

# Community Advocate Faces Eviction



PHOTOS BY WYNDE DYER/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Lynda Peoples and Eddie Hillman (above) have established a trust account for Clara Peoples (left) at Bank of America. Exasperated with confusing mortgage statements, like the one Lynda holds in her hand — showing payments have been made but only rising balances — the pair hope to get a lawyer to save Peoples' home.

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in America because of a little blond-haired, blue-eyed girl who started coming to her door each day for no reason Peoples could immediately discern.

"She'd always want to stay with me, and I had no idea why until I found out her mother was a prostitute," she said. "Then one day there were 10 other kids with her waiting out there and I thought, 'Oh my, what am I going to do?'"

What Peoples did was go into her kitchen and prepare sandwiches of peanut butter and syrup for each of the hungry children. Every day after that she made them sack lunches and sent them on their way. The crowds kept growing and before Peoples knew it, she was feeding the whole neighborhood.

Then she got an idea. After reading a newspaper article about how the government disposed of surplus crops and dairy products into the Atlantic Ocean, she thought all that food would be better put to use feeding the nation's hungry than sea life, so she booked a flight to Washington, D.C.

"I marched into the Pentagon and asked them why they were wasting all that food," Peoples said.

The Pentagon must have taken her request for food seriously, because when Peoples got back to Portland the military had delivered 15 boxes of butter, bread and canned goods stacked up outside her home.

"I never dreamed I would see it," Peoples said. "But I guess the military can do a lot of amazing things if they want to."

And so Peoples began to do amazing things herself. The next morning she emptied the boxes and distributed them to the neighborhood's needy. She began taking hungry families out to an old cannery to teach them how to preserve their food through canning and freezing. An Oklahoma native with farming in her blood, she made trips with volunteers to local farms to harvest farmers unwanted second crops.

Peoples' efforts led to a four-page feature on Community Care Association in the December 1971 issue of Ebony Magazine.

She gave people dignity by teaching them to take care of themselves.

"People don't want to wallow around — they want to stand up," Peoples said. "I taught them to survive by giving them a right to hang on and look

up, not down. I taught them that agriculture is life and life is survival."

And as for the little blonde-haired, blue-eyed girl, oh, she survived all right.

Peoples told her mother that she deserved a better life than the one she lived as a prostitute. The mother agreed and said she would like to be a nurse. Peoples had friends in high places that got the family into secure housing, enrolled the mother in a local nursing program and sent all seven children to private school.

She still talks to that little blonde girl to this day.

"She went off into the military and she's doing great," Peoples said.

Unfortunately, Peoples is not doing so well herself. Ten years ago she had to refinance her home with EMC Corp. Mortgage to help pay for her diabetes treatment. Since then, Peoples was told the company has gone out of business. She began sending her monthly checks to a new address in Atlanta, then another in Oklahoma, one

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— Clara Peoples, founder of Community Care Association

in Louisiana and, most recently, to California.

She receives monthly statements for each payment, yet somehow her balance has increased from \$128,000 to \$175,000. Peoples and her daughter Lynda both took \$8,000 from their 401K accounts to make a \$16,000 payment, but the company recently told them no payments have been received and the house will go into foreclosure on Feb. 28.

"We are all asking ourselves, 'What's going on? Where has our money been going?'" Lynda said. "We feel like we've been treated so unfairly."

Unable to make sense of the matter, they con-

tacted Optimum Mortgage for help. Employee Bernadetta Waters, who remembers getting honey buns from Peoples' back door as a child said it sounds like the family has been taken advantage of and suggested they enlist in the help of an attorney.

Unable to pay for legal fees, Peoples, her daughter and Hillman have set up a trust account at Bank of America and are planning fundraising events for the month of February.

By soliciting community members familiar with her charity work, they hope to raise enough money from donations to hire a lawyer and pay \$35,000 by the foreclosure date.

"We're going to beg — pure and simple," Peoples said. "That's all that we can do."

Lynda Peoples said her mother's health is failing and it is her last wish to spend her remaining days in her longtime house.

In spite of poor health, Peoples still serves about 4,000 needy people a month with absolutely no outside funding. Community Care Association


volunteers continue to pass out donated food to the poor at Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, located at 5828 N.E. 8<sup>th</sup> Ave., on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon.

Each morning hundreds line up in the parking lot to choose from canned goods, fresh produce, preserved meats and seafood, breads and pastries collected from local grocers, farmers, bakeries and individuals.


"Obviously people still need Mama Peoples," Hillman said.

To help join the fundraising effort to save Clara Peoples' home, contact Eddie Hillman at 503-285-6310, Lynda Peoples at 503-493-0332 or Jenelle Jack at 503-449-3790. For information on contributing help to Community Care Association, contact Clara Peoples at 503-287-7532.

Those wishing to give money for legal costs and mortgage payments to save Peoples' home can make donations in her name at any Bank of America location.




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## King's Widow Pleads for Peace

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Sen. Zell Miller of Georgia referred to King as a "native son of Georgia who changed my life, the life of my grandson and your life ... and the life of an entire nation, indeed the world, for the better. We must never forget that one person, only one person can make a difference."

Miller, a Democrat, said King was a leader whose dreams still inspire people worldwide every day.

"As we pause on this day to remember this great and noble man, let us all ask ourselves again the question ... What are you doing for others?" Miller said.

## Let it flow

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- Tackle some easy and inexpensive energy-saving projects around your house. Insulating, caulking and weatherstripping can add up to big savings of energy and money.
- Close vents and doors in unused rooms.
- Clean or replace furnace filters once a month during the heating season.
- Your heat may be going up your chimney. Close the damper as soon as your fire is safely out.
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