

Playwright takes the stories of the streets to the stage

BY ALEX ZIELINSKI
STAFF WRITER

Bruce Hostetler wants to tell stories that aren't being told. After moving to Portland a few years ago and volunteering at JOIN — a local nonprofit helping homeless individuals transition into housing — Hostetler became aware of an untapped pocket of society with an abundance of stories to tell: Portland's homeless population.

"So many people forget that homeless people are human beings with their own stories and experiences," Hostetler said. "That's what drove me to create the play."

From talking to a variety of clients at JOIN, Bud Clark Commons, Sisters of the Road and other homeless organizations, Hostetler directed a play through his local production company, Compass Works, based on his interviews with Portland's homeless. Called "Feral," the play aims to illustrate the individuals masked behind the homeless stereotype.

"I want to make sure the play is not about being homeless, but about being a person with a story," Hostetler, who recently inherited Compass Works, said.

Members of the community — both homeless and housed — are invited to provide feedback on the work following the performances. Hostetler says he also plans on making the script available to advocacy groups and municipalities throughout the United States and Canada.

Part of Hostetler's drive to create this interview-based play comes from its stark contrast to anything he's written before. Prior to moving to Portland, Hostetler spent 25 years on staff at Ashland's Oregon Shakespeare Festival.

"I was tired of writing plays about dead white guys for rich people," Hostetler said. "This is definitely something new. Something that speaks to a different community."

The play itself is structured around a main character living on the streets for the first time. Taken in by a seemingly scary homeless group, the man eventually learns how to cope with his new life and realizes the humanity behind the homeless façade.

"In the beginning, the audience sees the characters as feral and wild animals. But by the end, they become people," Hostetler said. "The main character's mindset changes along with the audience's."

Hostetler made sure that the characters he created bore little resemblance to the actual people he interviewed, to protect their privacy. Additionally, each character is made up of a combination of different people Hostetler met along the way, a technique to combine the plethora of stories he gathered.

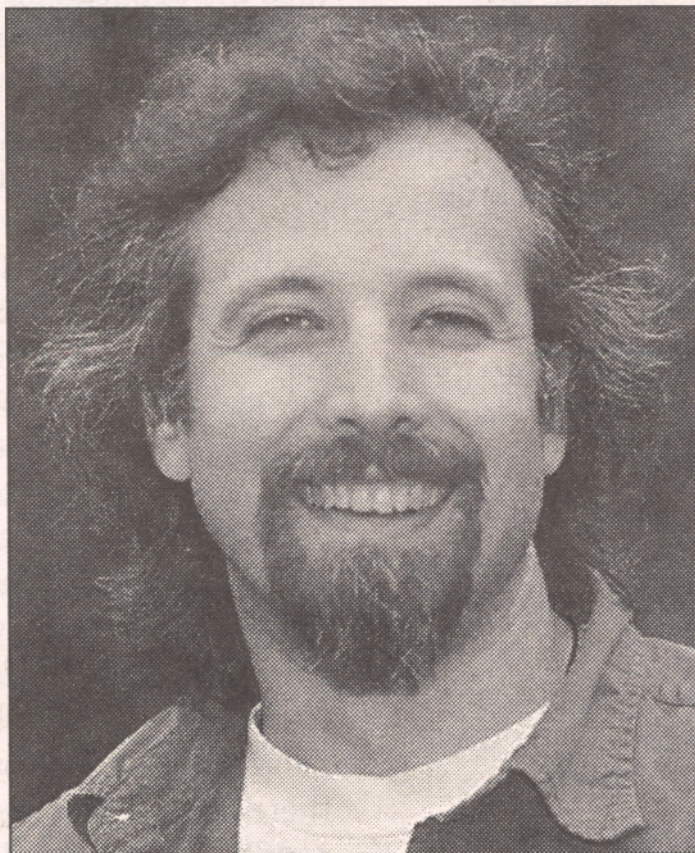
When it came to speaking with the homeless population, Hostetler said he rarely found a person not willing to share.

"Most of the folks I interviewed were generally open to talk. It's not that often that they are asked about their history and their personal life, if they are noticed at all," Hostetler said. "Our stories are what humanize us."

"Feral" will be performed at the Bob White Theater Warehouse, 6423 SE Foster Road in Portland. Show times are 7:30 p.m. Jan. 24, 25, 26, 31 and Feb. 1-2, and 3 p.m. Jan. 27 and Feb. 3.

Tickets are \$15 and \$12 for students and seniors.

The play is directed by Asae Dean and presented in partnership with the Portland Area Theatre Alliance's Fertile Ground festival of new works. The production was made possible by grants from the Regional Arts and Culture Council, the Kinsman Foundation and Portland-area donors.



Bruce Hostetler

"I want to make sure the play is not about being homeless, but about being a person with a story,"

A Pigeon's View

By Michael Vance

Soggy paper
Shattered glass
Dirty shirt to wipe that ass
Flocks of seagulls
Pigeons, too.

Poop on the sidewalk
Next to the loo.
Smelly bedding
Ripped up books
Used syringes,
Take a look!

A lake of vomit,
A sea of tears.
Screaming sirens,
Empty beers,
Septic wasteland.

No one cares
Make a change
No one dares.
This my classroom,
Downtown streets.

Learned the hard way
My own defeat.
Alive again
A different view
Wouldn't change a thing,

How about you?

Haikus

By David Mair

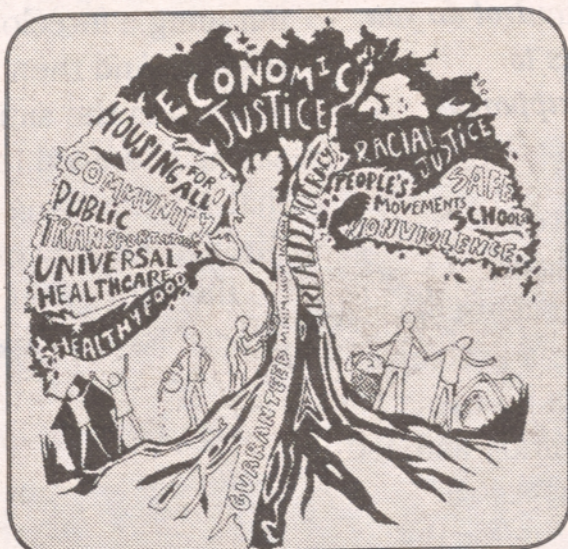
destiny is a
whore knocking at your door for
the money you owe

That's her kitty in
the rain, her purr like her tears
crying for answers

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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DAY MARCH

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From there, we march together across the river.



⏪ We'll march to Right 2 Dream Too to learn about the work being done there.

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