

The ice cream addict

Depending on whose set of statistics one adopts, there are currently between 500,000 and a million Americans who are homeless. Not counted are our neighbors who are jobless, vagrant, beggarly, destitute, down-and-out, impecunious, impoverished, necessitous, needy, penniless, penurious, poor or poverty-stricken.

And that also does not count prisoners. According to the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 2.2 million adults were incarcerated in U.S. federal and state prisons and county jails in 2013, about 1 in 110 adults. They are not homeless, because, according to the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act of 1987, "People in jail are not homeless."

I've teetered over the chasm of many of the above categories, having wintered in a tepee in the slop of a feedlot, nested in one-room tree house, lived 32 miles off the road in the high country without running water or electricity, bunked in barns, and slept in various rigs for months on end, but somehow I've always been able to find work, never taken unemployment or food stamps and have yet to be nudged over the edge into thinking I was homeless. That is not to say that it could not happen tomorrow. Recently I met a man to whom it had happened.

First, a bit of back story. Between 1998 and 2001, a group of people in Pendleton got together and came up with a plan to convert a vacated 1916 vintage Carnegie Library into the Pendleton Center for the Arts, at a cost of almost two million George

Washingtons. The same set of fingers that delivers this, your monthly word pizza, typed themselves bloody gathering some of the funding for the project.

The result sits on Main Street, just north of the Umatilla River bridge. It's a grand old dame of a building, two stories with tile roof and arched windows and stucco exterior, about the size of, oh, maybe a library. Inside is a large exhibition gallery, a performance auditorium, a crafts sales gallery, board room, big meeting room, and a basement full of teaching studios for all kinds of artsy pursuits.

Trust in Allah but tether your camel. As one deterrent to camel thieves, the Pendleton Center for the Arts is wired for security with motion detectors, smoke detectors, cameras, and a few spy-in-the-sky doohickeys pasted to the ceilings that look like half of a pantyhose container. From the desk at which I ply my grant writing craft, I can look at a screen and tell you who is coming through the front door. I first saw Jim on that monitor.

He walked slowly through the double doors, took three steps, spotted the plastic donation box that holds maybe twenty singles on any given day, then began staring heavenward at the circular stained glass skylight. Sixty-some years old, gray beard, green janitorial pants, off-white short-sleeved shirt, black Keddys, and a camo ball cap with a either a cross or plus sign in front. I arose from my cushy office chair and limped out to greet him.

"Howdy. Can I help you?" I asked. "I thought this was a church," he said. His eyes kept wandering from the ceiling

back to the donation box, then jerking away, like it was a striptease act he wasn't supposed to watch but simply could not resist.

"Nope, art center. There's a church across the street, though. What you up to?"

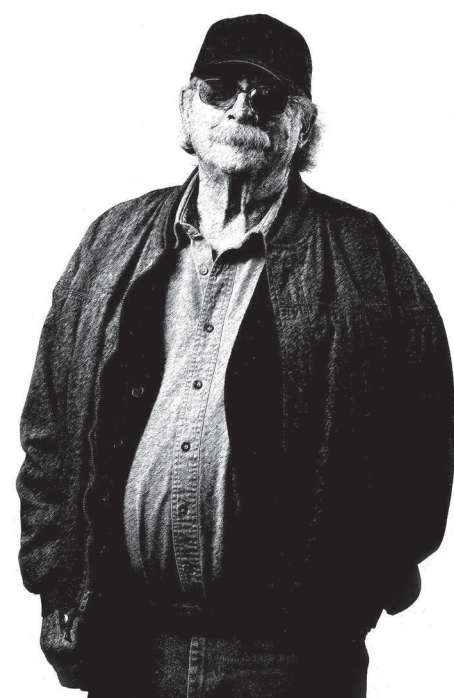
"Oh, I just came from the Salvation Army. I'm Jim, from Bend. My ex-wife is out here in the hospital and I came to visit her. Was going to bring the van that I been living in, but it is a gas hog, so I spend a couple of days putting doors and a shell on an old Toyota pickup truck so I'd have a place to sleep. I've been parked down by the river west of town, but it is out of gas and the police want it moved. Something about a three day limit. They are going to impound it if I can't move it by this afternoon. Pretty much everything I own is in that truck. The folks at the Salvation Army said they don't do gasoline and that I should try some churches. I thought this was a church."

Now, I've been panhandled by the best, ranging from "Gimme five bucks. It ain't the last five you are ever going to see" to "I'm raising money for the Pope's widow." But I am an easy mark because, deep down, I believe that someday when I am sleeping on a park bench under a newspaper blanket and needing a few bucks for a croissant and double latte, the great cosmic cash register will recognize my credit account and open to my needs. So I gave Jim twenty bucks and wished him the best of luck.

Three hours later, I was locking up the barn to head down the long dusty trail toward home and found Jim sitting on the front steps with a little bundle of papers in his hand. "Here are your receipts," he said. I told him I didn't expect an accounting of his expenditures, that the money was a free will offering from one human being to another.

