

NATIONAL

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homeless but for other homeless populations, including homeless families. This administration intends to have more engagement and collaboration through the USICH with federal agencies to solve homelessness.

*T.T.: While many people experiencing homelessness live in city streets or in emergency shelters, countless others spend their nights in the homes of friends and family, in campgrounds, or in low-rent motels. How will this administration reach out and provide needed services to those households?*

**Under The Bridge**

By Ann Preston-Paris

Under the bridge, if I'm especially lucky,  
 I might come across a fire to warm the cement I live on.  
 I might imagine its heat melting the hard frigid block  
 into a soft warm mattress.  
 I'd do the devil a deal to taste warmth and comfort again,  
 even for just one night. But, no, I take that back.  
 One night would never be enough to fill me up.  
 It'd be like an almost climax during sex.  
 There you are, strung up, high, and stranded.  
 I'd weave this one night into one thousand,  
 and one story after story.  
 After dream, after delusion.  
 To be warm and leave a safe place to lay my head.  
 Better than food, sex, or drug.  
 And so I wander on passing tents and boxes on and on.  
 I see people eating from cans  
 children and dogs closing in to share the meal.  
 Cats calmly perched on laps and shoulders.  
 Whats for them?  
 Some lovely sardines maybe, sans oil,  
 or a can of "people" tuna? Yum!  
 No one's cooking tonight it seems.  
 I make my way around our village of the poor  
 Norte Ville des pauvres.  
 It's dark and so quiet out.  
 Not a whisper of any car on the freeway next door.  
 Suddenly a small burst of red-orange!  
 There's an 11 oz coffee can in front of me next to the curb;  
 flames are reaching from it.  
 Tips flickering up and down like dancers  
 practicing jumps in place  
 and a group of men pressed close are sitting around the fire  
 warming their freeze-burned hands- they are telling stories.  
 Seeing them, I might dream of a room  
 in a sixteenth century English hotel  
 Its dwellers gathered in front of the fire  
 entertaining themselves  
 of a mean winter's night while minstrels pass on the way  
 I side to finer places of welcome and rest.  
 I join these modern-day men on the damp grass  
 and listen to their tales of hunger, cold, aches, and pain;  
 of wonder, hope and warmth that began  
 with the flick of a lighter  
 or a strike of a match.

**S.D.:** People are often forced to live with family and friends because they can't find an affordable home to rent. This is why it is critical that we do everything we can to stimulate the production of affordable rental housing. The Recovery Act's Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program will help thousands of families to avoid homelessness by offering moving expenses, security deposits and temporary rental assistance. HUD is making significant contributions toward the capital needs of local housing authorities so they, in turn, can serve more families. And we're reaffirming HUD's support for our voucher programs by proposing nearly \$18 billion in the 2010 budget, an increase of \$1.8 billion over current levels. It's clear that President Obama is intent on making sure that lower-income families, and specifically those at higher risk of homelessness, must not be forgotten as we seek to put this nation back on the path of sustainable economic growth.

*T.T.: Homelessness is not just a housing issue, of course, but an issue pertaining also to health care, incomes, civil rights, education, jobs. In what ways do you plan on coordinating your efforts at HUD with the efforts of the other departments in combating homelessness?*

**S.D.:** To solve homelessness requires not just housing but access to an array of supports. The services by agencies such as the U.S. departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Education are absolutely vital to help ensure that once persons are housed they have the services they need to become stably housed and improve their lives through education and employment. Clearly the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness will be playing a key role in coordinating government agencies on the issue.

*T.T.: During your years as commissioner of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, what role did you play in providing housing resources for the city's homeless population? What lessons did you learn from that experience that will inform your work as HUD Secretary?*

**S.D.:** In one of the most expensive housing markets in the country, we were able to make significant progress toward building and preserving 165,000 units of affordable housing, the largest municipal affordable housing plan in the nation's history. One of my proudest achievements in New York was the New York/New York III, a \$1 billion agreement between the state and the city to finance and develop 9,000 new units of supportive housing in New York City. The lessons I learned are that if you hope to develop affordable housing, you have to be nimble and you have to gather a collection of partners to help make it happen.

*T.T.: How did you become involved in the issues of homelessness and low-income housing?*

**S.D.:** As an 11-year-old, I was sitting in Yankee Stadium during Game 2 of the 1977 World Series when Howard Cosell uttered his famous words: "Ladies and gentlemen,

the Bronx is burning." The Bronx burning on the city skyline was just one of the many visible signs that government institutions and urban programs were failing. People were asking if our cities were dead, and American families moved out of urban cores to the suburbs in record numbers. It was a frightening and eye-opening time to live in New York. But it was a time that also sparked a deep interest in me, an interest in how I could play a part in changing the policies that shaped the urban landscape and the built environment around me. I remember very vividly walking on my way to school in the morning and seeing people sleeping on the streets. I remember constantly asking myself why. Why was the world like this? And what can I do to change it? I worked for a community housing developer in New York City after studying public policy and architecture in graduate school. Then one of my professors from graduate school asked me to join him at HUD in the Clinton administration.

**It's now time to use that same process and see what can be done not just for the chronically homeless but for other homeless populations, including homeless families.**

*T.T.: Why do you believe it is important for the government to play a role in providing and attaining affordable housing in this country? Do you believe that the federal government can really make a difference in preventing and ending homelessness?*

**S.D.:** The resources of the federal government can help as no other entity can, either through direct investment, tax credits, bond financing or a combination of these tools. But government can't do it alone. The only reason we were so successful in New York was because we marshaled the combined resources of a number of public and private players. I also think we have to change our general approach to affordable housing and endeavor to create sustainable communities that are transit-oriented and energy efficient. That's why HUD is working closely with the departments of Transportation, Energy, Labor and Education to cultivate a more comprehensive and holistic approach to development. We just have to think smarter about how we build the communities of tomorrow.

In the same way, I think the federal government can make a real difference in preventing homelessness as we work to end homelessness for those experiencing long-term or chronic homelessness. As you know, there has been a shift in how the federal government, as well as state and local communities, in how we confront chronic homelessness. All across the country, you're seeing the creation of thousands of new permanent supportive housing units and a noticeable decrease in our reliance on emergency shelters. I anticipate that we will continue to see this paradigm shift in the years to come.

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