

Police, too, may be in for a rude awakening

The Urban Gypsy

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 CONTRIBUTING WRITER

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As far as I know, it isn't a crime to be homeless, yet you couldn't tell that by the way the men in blue approached me the other day.

It was 8 a.m. last Sunday. I was reveling in the rare luxury of attempting to sleep in — yeah — so not going to happen, I know. The police pulled up to my tent.

They honked their horn and requested I pack up the tent — had they left it at that, it would have been fine, and frankly, you wouldn't be reading this article. They, of course, didn't. I stuck my head out to acknowledge them, at which point the questions began — what was my date of birth, my name, was I alone in the tent, was I an addict, and alcoholic or just plain crazy? Why was I there on the street, didn't I have any family or friends to take me in, and why wasn't I up already looking for work?

I felt heat rise in my cheeks as I watched them struggle to pigeonhole me with a label.

I barred my fangs (in what I hoped might pass as a smile) and replied dryly that yes I was at this moment alone save for Maggie the dog, but that they should be careful since her shivers can be very intimidating to some (Italian greyhounds are pretty famous for this). The irony of this statement was — of course — lost on them. Then I got seriously to the point, and couldn't quite help the small malicious bit of satisfaction that comes from being a sarcastic ass (at least to this gypsy). No, I am not an alcoholic, or an addict. Should

you check it out, you will find my background depressingly free of criminal behavior (with the possible exception of my sentence structure). My life and my reasons for being here are important only to me and aren't your business. And as the question of sanity — I am no more sane or insane than you are.

I do have a question for you, though. When was the last time you randomly picked out a homeowner or apartment dweller and knocked on their door with this line of questioning early on a Sunday morning?

At this time I would like to remind any who choose to be in law enforcement that the homeless are part of the population you swore to protect and serve, and nowhere in your job description do the words harass and profile appear. I would further like to remind you of that timeless Irish proverb, "It is often a person's own mouth that breaks his nose."

The only difference between us is poverty — it's contagious and ferocious in its appetites. So next week it could be you in the tent getting grilled about whys and hows — instead of me.

I would also like to warn you — be careful, because the fingers you step on today might be attached to the hand reaching down to help you up tomorrow.

We urban gypsies are individuals and should be approached as such — and afforded the same respect and dignity as everyone else. If you can't do that, perhaps you should get out of the uniforms to which your behavior currently shames.

Courage
 By MoBeth

True or false, what my mind tells me,
 What my emotions reveal
 Heartfelt sadness,
 Madness
 Always ending sunken in doubt and shame
 How is it that new thinking is born
 Birthed from primordial darkness
 into sudden daylight?

I tell myself
 Slow down, breathe in and out
 Open your heart clear your mind
 Is the truth different from the lie?
 Perhaps they dwell together
 The mask I hide behind
 And the courage to be who I am.
 One for the other, here and there.

My mask I dishonest but shows me
 the courage I lack
 My courage is true, but shows me
 the lie of fear
 I too readily grab on to.

For once in my life
 I did something to feel proud about
 Dare I say it out loud?
 I sought safety
 What will others think about me,
 say about me now?
 Not what the mask fears, I hope.
 They don't understand anyhow,
 Nor do they really care
 I do, now, enough

Courage is how I walk this new realm
 I am known by the light (albeit dim)
 In my eyes and the kind (broken, yes)
 heart I have.
 I lived in a shelter then and was fed for free
 How many others are like me?

Other beautiful, courageous women
 Perhaps confused, for sure afraid
 Are fight for another chance to live.
 I believe poverty can enlighten a soul
 It did mine
 Would it yours?

On the Yellow Line
 By Thea Constantine

I started writing these pieces when I'd take the MAX to my writing class every week and had my pen and tablet with me. And I still carry them with me. Now I take even more classes all over the place and I write down everything interesting that happens. Like the other week, I was on the MAX with some guys that were on their way home from Portland Community College and Guy No. 1 starts telling Guy No.2 this elaborate story about getting followed home on the MAX by these two other dudes who are going to rob him and how he had to call his ride early and ask them to come get him 'cause he had all this real expensive music equipment at home and he didn't want to get any of it stolen. But here's the thing — after this whole long tale, he says to his friend, "You know, if someone tries to take something from me — I'll fight to get it back. But I'm such a pushover, if they'd just ask me for it I'd probably give it to them." And that started me thinking.

I remember I had a friend, a thief, who told me that if he wrote his autobiography he would call it "You Should Have Just Asked" because that's what everybody always said to him, you know, when he'd get caught. So immediately I wanted to lean over and ask Guy No. 1 "Hey, do you have

\$500?" Cause he's such a pushover and all. But I decide, hey, just because he's full of shit doesn't mean you have to be an asshole about it, right? So I didn't.

I was on the MAX last week and there were these two women coming back from some sporting event. You could tell because they were wearing team colors with logos and stuff, and they're just gossiping away about all sorts of things when the train passes a shop and one of them says, "Hey, that's that store I was telling you about, the party store." And then this man (he was probably her husband, you could tell by the team colors even though they weren't sitting together) he calls out to her and says "Remember, honey? That's where I got that spinning pig for your party," and she says "Right" and then they just started talking to their respective friends again like nothing happened. And I'm just sitting there wondering, what kind of party requires a spinning pig? I even wondered if maybe I heard it wrong but what else could it have been? Spinning wig? Grinning fig? No. It was spinning pig all right. But what are you going to do with a thing like that?

So OK. It's not entirely true when I say nothing happened to me on the MAX. But what exactly was it? Should I have just asked?

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