

HOROSCOPE

BY SOUP
CAN SAMSTAFF
PSYCHIC

Taurus (April 20-May 21) Does anything genuinely beautiful need supplementing? Of course it does, but don't be a jerk about it.

Gemini (May 22-June 22) Credible street news is in your future. Like on page 9.

Cancer (June 23-July 23) Each of our lives is only for a brief instant, forget everything else. Shoot for the moon.

Leo (July 24-Aug. 23) If you often wonder if you are hallucinating a strange and twisted reality, you might be. But it will be over soon enough. We hope.

Virgo (Aug. 24-Sept. 23) Your world is upside down in a stange and delightful kind of way. Don't fight it.

Libra (Sept. 24-Oct. 23) It's OK if they call you batshit crazy — they might be right. Do they really matter at the end of the day? No.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 22) I'm not convinced, Scorpio, that you don't have a clue what you're talking about this month. In fact, all this year I've wondered just what the hell you're trying to communicate. Try writing or painting this month. Please.

Sagittarius (Nov. 23-Dec. 22) Wait, is this your first time reading Soup Can? OK, so here's the quick and dirty. I can make the rain stop, I heal people and I can see your future. In fact, when I'm not all layed up somewhere from days of getting sauced I'm rather nice to be around. You should try the same. No, not getting sauced, but being nice to be around.

Capricorn (Dec. 23-Jan. 19) Capricorn, you're screwed. Start small, baby steps and continue on from there. Any great leap and you will fall again in a heap of crap.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 19) Pull your head out of your ass, Aquarius. It's springtime.

Pisces (Feb. 20-March 20) I know it seems like I'm a little harsh on you Pisces, but the truth of the matter is every other sign has something to offer this month. Well, I take that back — Aquarius and Capricorn are in your boat. If it sinks, don't drink the salt water under any circumstances.

Aries (March 21-April 19) Newsflash: You don't know it all, Aries. You're good at giving advice, but you can't follow it to save your ass. Try practicing what you preach!

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 Part II

BY JAY THIEMEYER

The line at Labor King was long and muttering. Sleeping outside in the weeds, or in a shelter like the Lighthouse, which I discovered was one of a network extending even then across this country and into Canada, wore a fella down when you were doing the day labor thing. And every day you worked, you drank. How else to wash the taste out of your mouth. And cashing your measly check at the package store, what else was there for it? Or I should say, I did. Me and whoever I was with. Like Detroit who was down staying with his sister till she threw him out and he was stuck with day work to build the stash to get the room to get inside, to get off the street, to be able to not worry about cops or bumbashers. Detroit and I unloaded trucks together and slept in the weeds one week. Cashed our checks and got some beer — Country Club 800 — or Russeika Vodka, and forget the Lighthouse Mission. They had their standards. Wouldn't accept a drunk man. Have to find some place on your own for the night. And the old Atlanta Union Mission. Man! A tinderbox! The four stories tilted as if drunk itself. Old worn-out double bunks crammed together and bathrooms that stank of a hundred years of use and decades of not working. Pipes broke like the men who dared to use them. Booze flowed freely in that place. Nobody gave a damn there. Problem was they never had any open beds. So, it wasn't an option... You get close to a brother after a day working in un-ideal conditions, then slaking your thirst and getting the taste of dirt and diminution out of your mouth, then scouting together for some place safe, out of sight, and reasonably warm, a covering of old carpet, to pass the night.

And as I say, it was late winter. The demand for scarce work was only worse than at the beginning of winter. So, the line started around 4, or earlier. Shelter people were latecomers at 5. One of the advantages of sleeping out was you got to the line early. Though being hungover all day was no fun at all. Ingenuity was required to deal with the major tremors. It was laughable to watch but no fun to be.

I will say this about that Lighthouse mission. The fisheye soup for supper, and the extraordinary Flannery O'Connor-sequel fire-and-brimstone sermon we had to endure for the fisheye (Did you actually get one? No, no fisheye...promises, promises.) Notwithstanding, the linen was usually clean. Unlike the linen in the downstairs dorm at the local Portland Rescue Mission I slept in when I first arrived to Portland in '98. I slept in it unassuming the first night out of Hooper Detox — unassuming, that is, and unaware — and only in the morning discovered that the tangled "sheet" theoretically separating me from the spent mattress had somebody's shit in it, caked at the foot. The filth didn't bother me then. I was too tired to inspect or complain. My body was late in the game at that point. I was no longer "early out in it." What's a little

more shit if you're prone? If you're inside for the night.

We stood huddled and muttering our complaints or morning salutes — though, knowing no one, and not really wanting to know anyone there, I was silent, scrutinizing, and somewhat separate — there were others likewise segregated, who over time I drew closer to. We might draw closer after the competition for day labor in the early morning was over and we would find ourselves in the more leisurely space of the midday feed line. When we could talk and relax somewhat. Of course, it's relative, but the weight, the stress was less. At St Luke's Episcopal on Peachtree or Open Door Community on Ponce De Leon, there was relatively little competition for the soup. The vegan compote at Open Door was good stuff, thick and nutritious as I recall, and generally shunned or only eaten till the cramps and the stomach growls stopped by most who came in to feed. It was mostly the tenor of the place, the welcoming of the community people, that drew us in. Because, being American, we knew what good food was and McDonald's didn't have no feed line...And Ronald McDonald didn't have a place at the table for us.

But in these sanctuaries we had lots of time to gab, and it was later on in a day that was already over. So there was time to kill.

Not pre-dawn and freezing. Early, standing in the cold, not a soul felt jovial, though some joked around and jumped around in an attempt to warm up. And some had something to share, a little taste, a little socializer, to ease the discomfort of the oncoming day. Something to share with someone they knew who they'd bum for a return later. What goes around comes around, in the day labor line.

We all had the same nondescript uniform. Castoffs provided by some clothes closet at some church or other. Nothing matching or fitting, but roughly warm. Warmth with the layers. T-shirts on T-shirts, sweaters on sweatshirts, heavier jackets on light jackets, as winter came on the layers grew weight, as much as a body could carry and maneuver in. And what came through the pores added its layers. Mounds traipsing the sidewalks or huddled in lines. Waiting. For a shower, a meal, clothes or a bed. Or to cash a plasma check at the package store for a quarter.

And between the ongoing cold and filth, everyone's sinuses were clogged — if a person still had sinuses that functioned at all — which made our odor bearable. So customary was our stench it went largely unnoticed unless we were in a confinement, a silly and deadly and abysmal prospect as you can imagine, where shoes were removed revealing socks caked to feet like that shit in the bed I would accept as ordinary, unexceptional, in the Portland Rescue Mission. By '98, I had absorbed the drill and the mindset.

Having been housed now since '02, I am still reconfiguring myself. What level of shit is negotiable? How much shit will I swallow?



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