth it," he says. "This is what life dealt me, and guess what? I'm not going to be a crybaby and give in. I have the skills to get out of this."

OSU's President John Byrne says his university is not set up to help homeless students. "That's not to say there are no homeless students," he says. "I'm sure there are some who, for financial reasons, live in their trucks."

Some universities, however, take a more active role in helping the homeless. Suffolk U. in Boston is in its third year of administering a scholarship program for the homeless students. "The program is working fairly well," says Chris Perry, director of Financial Aid.

But the kind of help Suffolk gives to its homeless students is not available at most universities. Students like Alan, a Stanford U. senior, made his 1986 Toyota his home for a year. He bought a \$50 Stanford parking permit and saved \$6,000 in housing.

Arnold, a student at the U. of California, Los Angeles, slept in his Ford Probe to save time, money and the inconvenience of traveling back and forth to his home.

Although these two students chose to be homeless, rising costs of tuition are making those choices more prevalent for the many students who must depend on financial aid.

Kara Beach hopes a college degree will help her achieve her dreams as well.

Beach, 20, has a 3-year-old son, Dane.

She lives in an apartment provided by the Volunteers of America in Spokane. But for four or five months in 1991, Beach bounced around between her mother's home and those of friends.

"I come from a dysfunctional family," she says. "There was a lot of stress at home."

After getting a GED, she enrolled in September 1991 at Spokane Falls Community College. An English major, Beach gets by with grants and financial aid. She is doing well in college, her grade point average peaking at 3.8.

Being homeless brought on an array of problems. Beach spent days wondering where she would sleep next. Beach's hard times are not over. Stress remains in her life, even though she has a place to sleep now.

"I'm not really homeless," she says. "I'm misplaced." **U**

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