

HOROSCOPE

BY SOUP
CAN SAM
STAFF
PSYCHIC

Taurus (April 20-May 21) Soup Can has grown past taking philosophy so seriously.

Gemini (May 22-June 22) Release yourself from you own mental prisons. It's a big, beautiful world out there!

Cancer (June 23-July 23) Just because half your brain doesn't know what's going on doesn't mean it's an excuse to do nothing.

Leo (July 24-Aug. 23) Censoring yourself is generally unnecessary. That said, don't lose touch with your social graces.

Virgo (Aug. 24-Sept. 23) Down here we don't care what happens outside the screen door.

Either should you. Be OK with yourself already, Christ.

Libra (Sept. 24-Oct. 23) Time to start being realistic. Reevaluate your priorities -- we can always depend on you for a good time, but you've got to take care of yourself, first.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 22) Some people think they know it all, and others just pretend. Of course, then there's those who just like to sit on the sidelines and poke at anyone that they think fall into either category. Choose fun over the norm. And keep pretending, yo...

Sagittarius (Nov. 23-Dec. 22) How is the band War so awesome, when actual war is horrific? All I'm saying is 'Stepping into the Darkness' is an ill funk groove. Stay focused, and you can be 'ill' too!

Capricorn (Dec. 23-Jan. 19) Watch out that you might begin to stagnate in your own ideas. Your own opinions can be stifling -- enjoy those of others sometimes too.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 19) Pull your head out! We all miss you!

Pisces (Feb. 20-March 20) How much of life is willingness to believe? How strong is the power of conception? Sometimes we choose to believe in things because it's convenient, sometimes because it's fun. Believe in yourself -- you are your own light.

Aries (March 21-April 19) Don't catch the swine flu this week.

CORRECTIONS

Street Roots strives for accuracy, but we're human. So we also strive to correct errors in our paper whenever possible. Please report any errors to our managing editor, Joanne Zuhl, at 503-228-5657, or write to joanne@streetroots.org.

Labor King

BY JAY THIEMEYER

In late winter I stayed briefly in the first Lighthouse Gospel Mission I ran across in Atlanta. It was 1982. Early on, out on the street. Missions were an oddity, a last resort. Staying in a mission was outlandish; there was always a couch to be had.

And at that time I had never seen a Lighthouse Gospel Mission. I was intrigued by the phosphors. And being called a sinner in tones that took it for granted that, being homeless, I had done something horrendous and ungodly to deserve it. I thought I only needed a bed for the night! Not hellfire and damnation and consignment to some circle of Hell Alighieri never imagined. Damn! I thought I was a human being, down on his luck, waiting for the worm to turn, the Great Urobundo to turn chance in time my way, not grist for an egomaniacal showman who stood each night in front of us, the congregated homeless (bedless), to do his turn on our predicament. I knew what I would do if I were in the same position as him, and it wouldn't be to kick somebody when they're down. But then, I'm no instrument of god.

This was Atlanta in 1982, and I was far from alone, living outside or prostrating myself for a shelter bed. The streets were full of people down on their luck and there was always a crowd at the door of the Lighthouse, waiting as twilight faded for the chance of a bed ticket. Things were tight and a dozen or so would habitually be denied. The rest of us, if we be so lucky, slogged in and went through the routine and slept for a few hours between stints on the pavement. Or doing day work. We would get to bed finally around 10 p.m. If all went well, a night's sleep, as wonderfully divine as can be imagined, would cover us till about 4:30 a.m.

At that dark hour, we'd be rousted from our bunks, given granular waterbound coffee, as I called it -- weak, coffee grounds settled thinly on the bottom of the stoneware cup -- if we could stomach it, and sent out the door. Unless you were what I thought of as a 'trustie,' who cleaned up after the others, had a good breakfast (relatively good: grits with soft boiled egg, real coffee, milk and juice), generally sucked ass with the minister, and laid about all day at-the-ready. A gofer for the muckety-mucks. A Mission monkey.

Labor King was the name of the day labor site about five blocks down, just past St Luke's Episcopal Cathedral. Day labor, like the gospel homeless missions and the plasma centers, was thriving. I had first seen plasma joints or 'stab labs' back in '79, and since then they had flourished. As good an economic indicator as any.

The poverty industry in its more ground-level pedestrian incarnation, then, was the proliferation of day labor and temp jobs and the people who profited from the needs of the down and out. Nondescript storefronts whose insides were invisible to passersby, seen only by street people begging to "donate" plasma or do the grinding 'day work.'

