

# FORUM

## More than mere annoyance, homeless are reflection of us

By MICHAEL STOOPS

LAST NIGHT, I was talking to a friend, Charlie, a homeless, 60-year-old, late-stage alcoholic.

"Charlie," I asked, "People have been asking me about the concerns of the homeless. What should I tell them?"

Charlie pondered, then responded: "Tell them we're out here dying on the streets."

"Isn't there something optimistic I could tell them, some happy message?"

After a long silence, Charlie answered: "Yes. Tell them we want to live."

Since the founding of Baloney Joe's night shelter in 1978, thousands of homeless men, women and children have crossed our doorway seeking survival-oriented social services. From the doorway, I began to notice that the same people would appear night after night.

I would ask one standard question: "How come you're out on the streets?" In most cases the refrain would be: "Nowhere to go."

Last winter, I asked Mary, who is 40, "What does it feel like to be out on the streets?"

"It hurts," she said, "Because you're not wanted anymore."

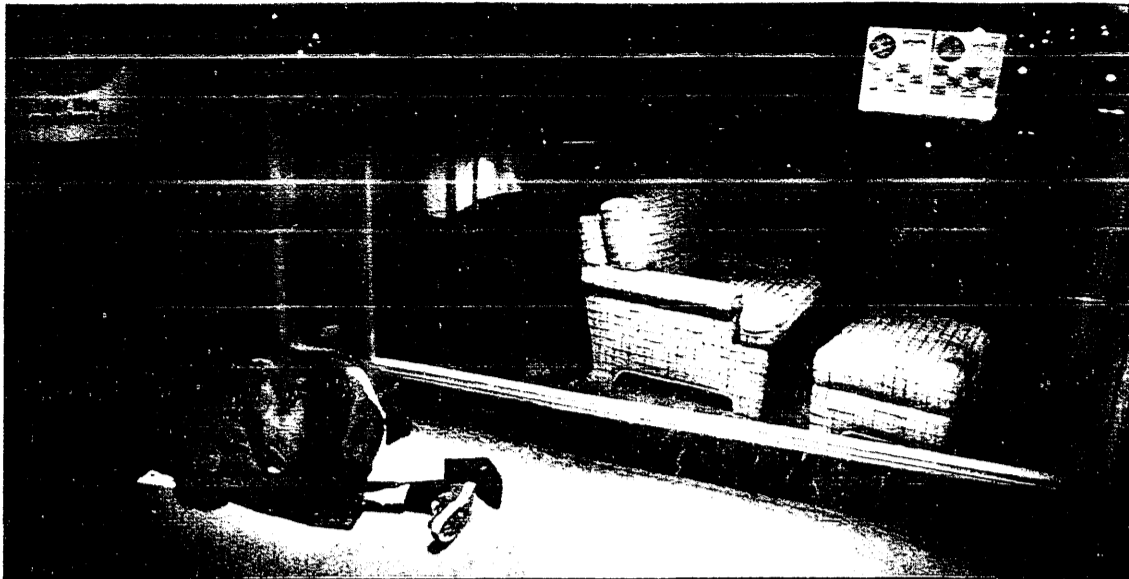
Mary seriously wonders whether or not she and other homeless people are part of a social experiment designed to see how long people can survive without food and shelter.

Daily, I observe men, women and children eating out of trash cans, seeking shelter in cardboard boxes, under bridges and along the Willamette River. I have seen people sitting in bus stations pretending they're waiting for someone to arrive.

In Portland, one of the most beautiful and livable cities in the country, people are living like animals.

Portland is rapidly becoming a Tale of Two Cities: one for the rich, and one for the poor. In this lopsided Tale of Two Cities, ours is a tale of misery.

How many people are homeless in Portland? In the metropolitan area alone, estimates run from 3,000 to 6,000. Estimates are



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misleading because the homeless are difficult, if not impossible, to count; they are embarrassed and afraid.

When this population was contained within the Burnside area, it remained virtually invisible to those outside the area. But as the population diversified and increased, the homeless have ceased to observe the old geographical restraints. Today, hardly a section of Portland, urban or suburban, has escaped the presence of ragged, ill and hallucinating human beings, wandering city streets in search of survival.

The homeless person of the Portland area is almost always described as a derelict with mental problems. The image of the "dirty, lazy, drunken bum," or "the free-spirited hobo" is no longer appropriate.

