

DAVID PRESCOTT

Return from rock bottom

BY JON ROSS ■ CONTRIBUTING WRITER

One man's journey to recovery includes reaching out to those left behind

David Prescott stands on the corner of Southeast Sixth Avenue and Everett Street in downtown Portland feeling the sun on his face. In his hands he holds the 22-page lease he's just signed with Central City Concern for a room at the Sally McCracken apartment building. Tomorrow, he'll move his belongings from the Hotel Estate, another CCC property, where strict rules and in-house NA meetings help people in recovery stay on the straight and narrow.

Tomorrow this boyish 54-year-old will take a step deeper into freedom and responsibility. Tonight he'll sleep one last time in the place that saw him through much of his two hard-won years of sobriety. It's also the place where, in the common kitchen, on his own time and dime, he prepped somewhere between six and seven thousand meals, which he personally delivered to people sleeping in the doorways of Old Town.

David spots me and waves, and I pull to the curb. He's not a tall man, but he has a good wingspan under his buttoned-up plaid flannel, so he has to fold himself into my small car. David and I met through Humanity In Perspective (HIP), a program through Oregon Humanities that offers a free college-level humanities course to adults who face barriers to higher education. I'm his mentor, though I'm certain I've learned as much listening to him as he's ever learned from me. For the past five months we've met regularly at the Starbucks at Pioneer Square, had coffee and talked about his HIP studies and anything else that comes up. Today I'm taking him to my house so we can have a quiet place to dig deeper.

On our way to the Steel Bridge, he points out the Blanchet House, where he stayed for six months on their residential work program. "I got connected with Narcotics Anonymous while I was there," he says. "I worked my shift at the

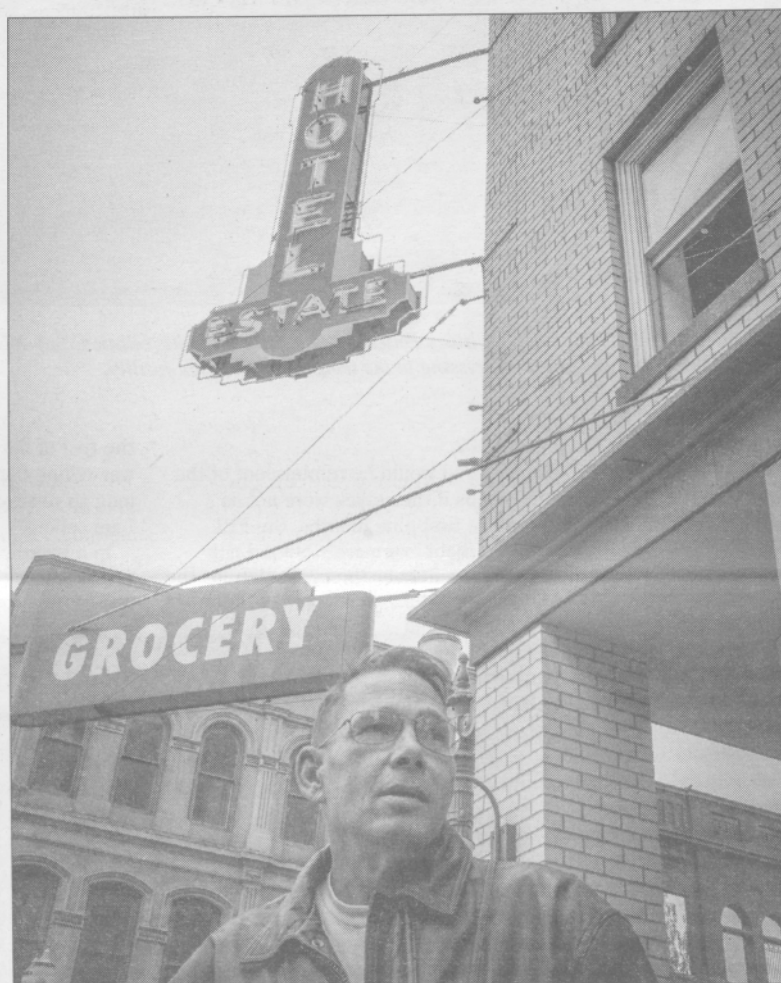


PHOTO BY JOE GLODE

NOTHING
makes me **MORE**
HOPEFUL
than discovering
another human being to admire.

— ALICE WALKER —

Blanchet House, then I would go down to the Estate for my NA meetings. A lot of people get clean and sober before they hit rock bottom," he grins a toothy gallows grin. "But it took losing everything and almost dying a homeless, horrible

death for me to actually say, 'OK, I want to get off the street, I want to try, one last time.'"

David was born in Portland in 1962 and lived his first years on Northeast Prescott at 57th Avenue, where his own father had grown up, raised by "a working, blue collar man." David's uncle, who studied psychiatry at Harvard and went on to serve as a two-star admiral in the Public Health Service and Assistant Surgeon General to C. Everett Koop, inspired David's father, who was younger, to aim high. After graduating from Portland State in 1966, David's father began to move his young family — his wife, David, and David's little sister — around the country, trying, in David's words, to "find himself in business and a career." He landed a promising sales position with Oshkosh B'gosh, but David's mother was deeply unhappy.

"I don't know why my mom was the way she was," he tells me over coffee back at my house. "I never felt that I was loved or deserved love. Actually, quite the

opposite. I suffered abuse from day one."

His mother wanted to go home to Portland. "My dad was insisting on pursuing his career, and he was on the road a lot, she was alone most of the time. She decided to take my sister and leave. She took all the furniture, drained the bank account. I ended up staying with my dad. I was 11 years old."

It's clear David's mother took more than his sister and these material things when she left. He looks away when he talks about her. "I had some serious abandonment issues. So when I came into puberty I was, you know, raging with hormones and had these horrible emotional scars."

David's father was climbing the corporate ladder, having earned an executive position in Los Angeles, and he often left David to care for himself. "As a teenager I really enjoyed that because he was gone most of the time and I had

The Nothing More Hopeful series originates from a workshop taught by Martha Gies. "I remembered my friend Sr. Rosarii Metzgar once telling me she believed all the terrible news with which we are daily battered must surely be offset by small and unseen acts of good." Gies resolved to enlist some writers who would hunt down and write those stories.