And right with them all were the package stores where we could cash our script. It was just like sharecropping on the old plantation. \$7, \$8 checks from giving plasma back then, low pay since so many were willing to "donate"; \$18 from a full day working for Labor King, after they took \$2 for the van. But if you were working way out on the periphery, which even then was miles and miles from the center of Atlanta, an hour's drive or more from the office where we signed up, it was usually guaranteed that you would miss the van back into town. Still, each morning when you complained about being left by the van, the only answer was, "ya gotta be quick, man." This from a jerk with some biker gang. It was a racket, day labor. "Ya only got yourself to blame if you dawdle." And sure enough, over time, I noticed no one else complained. It was routine. Everybody knew who the biker dude was and what was the expectation -- that someone in our predicament should be grateful. There was no talk of organizing or resisting. It just wasn't brought up. You either accepted the crumbs or did without. Or bummed change for a living.

We started lining up at 5:30 a.m. Shelter people from the surrounding blocks along with folks camping in the weed patch started to congregate; coming together like survivors after some natural disaster, a hurricane or a shipwreck -- which it was. The Reagan Revolution from the mudsill perspective.

The line consisted of a diversity of people who all bore the marks of the Reagan Revolution -- the burgeoning calamity of the American soul whose impact has progressed to its logical conclusion with the current economic meltdown. Whose remedy is paid for on the backs of taxpayers who are its victims? When mandatory health insurance is considered 'reform,' not a subsidy to the corporate insurers? That's the Reagan bequest. Anything that doesn't benefit the corporatization of the country is Socialism. You have a responsibility to support the rich and not squawk.

It was the same in '82. It was written in the faces of the people in the line.

While think-tank types debate what the next move should be, here at the presumed

close of the Reagan Revolution as consummated by Bush the Boy-King and Alan Greenspan -- how to rebuild the middle class, how to move us from fossil fuels to green tech, and away from a debtor-consumer society, people who stood in that line each cold morning competing for a handful of jobs, unloading freight at the loading dock or just hauling crap at some construction site for a 90-story commercial tower, saw the future then and live it still. If, that is, they are still alive.

Many were last hired, first fired, early beneficiaries in the '70s and beginning of the '80s of wave after wave of worsening layoffs, downsizing and truncation of the union presence. Many were from the Rust Belt or MidAtlantic, by way of the overstoked Texas and Oklahoma oil fields. I knew several who'd lived in the tent city outside Houston I'd only read about in a copy of Sojourner magazine I'd find in the phone room at Open Door. Jim Wallis's Sojourner, the Catholic Worker, The Nation, and the New York Times, all spreading the news: a poor man ain't got no home in this world anymore. Taking up the beat from Woody Guthrie. I thought these brothers were mythological, not real -- how could this reality of theirs be real, I wondered. Their families were all back home in some place like Ohio or Massachusetts or Maryland, or in transit while they maneuvered from one overpopulated hiring site to another, one city to another.

In Atlanta, the fellas I knew lived outside, way out on the periphery near the construction edge, as growth without borders continued its mindless spread, all the budding towers on the then-outskirts of town. They didn't need the van. They would show up in advance to seek nonexistent jobs, then they'd come downtown to line up with the rest of us at St Luke's or Open Door, or one of the other lines to the south part of town. Down Georgia Avenue, near where Ted Turner's World Games found a home. And the Olympics. In a former residential neighborhood, razed and the people displaced, just like when they built the Memorial Coliseum and the Rose Garden and Legacy Emanuel Hospital here in Portland and eliminated all those homes owned by black workers. Other blacks in Atlanta suffered at the arbitrary hand of their purveyors of soccer stadiums, World Games, Olympics, where white rich folks watched black athletes compete for a pocketful of gold. Pushed by white men and non-white men who wanted to be white. And have access to the goodies at the expense of others.



You are Invited!

Soapbox Under the Bridge

Come GIVE VOICE to your creative mind on
Portland's Sit/Lie and Anti-camping Laws

Why? To speak out for Human Rights and Justice

What? An open-air, open-mic where we invite you to bring your poems, songs, and words of wisdom to slam, speak, share, sing, spout, and creatively express your perspectives and feelings on the Sit/Lie and Anti-camping laws & how they are effecting our community

Where? ○Bryant Square/Paranoxia Park @ Potluck in the Park

When? Sunday, 3rd of May 2009, 4pmsoapboxunderthebridge@gmail.com