

The face of need

Mind lost in delusion leads woman to Baloney Joe's

By LAUREN COWEN

Correspondent, The Oregonian

Karen Arnold pulled a moldy sandwich from her shopping bag and wedged her way into the room, which smelled of stale beer. She tugged at the sandwich with her teeth and looked up with a mixture of defiance and delusion.

Around her at Baloney Joe's were the faces of the homeless, scarred by the wear of the search for basic necessities. Many of the older men stared at their food and fumbled with half-smoked cigarettes. The younger men and women mostly talked of plans to build a new life, while three children, none older than 7, crawled between the legs of strangers who had become their roommates.

Arnold crouched in the corner of what has been her home since last March.

At 32, she has no job, no income, no family as far as she is concerned and no real friends. She often wears a mask of normality, showing her intelligence, her extensive vocabulary and the evidence of her upbringing in a comfortable home in a wealthy California suburb. But with alarming frequency, Arnold drops the mask, revealing a woman who is struggling to hold on — not only to her few possessions but also to her sanity.

"It's very difficult to do anything here. I want some privacy — I need some privacy," said Arnold, twirling her hair from underneath her winter cap. "I want a university education, but I think I'm going to go to the

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Olympics. Did I tell you that I knocked three people out in the park the other day because they were going to start a revolution?"

Arnold is homeless and mentally ill. She's not alone. According to researchers at the Oregon Health Sciences University, up to one-half of those who are homeless are in need of intensive psychiatric care, a number that has increased dramatically in the last 10 years as laws governing the institutionalization of the mentally ill have been revised to protect patients' rights.

Discharge records from Dammasch State Hospital in Wilsonville do not show how many patients are released to the street or emergency shelters. What they do show is that about half of the patients discharged in October were released to unstructured settings where they were not getting additional care. Dammasch, a medical center for the mentally ill, serves a six-county region that includes Multnomah County.

"I think you could say there are a great number that land on the street," said Dr. Richard Rollinson, clinical director of Dammasch. "All of us are frustrated by the situation, that probably half of those who need to be served."

Homelessness and mental illness are interacting problems. Being without food and shelter and living on the street in constant fear or in public shelters without privacy can wreak havoc on even the most well-adjusted minds. For those who are already in need of medical attention, the stress can smash the fragile gains of therapy.

For some the problem involves mood disorders, such as severe depression. For others, like Arnold, who has been diagnosed as a paranoid schizophrenic, the problem is a thinking disorder — a disorder especially worsened by stress.

"This is a great problem for the individual," said Dr. Daniel Casey,



Karen Arnold, who has been diagnosed mentally ill, reflects on her life on Portland's streets.

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chief of psychiatric research at Veterans Administration Medical Center and a professor at Oregon Health Sciences University. "These people are not able to be advocates for themselves, and yet they are the least likely to get help."

Officials say Arnold's story is painfully typical. She spent most of her life in and out of California-based institutions until she persuaded a judge that she was able to care for herself. Her parents and the hospital staff testified otherwise. Last spring, she packed her bags, told her parents not to try to find her and came to Portland. She believes, often, that she is involved with a famous person or that a government

agency is after her.

It was not always that way.

Karen Arnold grew up in Marin County, Calif. Her father, Gerald Arnold, was in the retail clothing busi-

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ness, doing well enough to move his wife and new daughter into a four-bedroom home and join the local country club. Her mother, Ardythe, now a real

estate agent, was president of the local Parent-Teacher Association and a Girl Scout leader.

Interviews with Karen Arnold and her parents, who now live in San

and loved fairy tales, especially "The Sleeping Beauty." By the time Arnold was in the third grade, she was perceived as so bright that her elementary school elected to have her skip two grades.

"Whatever happened to Karen, it certainly didn't start out that way," said Arnold's mother. "She was everything you could want in a child — bright, caring. She always made me something on Mother's Day. I still have all the cards she gave me."

But by the time Arnold was 13, her parents said, she had become increasingly isolated and withdrawn, displaying an excessive preoccupation with public figures and violent news events.

She had trouble relating to anyone and began experimenting with drugs.

In 1968, when teen-agers and parents were put at odds by the war in Vietnam, Arnold withdrew into herself, alienating herself from the real world. Her parents said they had no choice but to have her committed. A week later, doctors in the psychiatric ward of Marin County General Hospital told the Arnolds that their 15-year-old daughter suffered from paranoid schizophrenia, a mental disease of unknown origin that can be controlled and abated but never fully cured.

"I thought it was the worst day of my life," said Ardythe Arnold. "Had I known what would come, I would not have thought that."

Both Casey and Rollinson emphasized that people do not become schizophrenics because they are on the street. But often, they say, the disease is so difficult to understand and handle that the schizophrenic ends up on the street, alienating anyone who tries to help.

For the next 15 years, Karen Arnold's life followed a dangerous cycle in and out of hospitals. Once out of hospital programs, Arnold's parents say, she grew increasingly violent and belligerent. She refused to take medication deemed necessary to control the hallucinations and delusions. But in a more lucid moment, Arnold convinced a judge that she was an adult who was capable of caring for herself.