In 1985, the homeless are the senile, the autistic, those who talk to God and to themselves. There are those who cannot tie their

own shoelaces without assistance. There are amputees and double amputees, the lame, the sick and the blind.

Some are families. Some are children living alone in a cruel, hard, violent and selfish world, destined themselves to become cruel, hard, violent and selfish. Many are young. Most are black or brown. Many are veterans of our wars, especially the Vietnam War, scarred and angry.

Homelessness can happen to anyone. If you suddenly had no money, if you had no family or friends, and if you were to go home right now to be thrown out or have the door shut in your face, where would you sleep tonight?

Would you do exactly what everyone else does here? You are a human being with needs. If you were out on the streets, you would freeze to death in the winter. You would be going after the garbage, and you would learn many things. You would learn where to get a

drink of water, or where to use the bathroom.

When we realize that homelessness can happen to our loved ones or even to ourselves, matters get complicated. When people other than old men, drunk or sober, wind up on the streets, such as young able-bodied men and women, women fleeing from their abusive husbands, and whole families, we then realize that homelessness is an issue for us all.

These homeless are on our streets without resources and without choices. They are walking tombstones, with their epitaphs already chiseled into the shadows of their eyes.

They are ghosts sleeping with yesterday's newspapers thrown around them for covers at night. The hardness of life on the streets is found in the bodies of those who freeze to death or suffer frostbite and the amputation of arms and legs; in the pathetic bundles of homeless people who huddle all night in the

doorways and in the many people who go to the Burnside shelters and are turned away because there is no room.

Some people say the homeless are on our streets because they choose to be. That is a lie. No one chooses to be homeless.

We have a complacent middle class in Oregon that is used to the presence of the homeless and hungry. Instead of a compassionate approach to its fellow citizens, it is gradually becoming imbued with social Darwinism: Let the weak perish, throw them out of the lifeboat.

George Bernard Shaw was correct when he said: "The worst sin toward our fellow creatures is not to hate them, but to be indifferent to them: That's the essence of inhumanity."

If you had to face the next five months on the streets of Portland with cold hands, fingers falling off because of frostbite and gangrene, if you had to figure out how to live through the next five months without your family, with no place to go, you would be doing more than ever before to help the homeless.

How easy it is to walk past the homeless. A quick glance and twinge of emotion — anger or guilt or compassion — and then we move on at a slightly faster pace. Too long a look would be too open an admission of responsibility.

If 3,000 of Portland's own citizens were suddenly displaced by an earthquake or volcanic eruption, a disaster would be declared. The Oregon National Guard would be mobilized, and massive relief efforts would be under way. But in the face of a far greater calamity, our city creates task forces to come up with recommendations.

It is imperative that we do something today — and most certainly in the next few days — to provide both food and shelter to people, because it is now cold in Oregon.

For us to solve the problem of widespread homelessness in our community, we need to scream at ourselves, and not at God, for allowing people to lead such desperate lives.

When we start treating the homeless like our friends and family and loved ones, we will no longer tolerate people being homeless on our streets.



## Cynical summit watchers are pumping expectations

By ELLEN GOODMAN

BOSTON — It's a little bit like getting a prescription for a crash fitness program. Here we are, just days away from the summit, and the government wants Americans to shape up their attitudes for the big meeting. It is trying to convince us to lower our expectations.

Expectations, it appears, are the political blood pressure of the nation. The sober pronouncements coming out of Washington are all designed to keep the pressure down. George Shultz, Robert McFarlane and the rest of the Geneva Health Brigade are afraid that they'll return empty-handed and send us all into a state of shock.

In toning our attitudes for the summit, one of these leaders has stolidly pronounced that he feels "hopeful but not optimistic" about any arms agreement. Another has warned that the two leaders may not even be able to sign a joint communique. Even the normally ebullient, wood-chopping, muscle-flexing president seems subdued about the possibilities for summitry.

It doesn't take too much energy to abide by the presidential fitness program for summit watchers. There are at least three easy ways to lower the expectations of the average American in no more than a few minutes a day.

The first exercise is called Recycling. What you have to do is set your stationary recycle at 20 to 25 mph and listen to the old tapes of the president. Hear him as he confuses one missile with another, mixes the John Birch Society writings with those of Lenin and tells the British press that there is no word for "freedom" in Russian.

