

FINDING HOME, from page 10

"Not comfortably, like in a domicile, but you can sleep."

So from May 2015 through April 2016, he lived in that Buick. In summer, the temperature in there got as high as 125 degrees, he says. Several times he was in danger of dehydration and heat exhaustion and had to call paramedics. For a few winter months, a friend let him stay in her home.

The hip pain got worse.

"To get out of the car, I would literally lift my left leg over the doorsill with my hands, put it on the ground, push myself out of the driver's seat, prop myself against the side of the car. Without the cane, I couldn't have done it."

He slept in the front seat; he couldn't get into the back. He kept a few clothes in the car, some food, and a Stanley thermos for a hot drink in the morning.

"I'd park in some lot. In the morning, not uncommonly I would find someone parked close by, getting out of her car, brushing her teeth, her hair. I figure it's 5 a.m.; she's getting ready to go to work.

"Police officers would knock on the window and say, 'What are you doing here?' I would explain, and the officer would say, 'Well, yeah, you're not breaking any laws, but we can't let you park here.' Invariably they were polite."

Srp grew a beard, only because "it was hard to find a place to shave. Some places won't even let you inside if they think you're homeless. A lot of places have no mirrors. They don't want people getting washed up

and doing things like shaving. A toothbrush doesn't take up much room, but you need running water. In the morning, the first order of business would be to go find a restroom."

He tried not to go back to the same places every day. He got to his doctor appointments and spent his days at the Beaverton City Library and at the Elsie Stuhr Center, a Beaverton recreation center where there's Meals on Wheels.

"They don't deliver to cars," he says. "But you can get a hot meal and socialize. And there are good people there. Or I might go to one of the local churches that had a hot meal."

At some restaurants, the staff was helpful and friendly, let him sit in a booth, have coffee, use the free Wi-Fi to search job and apartment listings or watch movies. He is still grateful for all of that. And he found support from his large Facebook group, "Friends of Mike Callahan," based on the science fiction novels of Spider Robinson.

"Without them, I wouldn't have survived this," he says. Robinson's tenet - "shared joy increases, and shared pain decreases" - kept him balanced.

Srp is philosophical about his time in the

car and about how he wants his story told.

"You know," he says, "when we were young, you'd hear the word 'hobo.' You didn't stop and think, 'What does that mean?' Well, I can tell you. It means you're not looking at that person and seeing a person. You're seeing a label.

"There's a big difference between surviving and making it. If all you're doing is surviving, all you have is yourself. If society takes that from you, you have nothing. It didn't happen to me, but I was lucky. It was one of the things I actively worked at. Don't let yourself be depersonalized. Don't

let people get away with that.

"Be clear in the story," he insists. "These homeless people aren't labels - derelict, bum, drunk, wino. People walk down the street and they don't see what's right in front of them, that those are *people*."

By April 2016, the pain was too much. "If I didn't get the surgery, I would not be able to get out of the car. I would die in there," he says.

He found a rooming house where he could stay until the surgery was finished,

then went to an Avamere facility for physical therapy.

A staff member at the Stuhr Center gave him the Street Roots Rose City Resource booklet and suggested he go into Portland and talk to Northwest Pilot Project. Srp was doubtful.

"I had hardly ever been to Portland," he says. "I'd lived in Washington County, and I really wanted to stay out there. I didn't know the city."

But he got his name on a list, did all the paperwork, and when his social worker at NWPP found him an apartment, he decided to give Portland a chance.

He'd been 16 months without a real home. NWPP supplied "a bed, bedding, two forks, two spoons, two knives, two glasses, two bowls, and a 9-inch frying pan," he says.

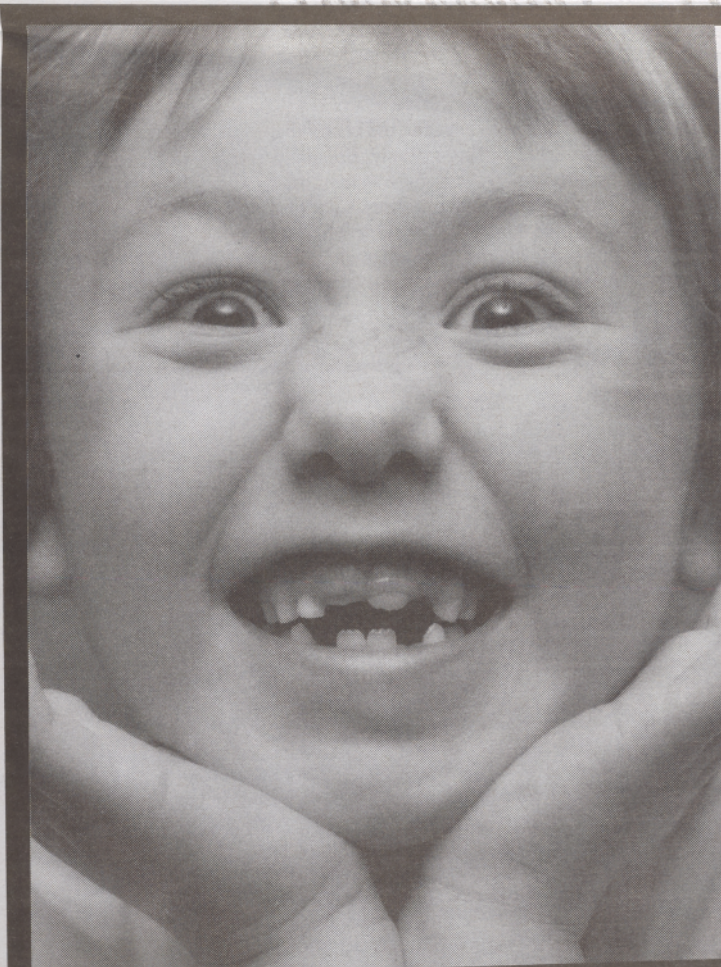
The apartment has a stove and a fridge. Friends in the Facebook group sent a pot, a coffemaker, a tea kettle and a tea pot as housewarming gifts. Srp is set.

"Some people need lots of toys, a nice house with pretty furniture," he says. "For me, it's all about the people."

Srp's final words, as we finish our long conversation: "Someone told me once that a philosopher is someone who values experience for what it teaches. That applies to me. I have been lucky."

He still has the car, and still goes out to Beaverton to visit friends. He keeps up with his Facebook group. He's getting to know his new neighborhood.

When I last saw him, he grinned and showed me he could take a few steps without the cane.



Better dental health can lead to better whole health.

A healthy mouth connects you to a healthy body. Just one of the ways we're healthier as a whole.

OHP-HSO-16-129



CareOregon®

A **health** Partner
A **share**

yourwholehealth.com