

Interrupted Dreams

An evening with downtown's street crowd

One Saturday evening in September, Bobby Lee, Caroline Cummings and I went out together to spend some time with a few of the young people out on our streets downtown. Bobby is corporate communications officer for Hynix Semiconductor and a former Eugene city councilor; Caroline is resource development director for Committed Partners for Youth.



In particular, I was interested in homeless youth. We talk about the young people downtown as if they are all one group, and that is simply not true. They have the common ground of being young (well, except for those predators who hang around them).

We got there about closing time for the Saturday Market. We edged through a sea of young people with dogs, drums and kids of their own. More than a few said hi or told me that I had been the teacher of a friend of theirs. It was not a scary experience in the least. We had a few conversations. One young woman was there with the mission to look out for others and make sure they made safe choices for the evening ahead. Another had a new baby in tow and told us about trying to turn her life around. She has three children, two in the care of her parents. She said her home was good, her parents great and that she had just made years of poor choices. She faces lots of challenges right now.

A group of young men had agreed to show us around and talk with us about what it's like to be homeless in Eugene. They were now between the ages of 17 and 21 and had been "out there" for years, off and on. They showed us places where they slept. For the most part they try to find places away from larger campsites. Larger campsites attract a rougher crowd, more opportunities to make bad choices. They watch each other's backs. One of them is holding down a job, not easy with no home. He's working for that apartment.

They all have benefited from the services that can be found here in our community. Some of them took anger management training, and it did help. They were sorry when the program ended, but it is pivotal in their lives and thinking. All had gotten their GEDs and are proud of their accomplishments. All have dreams and plans, but days do go by.

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Several of these young people I spoke to had been alienated from the school system early. One resisted being labeled "special education," and another spoke of a teacher who told her she was "wasting her time in school." I am guessing none of these kids were easy students. Their lives have always been challenging, and the school setting does not exist outside of that. Each of these kids had to have a lot of self motivation just to survive. They are very well spoken.

It's strange to hear how much they love Eugene, being homeless. They feel the impact of a tougher transient crowd that comes through on a regular basis. They grieve when their favorite campsite gets trashed. They appreciate those who help them with basic services such as food, shower, clothes and education opportunities. If one of them can keep that job, then comes the apartment, then comes the future, and they are longing for it to be better.

They find most Eugene police fair. They like those bike cops. They like to know the police are around.

They collect things, they lose things. They share. They huddle together for warmth. They have girlfriends and boyfriends. They like gourmet pizza. They worry about young, very young, kids being on their own.

They forgive their parents who struggle with addiction issues. They are upbeat – at least today. They seem so capable, but years and years out there sets patterns that are hard to break. They ask what its like to be, you know, "regular." Is owning property and paying bills too stressful? Do we have stressful things in our lives? What's it like to be us?

What do they want to be? One wants to go to culinary school and be a chef. Another wants to do welding, especially underwater welding. A third wants to be a computer programmer. They all want inside but are fearful of ever getting there, and fearful of what it would be like to be there – yet they hope and dream and laugh. I believe in them. I think they will get there. They have met many challenges already. And, by the way, some of them are registered to vote.

Eugene Mayor Kitty Piercy can be contacted at kitty.piercy@ci.eugene.or.us

How to Be Happy

by Shannon Wheeler

EAT, DRINK, AND BE MARY!



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TACTICAL ERROR

I participated in the demonstration at the WOW Hall (9/28) against the performance by Jamaican reggae artist Buju Banton. It was well attended and seemingly effective until the organizers of our peaceful gathering asked us to move aside and disband before Banton even showed up at the hall. Most concert goers hadn't arrived and when they did, there was no protest presence. To many of us gathered this seemed like a tactical error. I think that at least some people, when faced with our picketing, would have reconsidered attending.

Michelle Holman
Deadwood

WHY, JIM, WHY?

I enjoyed reading the Torrey vs. Walker article (EW 9/21), especially the part revealing Torrey's contribution to the Bush '04 reelection campaign. (This is most curious, given his desire to avoid the R at the end of his name.) Prior to reading the article, I had submitted the following question (for Jim Torrey) to the City Club of Eugene, for possible use in the 9/29 debate being held at the Hilton: "The Register-Guard reported on Sept. 14 that you are an unabashed supporter of President Bush. I have also heard that you contributed money to the W. Bush election campaign. Can you tell me why you would do such a thing?"

Regardless of Torrey's motivation for backing the most powerful of the R men, I am proud to offer my support to Vicki Walker, a D woman. Your article made it clear to me that Vicki works her tail off on behalf of her constituents, and she knows best how the Legislature works. While I live in Springfield, and I cannot vote for her, she is the senatorial candidate who best represents working families. I hope that those who are able to vote for her will do so.

Meanwhile, I anxiously await the answer from Mr. Torrey, regardless of whether it is in the debate venue or in one of his allegedly non-Republican campaign ads.

Star Holmberg
Springfield

NO ON 45

Urge everyone to vote "no" on term limits (Ballot Measure 45) this fall. Term limits already exist in Oregon. They are called elections. There are really only two things a citizen of this republic has to do: Stay informed and vote. Do we really need to abdicate to an automatic process our civic duty of voting for our representatives? That is lazy and utterly lacking in personal responsibility.

The longer a legislator serves, the more experience they gain, and the better they become. We are entrusting these people to run our state. Would you trust a group of rookies to run your corporation? Would you want your first open heart surgery to be your heart surgeon's first too?

As a "rookie" school board member in Creswell, I recognize the importance of institutional memory firsthand. I often rely on the more seasoned board members to provide me with the history of a given issue. The difficulties of a system without that resource are insurmountable.

With term limits, you are taking away that experience and institutional knowledge and replacing it with bureaucrats and lobbyists. Guess who the novice legislators turn to when there are no experienced colleagues to mentor them? The lobbyists and the bureaucrats. This is not how a republic should be run.

The out-of-state donors financing Measure 45 don't believe that Oregonians can determine on their own which candidates are the most qualified. We want the most qualified leaders in the legislature. We, the voters, can make that determination ourselves without some rich intermeddler from New York and his New York-based PAC, U.S. Term Limits, telling us anything different.

Vote no on Measure 45!

C. Michael Arnold
Creswell

BAD NEIGHBORS?

While listening to my terrorist neighbor's phone calls, I heard him make reference to