"That's a horrible scene, those sanitariums," said Arnold. "I'll never go

"I want a university education, but I think I'm going to go to the Olympics."

back there, but Keith Richard (lead guitar player for the Rolling Stones) is trying to put me there because I'm more famous than he is."

Last spring, she told her parents that she was leaving and did not want to see them again. She took money she had collected from Supplemental Security Income payments and flew to Portland.

"After all these years, I don't know her anymore," said Arnold's father. "We've had so many violent episodes, so much horror, she's a stranger to me, and I won't let her stay in this house anymore."

Karen Arnold sees it another way: "My parents were horrid. They kept throwing me in institutions, so I just left."

How and why Arnold came to land at Baloney Joe's emergency shelter at 313 E. Burnside St. is unclear. She said her car and all her belongings were stolen. Her parents said they have been told not to send her money, and Arnold refuses to apply for disability payments because she said it makes her feel like a parasite.

All she wants, she said, is a home of her own and a job so that she can go back to school and pursue her dream of being a teacher.

"I don't need any counseling. What I need is a job," Arnold said.

Indeed, she spends much of her time applying for jobs. In one day, she walked up and down six blocks of the downtown area and inquired about jobs in nearly every retail outlet or office. Between stops, she stood on the street and asked for money, watching most people pass her by. Two persons stopped to ask if she was all right. More often, people looked and then told her to get a job.

She picked up her two bags holding all her belongings and started walking down the street.

"Where am I going?" Arnold responded to the question with frustration. "Why, my dear, I'm going home."

Council candidate sees life from both sides now

By RICHARD READ

of The Oregonian staff

After a year and a half living in a Dodge van, Barry L. Bloom says there are two sorts of homeless people.

"You have the citizen homeless, who are on the street because their life has been snatched away from them due to joblessness or some kind of handicap," Bloom said. "Then you have your transient homeless, who are seeking stability, their own level of understanding or their own self."

The 42-year-old Sunday school teacher counts himself among the latter, having stuck to a conscious decision to live in his yellow-and-red van in the streets of Northwest Portland.

"I'm not the typical street person," Bloom admitted. "I don't have a handicap, I'm capable of working, and I'm educated."

Until last year, Bloom lived beneath conventional shelter like most other Americans. He had lived in an apartment in Milwaukie before Northern Telecom Inc., his employer of one year, reassigned him to work as a digital service engineer in Omaha, Neb.

Finding Nebraska not to his liking, Bloom returned to Portland in March 1984, camped in his van and began job hunting. In one day, he distributed 47 resumes downtown, peddling his 11

years of experience as a telephone repairman in Cleveland.

Bloom, who has an undergraduate degree in elementary education from Pennsylvania's Clarion State University, was unable to find a suitable opening through various employment programs. He turned his attention to volunteer work helping other homeless people and began developing a more-or-less comfortable lifestyle on the streets.

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Bloom, a grandfather estranged from his three grown children in Cleveland, used food stamps for a while and then found occasional day labor and collected cans for deposits.

"I did a lot of reading, things that I had wanted to do for many years," said Bloom, the son of a teacher. A blond, blue-eyed man with a gentle smile, Bloom dressed in clothes found at Goodwill or scavenged apparel from dumpsters.

"I probably shouldn't say this, but I am a Christian, and I do believe that

it's not left up to me to decide how my meals are provided for me or how my needs are met," Bloom said.

"How they are met I really don't worry about too much," he said. "If I needed a meal now, I would just wait until one came along. My last meal was yesterday at the First Presbyterian Church."

Bloom volunteers three days a week as a host at the drop-in center at the church, teaches Sunday school there

and works at least one night a week at a shelter for homeless people.

He cooks occasionally in his van, which he inhabits alone. He moves the vehicle to a new spot whenever residents of nearby homes ask him to leave.

"In summer it's really nice in the van," Bloom said. "Now it's a little bit different."

Bloom said he had about \$900 in the bank as a reserve, the result of a suit he filed in Multnomah County Circuit Court against a bank that said he was

too financially unstable to open a checking account. The suit was settled out of court in August, said his attorney, Roy E. Elicker.

"Up to this point I've wanted to stay as I am," Bloom said. "Now I've decided what direction I want to go."

Bloom has filed to run in 1986 for the City Council seat to be vacated by Commissioner Mildred A. Schwab. He plans a low-budget, grass-roots campaign advocating housing and assistance for homeless people.

"I understand both segments of society — people with homes and homeless people — because I've been in both positions," he said. Bloom, who said he was director for three years of a day-care center in Pennsylvania, also supports bond issues to build a network of day-care centers in Portland.

He is opposed so far by Norman J. Rosenbloom, 5329 N.E. Hancock St., a retired Portland police detective.

Bloom said he was seeking the council position in order to help others. The job's \$50,860 annual salary would enable him to move into a house, but that result would be secondary, he said.

Asked how much he knew about running a \$700 million-a-year city bureaucracy, Bloom said, "Probably as much as the rest of them."



Barry L. Bloom, who is running for the City Council, lives in a van.

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