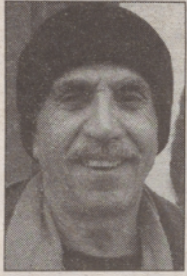


Getting back on your feet, with support

BY SAM AL-JONDI
CONTRIBUTING VENDOR



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No one was born to say, "I want to be homeless when I grow-up." It is an experience that does not appear on anyone's radar screen. When you have reached adulthood: You have a job, a wife and a mortgage. Everything is hunky-dori and is going according to plan.

Then any number of things can happen. Your job gets outsourced to China or India or any number of other places on earth where labor can be obtained cheaper. After all, the corporation that we work for is out to make a profit, so if need be, that might mean shipping your job overseas. If this happens, it can all start to fall apart. You lose your mortgage, the bank takes your house and in the process, you lose your wife and family. Then, for many, they end up out on the streets.

Of course, there are many reasons for people ending up on the streets, but the results are the same. You find yourself walking around — feeling like the world is closing in on you. You see no hope on the horizon. You forget what to even hope for. Somehow you can't help blaming yourself and believing it's your fault. You believe you can't escape it. You know you must take responsibility for yourself. This is the psychological drama you find yourself living in, right beside your physical need for shelter and food. Some people simply give up and resort to drugs or other things to cope. Others are able to hold on and search for that roadmap to living again.

Not all the homeless are good and not all them are bad, but none of them deserve to suffer and die on the streets. A lot of them are vets who put their life on the line to protect this country, and its way of life, ultimately, protecting the haves sitting in their mansions.

I have experienced homelessness. My own set of circumstances put me there, and I want to talk about some of my experiences.

One cold night recently, the wind was

blowing from every direction. It was raining and because the wind kept changing direction, it was very hard to find a dry spot where one could put a sleeping bag or blanket. A group of us gathered under the Broadway Bridge and we each found a dry spot where we could lay our heads. There were four of us.

A short time later a woman on a bike made her way to us. She put her bedding down and lay down on her blankets. She had no tarp. Everyone fell asleep, cold, listening to rain and wind whipping up around the bridge. Like I said, the wind kept changing direction. When I awoke again, I uncovered my head from the tarp and sleeping bag to see the woman getting up. She was literally soaking wet and shivering. She boarded her bike and left. I looked at the sky and thought, "what is wrong with you?"

I woke later that morning to a man kicking my feet demanding to see some I.D. It was a police officer that had driven his car under a portion of the bridge. He took each of our I.D. cards. I feared what he might do. My heart raced. He took our names and gave us a warning, but said next time we would be arrested for trespassing.

Something inside of me felt like a boxer down on my knees. All I could hear was the voice of my coach who's mouth barely reaches the platform, yelling at me, "Get up. Get up, you bum. You can win. You can get out of this. Get up and fight."

For me, my coaches in this circumstance are people like Israel Bayer, Joanne Zuhl, Kreeg Peoples at Street Roots, the people of the Northwest Pilot Project and Rebecca, Jason, Jessica and the children who get up at 5 a.m. to go to Blanchet House to serve the homeless. I hear their voices saying, "Get up. You can do this. Fight." They are the voice of that coach who believed in me and helped me win.

I am not out of this nightmare yet, but I am on my feet. It is indeed the American spirit and the great hearts of the people and services I mention that are making the difference.

Ocean

Michael Vance

Spew forth your relentless power
Come crashing over these buildings
drown these freeways and overpasses
leave not one courthouse or police car
behind when the tide retreats.
Let the high rises sink to the deepest abyss.
I'll be on my lifeboat popping the bubbles
as they surface with an American flag
pole in my hands and a shit eating
grin on my face. We're starting
this mother fucker over! Amen.

Untitled

sonia i. french

Oldies, classic rock,
playing on the FM
shaking memories loose

I can't turn down the volume on my
past
It screams decibels over the sound
of my future



Two year old Emmett Quigley stuffs dollar bills into the Panera Cares Cafe donation box as his aunt, Julieanne Quigley reads the mission statement of the shared-responsibility restaurant. The Hollywood Panera has become Panera Cares Cafe, a nonprofit business that offers suggested donations for goods. If people can't afford to pay, they can pay less, or nothing at all.

PHOTO BY KEN HAWKINS