"There was a day when the \$20 would've gone straight into cheap whiskey, but I turned a sharp corner twenty years

"I consider ice cream to be one of the essential ingredients of life and would never hold a mint chocolate chip addiction against anyone."

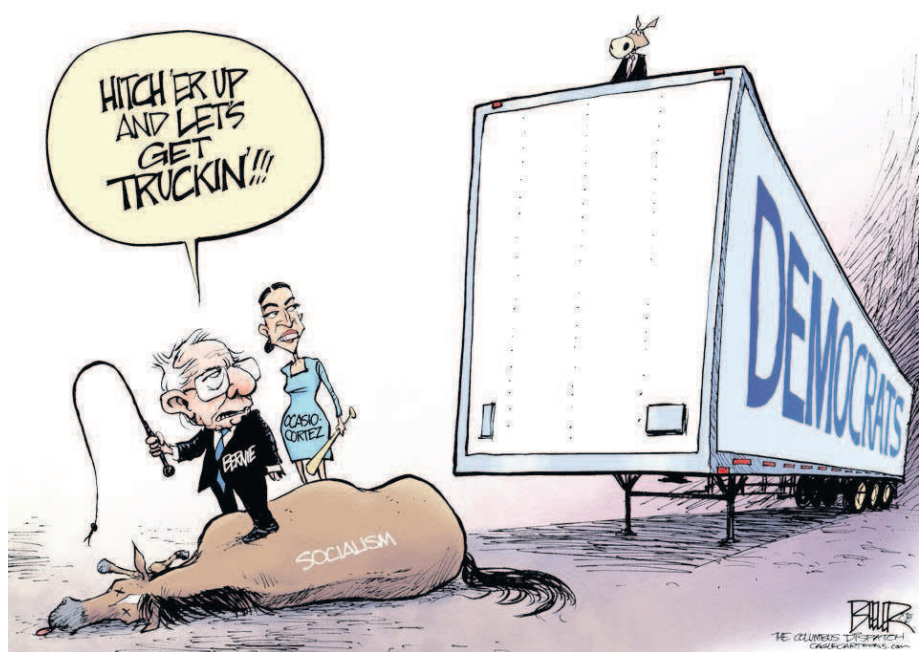


J.D. SMITH
FROM THE HEADWATERS OF DRY CREEK

ago when I lost a son. I didn't want you to think that you bought me a bender. You will see here in the receipts that \$10 went toward gas from the Chevron station. They loaned me the can. And \$5.50 went toward groceries, mostly noodles. Then I spent two bucks in the laundromat, but I gotta confess that the last \$2.50 went for a double dip of mint chocolate ice cream at Baskin Robbins. Hope you don't hold that against me."

"No sir," I said. "I consider ice cream to be one of the essential ingredients of life and would never hold a mint chocolate chip addiction against anyone."

J.D. Smith is an accomplished writer and jack-of-all-trades. He lives in Athena.



Horses need our help

"A horse is the projection of peoples' dreams about themselves — strong, powerful, beautiful — and it has the capability of giving us escape from our mundane existence." — Pam Brown

Every morning at breakfast time, through our dining room window, down the hill and across the road, in fog or rain or snow or sunshine, we watch while six horses are turned out of their barn. Immediately after crowding through a narrow gate, they race across a tree-lined pasture, and it seems clear that these animals are well aware of their strength and power, perhaps even of their beauty, and that, once set free, they gallop joyfully simply because they can. Pam Brown, quoted above, is correct when she says that horses have qualities many humans envy, and that their mere presence can somehow offer us an escape from our everyday lives.

For decades, we have run and hiked along southern Oregon's rural roads and seen ample evidence supporting Brown's assertion. A remarkable number of the 21st century Americans who live in pastoral settings and can afford to build fences keep horses, often for no readily apparent reason.

The iron horse began displacing the four-legged kind long ago and mounted cowboys have virtually disappeared. Despite the fact that industrialization has made working animals nearly obsolete, a lot of people still want to own their own horses. Unfortunately, too many of those horse owners end up neglecting their responsibilities, resulting in the abuse and neglect of tens of thousands of strong, powerful, beautiful animals.

The half-dozen horses we love to watch from our breakfast table, along with dozens more, reside at the Equamore Horse Sanctuary, a nonprofit a few miles east of Ashland, Oregon. Equamore, which is funded by donations, has a mission "to provide a safety net for unwanted, abused, abandoned, neglected and aged horses who are without alternatives for their care, while fostering compassion and responsibility for horses through education, outreach and intervention."

In 2016, the county sheriff was called to a notorious southern Oregon property, where horses were kept in poorly fenced enclosures with no shelter, and often without food and water. The owner was persuaded to relinquish a horse named Arlo to Equamore. Arlo was near death when he arrived at the sanctuary, at least 300 pounds underweight, with a concave

rump, a visible spine and a coat falling out in patches.

But he survived to become what the Equamore newsletter, NeighSaver, described as "a magnificent black thoroughbred gelding with a regal bearing and a sweet personality." Since 2016, four of the six horses that remained on the infamous southern Oregon property have died, and as yet the owner has suffered no consequences for his neglect.