Next comes Transcontinental Meditating. To perform this exercise, you sit on the floor with your legs crossed, fingers raised and eyes glued on the book published this week under the byline of Mikhail Gorbachev. You now concentrate on any of the solenoid platitudes more suitable for mantras than meaningful negotiations: "Peace is the most important goal of the

Communist Party and the Soviet state."

Ooooooooooooo.

The third exercise is the relative new technique called Imaging. To perform this one, you merely close your eyes and think of Reagan and Gorbachev alone in a room with a translator. Now imagine Reagan saying "human rights" and Gorbachev saying "space weapons." Imagine Reagan saying "evil empire" and Gorbachev saying "imperialist capitalism."

Imagine silence.

If you do enough repetitions of these three exercises, you will be in exactly the shape they want you in by Nov. 19. Depressed. Hopeless.

Well, spare me, but I don't want to sign up for this workshop. I don't think that the average American needs to lower his or her expectations. From what I see, the pressure is already so low that we're nearly comatose.

Americans do not expect their president to come down from the Swiss mountains with a tablet or timetable for doing away with all or even half the nuclear weapons. Only a handful of the most idealistic dare to hope for a modest agreement that would end testing.

Our wish list is already pathetically meager. We would like to believe, please sirs, that those with superpower would exercise some real power to stop the arms race. We'd like to believe that there could be a meeting of the minds that focused on the wild proposition of mutual survival. We'd hope that both countries would step back from a policy of mutual bankruptcy.

In short, the only adrenaline that rushes through our bodies when we think of the meetings ahead comes from a wild and crazy desire. We want the future to look better on the way down from the summit than it does on the way up. We don't want them to blow this chance.

The secret of the body-building politic is that dealing with government is bit like dealing with children. Every time you lower your expectations, they lower their performance. You may protect yourself from disappointment, but you also get nothing.

I don't think we should prep for the summit by pumping iron, even iron curtains. But if we don't raise the public pressure, the whole trip will turn into the most useless kind of exercise, an exercise in futility.



GOODMAN

## Fear of flying doesn't extend to space

By MIKE ROYKO

THE REPORTER was calling long-distance and said he was taking a survey of journalists. His question caught me completely off guard.

"Are you going to apply to be one of the newsmen to go on a space flight?"

Go on a what?

"A space flight. They are going to be making applications available in a few weeks. And I'm surveying journalists in different parts of the country to see if they are going to apply."

You mean getting into a rocket and going to outer space?

"Yes. The newsmen are going to be selected from five regions of the country."

Well, I haven't given it much thought. But as long as you mention it, I'll check my schedule. If the space flight doesn't conflict with a Cubs-Mets series, I'm sure I'll apply.

"Traveling through space wouldn't be a problem to you?"

Not at all, I said, concluding the interview.

Later, I mentioned the call to someone I've worked with for many years. He laughed and said:

"Why did you lie to him?"

I didn't lie.

"But you don't fly. You have a phobia about flying. You've written about it many times."

That's not entirely true. I flew from Washington, D.C., to Chicago as recently as 1976.

"Sure, after somebody took you to the National Press Club, fed you 10 martinis and poured you on the plane."



ROYKO

An exaggeration. It was only eight. And they weren't martinis. Just plain vodka on the rocks, with a lemon twist for my sunshine vitamins.

"Whatever. But that's the only time I've known you to fly."

Also untrue. In 1959, I rode a helicopter to cover a story. In my youth, I rode the Bobs in Riverview Amusement Park six straight times without getting off. And I recently went to the 95th floor of the Hancock Building for lunch.

"That doesn't exactly make you Chuck Yeager. C'mon, you're deathly afraid of flying."

Another misconception. I have never been afraid of flying. Flying is perfectly safe. It's the thought of crashing that has restricted my air time.

"I don't see the distinction."

It's obvious. It doesn't happen often, but airplanes do occasionally run into mountains, bridges and power lines, or miss runways and land in rivers, swamps, harbors or on somebody's roof. And while I accept that we all have to go sometimes, I've always looked ahead to passing on quietly and peacefully, in my bed, surrounded by my children and grandchildren, dabbing their eyes and looking mournful in hopes that I left them a little something in my will.

"But space shuttles take off and land, too."

Ah, but they go straight up. Whoosh and they're on their way. And they land in remote wastelands where the runways are about 90 miles long and there's nothing to hit but a few lizards.

"Yes, but you're going so far up, beyond gravity."

Exactly. And what's out there to hit? No power lines. No mountains. No bridges. No dumb birds to fly into the whatchamacallit. No tiny private planes getting in your way like a bunch of gnats. No lightning, no storms, no gusts of wind.

