

Cobra Pose

By Debra Knauf

Spine elongates
Tension releases
Hips off the ground
Arms strong
Head upright
Looking forward
This is just what it is

A new being emerges
Stripped of outward burdens
Engaged with the world

But detached

Free
Not tame
Not contained
Not surfaced with slick veneer
Desert varnish
Not covered by thick crust

What shall take root?
Exposed
Vulnerable
Trusting absolutely
Being
Love
Care

On my swing

by N. Page

Maybe if I turn round and round
on my swing
Round and round again
Like I did before

Beneath the widest maple tree
in all the world
On my wooden swing
With the cotton rope
spinning a beautiful braid
Above my head

If I turn round and round again
With a sea of leaves beneath me
And round once again

Maybe I'll be nine again
I could see my big cat, Mac
And I could see my mom
And maybe even my dad

And if I go round and round again
I might see you there too

Power shut-offs loom as winter approaches

FROM 211INFO

If you sit in the 211info call center it won't be long before you hear from someone that needs help paying their utility bill. Some people call before their shut off notices pile up. But many are calling as a last ditch effort. These days, energy assistance funds disappear as soon as word drops that local nonprofits have money to distribute.

A porous safety net is leaving too many people behind. And as the months turn freezing cold, candle light isn't enough for struggling families. One such 211 caller represents thousands of local residents who will have their power shut off this winter with nowhere to go. Names and certain identifying information have been removed to protect the privacy of the caller.

Caller: "My power was shut off yesterday. I called you this morning. You said there were three agencies that had funding for energy assistance, but when I called them they were already out of money. What should I do now? It's really cold."

211info specialist: "Is there a way that you could take money away from other bills, like maybe your cable bill or a medical payment, so that you could pay to get the

Last season, Oregon received \$46 million in Low-Income

Home Energy Assistance Program funds. This year, the state received \$22.5 million. 211info received more than 9,000 calls for utility assistance last fiscal year (June 2010-July 2011) in Multnomah County alone. It received more than 12,000 in the tri-county metro area.

power turned back on?"

Caller: "I have to pay my rent or else I won't have anywhere to sleep. I use my disability payment for rent; I get food stamps to pay for food. I had to pay in advance to see a dentist last month, and I just don't have any money to pay for anything else. I don't have cable TV."

211info specialist: "Do you have a caseworker at the Aging and Disabilities office?"

Caller: "Yes, but she said she can't help

me."

211info specialist: "Do you have any family or friends who might be able to assist you temporarily?"

Caller, crying: "No."

211info specialist: "Are you part of a faith community that you could turn to for help?"

Caller, crying harder: "No. What am I going to do?"

211info specialist: "One option would be to go to the Women's Winter Warming Shelter so you could be warm at night."

Caller: "I am not homeless! I just need heat, and I don't want to go to a shelter. I'm disabled, and I don't even know how I would get there."

211info specialist: "I don't have any other suggestions for ways to get your utilities turned back on today. I hope you stay in touch, so if other resources become available you can try them. It sounds like you have a lot going on right now, and I'd like to get you over to someone who can talk about your feelings about your situation. I could transfer you there right now."

A Helping Hand

In March 2007, a man donated his time to the Macdonald Center; he was five days fresh from prison and was ready to go back because the system doesn't train its inmates how to live on the streets. They give them a few worthless classes on how to fill out a resume, but face it, that and 25 cents won't buy you a cup of coffee.

This particular convict was sent to the release center where they warehouse inmates until their release dates come up. Certainly, you'll find those inmates who speak fondly of the center, but chances are they want to make points with the superintendent or they have one of the few jobs the system offers and they'd like to keep it.

Not to lose track of this convict, he did his time (a total of 18 years), he was a two-time loser. After five days he was ready to go back to prison because it was the only life he knew. While eating lunch at the center's cafeteria, another inmate gave him a sealed letter with instructions to take it to the Macdonald Center and give it to Marylee King (the director of the center). Being the convict he was, he didn't look at the sealed letter; it wasn't addressed to him. This was March 5, 2007, and to this day, Marylee is the only person who knows what was written in that letter. The convict's name is Donald (aka: Chewbaka).

Days after his release, Donald was on his way to the parole officer to be locked up

again. He was so afraid of the outside world that he didn't know what else to do. Then he remembered the letter he carried with him, being the man of his word he took the letter to the Macdonald Center. Walking back and forth in front of the building, afraid to go in, he finally gained the nerve to go to the front desk and gave the letter to the man who sat behind the desk with instructions that it be given to Marylee. He was instructed to have a seat in the lobby while they took the letter to the back room; he sat there like he was waiting to see the parole board.

About 15 minutes later, Marylee came out and introduced herself to Donald, inviting him back to have a cup of coffee and some conversation. Noticing he was cold she asked if he would like a jacket. Without a doubt, he accepted and they dove into talking for the next 45 minutes. Nothing real important was said; she invited Donald back the next day where they spent a long time in conversation and coffee. She noticed all he had to his name was a plastic coffee cup, two shots of coffee and a few bags of Top Ramen soup.

One thing led to the next and the two became fast friends. She let him help around the Center as a way to pay her back for befriending him, and she became a very important person in his life. Donald became a full-time volunteer for the Macdonald Center and eventually the residence as well, doing various jobs that ranged from hospitality, bouncer, janitor and even the

gardener.

After two and a half years, Donald moved over to the Macdonald Center Independent Living Services office where we volunteered for more than two years before he had to retire due to his health. This is not about the convict turning his life around to become a productive member of society, but about someone who the Macdonald Center held out their hand to when it was needed the most. They took someone who society cast away and made him the man he is today, a proud man, a man who can walk down the street and look you straight in the eye and say, "Good morning!" and mean it. A man who helps an older person and expects nothing in return; a man who works with the low-income and homeless.

About a year ago, an article came out in Street Roots about the Macdonald Center buying the West Hotel and evicting the tenants without help. I am that convict, and I also lived in the West. The Macdonald Center not only paid my first and last month's rent, they also paid the deposit and found me the place I live in now. I wasn't the only one who received their assistance; almost every tenant living there was given the very same assistance. Thank you, Macdonald Center, and all the staff involved.

— By Donald Harvey (aka Chewbaka)

good. local. food.

ALBERTA
COOPERATIVE
GROCERY

1500 NE Alberta St.
Portland, OR 97211
503.287.4333

www.albertagrocery.coop
open to everyone 9-10 daily

people's
FOOD CO-OP
good food. free classes.
real community.



3029 SE 21st Ave
open 8a-10p daily
EBT accepted
(503) ORGANIC
www.peoples.coop