

Kindness, cruelty greet woman on street

by SCOTT NEWTON

The first time I talked to Ovella Weimer was in February. I helped her move some boxes and plastic buckets from in front of the Double Dragon on Pioneer Boulevard to a place on the sidewalk in front of the Coast to Coast Store, about 20 yards away.

During an hour-long conversation a man stopped to tell her that she was, as always, welcome to stay at he and his wife's home if she got cold.

A short time later some high school-aged boys drove by. One of them rolled down the window and yelled, "It's the bag lady."

It isn't exactly complimentary, to be called a bag lady, is about all Weimer said of the incident.

I asked if I could interview her for a story, and she said that she couldn't keep me from doing a story, but that she doesn't seek notoriety.

I didn't take any notes, and left after awhile as I had another obligation.

Friday morning I stopped and talked to her, again on Pioneer Boulevard.

After talking for a few minutes I again asked if I could interview her for a story. Again, she told me that she does not seek notoriety.

We talked for about an hour as cars whizzed by. I still had not taken any notes.

During that time we talked about Portland Mayor Frank Ivancie's "war on crime," just announced that morning in The Oregonian.

I will tell you that that plan is unconstitutional, Weimer said.

Weimer, a Jehovah's Witness during the time the Witnesses fought a number of freedom of speech and worship cases (and won favorable rulings from the Supreme Court time and again), talked about the constitution.

She also talked about life on the street, and assured me it is more difficult than I could imagine.

I told her that I would make that

point if she would let me interview her, and she reluctantly agreed.

I went to my car and got a notebook.

We walked to T.J.'s and sat in a corner booth by the window.

Weimer said that she was "forced" out of her home in Salem about three years ago.

She said that she had to sell off possessions in order to keep paying the rent, and also that people in the neighborhood were being harassed via high-frequency sound waves.

She said she had to laugh when one neighbor had a moving sale and put up a sign that read: "Moving sale hear."

She was selling cosmetics, she said, and two people placed large orders. One of them worked for the state and the other's husband worked for the county.

The delivery service would not deliver her orders, she said, saying that they could not find her home, though she went down one time and drew a map for them.

The management of the company changed shortly after that, she said.

Since the merchandise didn't come, the women reportedly demanded their money back. Weimer got the money, in part by selling a sewing machine, but it was the final straw, financially.

She said that, going door-to-door selling cosmetics, she had talked to people about what was going on in the state institutions. The women who demanded their money back were trying to get me put in jail, she said.

"I was told that if I kept talking about the state institutions I would be put in the penitentiary myself," Weimer said.

She was born in West Virginia. At five, her parents separated and her father "took" the children when her mother was away.

They "gradually migrated" to Carbonado, Wash., "10 miles from Mt. Rainer as the crow flies."

She lived there until 1937, when the coal mine closed.

"It was a lovely place, and similar to the Mt. Hood area," she said.

"Mt. Ranier was like a big ice cream cone up above us," Weimer said.

They moved to Buckley, seven miles away, where she was due to attend high school anyway.

In 1938 she was baptised a Jehovah's Witness.

In March of 1939 she quit school, during the second half of her sophomore year.

"I had gone as far as that school could school me, as far as what I wanted to do with my life."

She said that she had liked school, and had always done well.

She didn't tell her father until after she'd received an assignment from the Pioneer Ministry.

She was assigned to the Tacoma business section. "And I was still wearing bobby socks at the time, so that kind of shook me."

He father cried when she told him. "He said, 'Whatever made you think I would have stood in your way.'"

When asked if that was a gutsy thing to do, she said, "It was the thing for young people (Jehovah's Witnesses) to do."

Being a Jehovah's Witness during that time was not easy, although Weimer said it caused few problems at her school.

One incident did bother her, though. There was a teacher that she liked, who would joke and talk with her. That was, until he observed her not saluting the flag during an assembly.

About two years later Weimer saw this teacher on the street, and she spoke to her.

She had teachers who tried to talk her out of quitting school, she reports.

After three months in Tacoma she moved to Seattle, where she lived for three years and attended a "missionary school," learning history and the scriptures.

The work was enjoyable, she said. She was "planting a lot of

seed," going door-to-door, talking to families, teaching them, "reaching people."