Another horse, Gandalf, was named after the powerful wizard in The Lord of the Rings. As a young stallion, he joined an untrained and unmanageable herd of stallions and mares on private property in Northern California. By the time his owner agreed to turn him over to Equamore, Gandalf had lived his entire life doing his best to defend himself from the herd's dominant stallion. Once he was safe at the sanctuary and the severe wounds inflicted by the domineering stallion had healed, Gandalf was gelded, and became a healthy, happy animal.

The day we called to arrange a meeting with Linda Davis and Ruth Kennedy, Equamore's executive director and president, they had just put down a horse named Sara. "She was literally starving when we took her in," Davis said. "It's always heartbreaking to see them go, they're all like family, but we were glad to be able to give her 10 good years."

"We have 56 horses here now," Kennedy explained. "We used to adopt some of our horses out, but the success rate was too low." More often than not, he explained, "they ended up with owners at least as irresponsible as the ones they came from. The estimate is there are about 170,000 horses mistreated or neglected in America. Law enforcement agencies rarely offer much help. They have tight budgets and other priorities. One big problem is that horses are classified as livestock. Dogs and cats are so-called companion animals, so they get far more protection by the law.

"There's no easy solution," Davis added. "Our need to raise money is relentless. But we've been doing what we can here for 27 years."

We took a slow walk through the barn before leaving for home. It was feeding time, and the only sound was satisfied horses chewing alfalfa hay.

Hilde and Michael Baughman are contributors to Writers on the Range, the opinion service of High Country News (hcn.org). They live in Ashland.



Pills a pain for celiac sufferers

It all started with an offer to take a tour of the Tillamook Cheese plant in Boardman with Congressman Greg Walden. I had been on a tour of the plant about 10 years ago, but as an elected county official always appreciate face time with my congressman.

My daughter Sara, who lives in Reno, Nev., was vacationing at our house and agreed to come along. Our touring group was small, and afterwards we reconvened in a small conference room to sample Tillamook's products and have a round-table discussion.

Sara, like many of my family members, suffers from celiac disease, an autoimmune disease caused by a reaction to the gluten protein found in wheat, rye and barley, affecting approximately 1 percent of the population. As I looked at the allergen information on the packaged products, I asked Sara if she could consume anything because of her allergies. This started a conversation about food labeling and the difficulty faced by people with allergies, and celiac in particular. Sara pointed out that processed food was difficult, but you could always opt out, and the larger concern was with prescription medications.

At this point we had Greg Walden's attention. Sara explained that typically the doctor would prescribe the medication, and when asked if it was gluten free, would refer you to your pharmacist. The pharmacist can sometimes confirm the ingredients, but more often than not refers patients to an internet search or, in rare instances, directly to the drug manufacturer.

Congressman Walden commented that Dr. Scott Gottlieb might be visiting his district soon, and offered a potential follow-up conversation with him. I'll admit that I didn't know who Dr. Gottlieb was, and later learned he is the commissioner of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. I appreciatively accepted the opportunity.

In early August, Sara and I were invited to attend a meeting with Walden and Dr. Gottlieb in Bend. My assumption was that 50 or so people would attend the meeting and it would consist of local elected public officials and medical professionals from Central Oregon. I wasn't sure how much time we would have allotted to us, but Sara agreed to make the 7-hour drive from Reno to meet me and my wife Susan, who also has celiac disease.



DON RUSSELL
Comment

The morning of the meeting, Sara and I arrived a few minutes early to our hotel conference room that was much smaller than anticipated, joining a handful of other early attendees. The few we introduced ourselves to indicated that they represented large pharmaceutical manufacturers. Shortly thereafter, Walden, Dr. Gottlieb and additional staff members arrived. There were only about 12 people in the room and a round of introductions revealed representatives from Oregon Health Science University; Sara Russell, consumer advocate for a day; and a half a dozen people representing the pharmacy industry. We were given the floor for about 15 minutes, and when I say we, I really mean Sara.

Sara worked as a pharmacy tech for nine months when she was going to college, and now works in the insurance industry in Reno with a heavy emphasis on group medical coverage. She told the audience that as a well-informed consumer she had difficulties finding out if the medication prescribed was safe for her or her 7-year-old son to take. It's not the active ingredient that's the problem, rather the filler ingredients that make it a pill. Ingredients like starch, cellulose, Vitamin E or caramel coloring are all red flags for potential gluten sources. Everyone listened intently and understood the problem.

Dr. Gottlieb indicated that the FDA has included suggested wording to specify gluten in a working draft that may be finalized soon. Sara asked if suggested wording was strong enough to ensure execution, and was quickly told by the representatives present from the industry that FDA suggestions are taken very seriously. Sara also proposed that the FDA regulate labeling consistency and placement for products advertising as gluten-free to ease frustrations many consumers experience when grocery shopping, which was well received by the FDA representatives for future consideration.

It was a great opportunity for Sara and me to advocate for the estimated 3.5 million people in this country who have celiac. I'm also certain that if Walden were not the chair of the Energy and Commerce committee for the House of Representatives, it would not have happened.

Don Russell is a Morrow County Commissioner and lives in Boardman.