As far as I can tell, the only thing to worry

about up there might be a strange spaceship carrying alien creatures who look like calamari.

"But the question is, why would you want to do it?"

Wanderlust. Curiosity. The desire to see what few others have ever seen. I've been to the Wisconsin Dells. I've been to the Fontainebleau in Miami Beach. So what's left?"

"I believe you're serious."

You can bet on it. And when the applications become available, mine will be one of the first they'll receive.

"But are you sure that when the time comes to put on the spacesuit and actually climb aboard the spaceship, you will really have 'the right stuff'?"

The question is whether the people running the operation will have the right stuff.

"What do you mean?"

About eight fast ones on the rocks, with a twist of lemon.

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## Russell's ribs

FROM ALL REPORTS leading up to the summit there seems to be no framework or agenda on arms control. Therefore, all that is left is to engage in — to use diplomatic parlance — winging it.

"Look, Mikhail — let's knock off the bolshoi. We both know that neither one of us is going to budge an inch. So, that in itself is an agreement, right?"

"Is true, Mr. President. Can you not also agree to stop calling us evil despots on the ash heap of history if we stop saying that your John Wilkes Booth was a tool of the CIA?"

—By Mark Russell

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## Workfare idea, too, will become passe

By WILLIAM RASPBERRY

WASHINGTON — Well, of course "workfare." How could we ever have deceived ourselves into believing there was some other rational way of delivering relief checks to able-bodied adults than by letting them work for it?

New York is but the latest state to adopt this "obvious" notion, now sweeping the country. Giving people what they need, without requiring any exertion on their part, is absurd policy. It seems so clear to so many of us now that we imagine we've always known it.

Well, we haven't always known it, and it is far from settled that it always has been true, no matter how irresistibly logical it now seems.

I offer you an insight given me by Evan Kemp of the Disability Rights Center when I asked him to explain to me why the word "disabled" had supplanted the equally serviceable "handicapped" in describing people with physical impairments — and why "handicapped" had replaced "crippled," and so on.

Forget logic, Kemp told me. Acceptable designations for a particular out-of-favor group keep changing every so often until that group becomes a respected part of society. "As long as



RASPBERRY

a group is ostracized or otherwise demeaned, whatever name is used will take on a demeaning flavor and have to be replaced."

It is my guess that the same thing applies to social programs. We change our ways of dealing with people in need for the same reason we change what we call people who are confined to wheelchairs. Approaches, like terminology, run their course and are abandoned, not because the approaches were wrong, or because the problem has changed, but because too long an association with a problem gives the solution a bad name.

Charity used to be a private affair. The needy would seek aid from a well-to-do patron and, in effect, propose a contract. The needy would get cash or other help. The provider of that help would get a heady combination of deference, free labor and a sense of his own saintliness. It worked for a time.

But then it must have occurred to us that reducing the poor to hat-in-hand mendicancy was not a good thing. Better to institutionalize charity, both in order to reach all those in need — not everyone could find a decent patron — and also to remove the pride-destroying elements of the private arrangements.

And so we got public welfare, and that worked too — for a while. Welfare soon developed its own "shaming" system, providing an incentive for those who could exist without the dole to do so but also humiliating — and crippling — those who couldn't. Then came "welfare rights," a worthwhile effort to remove the

shame from dependency, followed by the slow recognition that the absence of shame had its own costs, including a disincentive to seek gainful employment.

That's about where we are now. We have rediscovered truths so obvious that we wonder how we ever lost touch with them: That work is the only non-corrosive means of gaining income (at least for the poor); that you cannot remove the sting of charity without also removing the incentive to independence; that you cannot produce industry by rewarding sloth.

These things, plus a newly keen sense of the social danger involved in breaking the connection between working and eating, have led us to see "workfare" as the only reasonable way to go — even though it will cost more, not less, in tax dollars, as a result of day-care and other services.

I think the new conclusion is correct, but I also suspect that it is temporary. We may well wake up some years hence to discover the high costs — and the high failure rate — associated with trying to "transform" the poor. It might occur to us that the only reasonable thing to do is to establish eligibility and mail checks.

You can almost write the column or newspaper editorial right now: "Do we link Social Security checks to the behavior of the recipients? Then why don't we handle welfare that same simple, efficient, and logical way?"

Evan Kemp wouldn't be the least bit surprised.

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