In 1942 she moved, on her own, to Portland. She was ill and had been told to rest.

With the war on, everyone was working, and Weimer stayed with and took care of a woman who would later die of cancer.

A year later she sent for her sister, who moved to and lived in Portland until she married.

"I really liked it in Portland," Weimer said.

She also spend some time in St. Helens, but was required to earn her own keep, and so had to take jobs in Portland.

Weimer, with blue eyes and blonde-gray hair, is German, Scotch, English, Irish and, "supposedly," one-sixteenth Cherokee Indian.

Her tendencies are Scotch, she said.

In 1953, in New York, she was interviewed for a position overseas, but a heart condition disqualified her before the training program ever got underway.

"That was the dark time, when I couldn't do what I'd wanted to do, ministry work in a foreign country."

That was also before, she said, she realized that she was needed in this "so-called civilized, Christian country."

Some time after that she drifted away from the Witnesses, although she said she'd rather not go into it, except to say that there had been changes in the organizational structure of the church. She still observes some Witness holidays, however.

She brought up the Armageddon, and said that Jehovah will bring a third of the people through the fire, with people of all nations having a chance to survive.

Jehovah will begin at his own sanctuary, Weimer said.

She added, "God knows the heart. You are judged by what is in your heart."

Before, and after, the 1953 assembly in New York, Weimer worked in Wisconsin. After the assembly, when it got "too cold," she moved to Roseburg, where she worked at a state bank.

She was "checking endorsements," and knew she'd go from bookkeeping to cashiering.

"I hated it," she said.

She'd worked in a bank before, and also as a bookkeeper. What she wanted to do was work with people, and she felt she could have some success as a salesperson.

She worked at Penney's, in the Hollywood district, for some time, and then took a job at Charles F. Bergs.

Later she worked at another fashion store.

And, she said she was a good salesperson.

Because of illness, equanil was prescribed. She said they're called "don't-give-a-damn pills," and the name fits.

She said, "If I'd known then what I know now I never would have taken the medication."

She then sold dry cleaning coupons (advertising) in Salem, later worked at Penney's in Corvallis, for a ladies store in Salem, and then at a Meier and Frank.

In 1960 she started working for Avon, and was made a district manager in three months, but Weimer said she was not manager material.

After a few other jobs, and following the death of her father in 1962, she took a job in a ladies store in Salem.

In 1968 she had to have surgery, and when she was ready to go back they were laying people off.

She then took over a 400-customer magazine renewal file, and built it up to 4,000, eventually to the point where she was making \$5 to \$10 an hour. She did this for eight years.

In March of 1975 she had a heart attack, and though she tried to go back to the magazine renewal

business, she was forced to give it up.

She moved into low-income housing, and when she got well began selling cosmetics.

She said she sold a good line, and was beginning to build her business up when she was forced out of her home.

Her father taught her compassion for the poor, she said. Her principles were magnified by joining the Witnesses.

About the plight of the poor, she said, "I had no idea it was so bad till I was out on the street, and I haven't felt the brunt of it because I get a social security check."

She gets her exercise, walking, and may breathe easier since she's been living outside, she said.

And there are people, from Mt. Hood, through Sandy and Gresham and to the coast, who've helped her in many ways.

Still, she assured me, it's a difficult life for those who are forced out on the street.

We had entered T.J.'s about 12:30, and at about 2:30 Weimer had said that she needed a break from the conversation. Still, she kept allowing me to ask what I said would be just a few more questions.

About 3:15 she said that she was uncomfortable. She rubbed a spot on her head and said that she was being hit by a laser beam, that she had been uncomfortable since we had arrived.

As we got up to leave she told me she was aware of the pressures that would be on me from my editor or publisher at The Post.

I assured her I wouldn't be pressured to sensationalize.

But again, she told me that she would understand.

I paid for the coffee, and she slipped out the door ahead of me.

She walked about a block ahead of me, in the gentle rain, back to the boxes and plastic buckets, which were covered with a piece of plastic.

8 mg. "tar", 0.7 mg. nicotine av. per cigarette by FTC method.

More you.



Warning: The Surgeon General Has Determined That Cigarette Smoking Is Dangerous to Your Health.

More Lights 100s It's beige.

