

To 'The General Public' or 'Whomever thinks this doesn't concern them'
2020 Ignorance Ave
5000

IN viewing this crumbling metropolis for what it really is, from a place of new-found privilege. I can spot the revolving door of poverty from a mile away. It creeps up on you, as you remain blinded, until you realise it's the first night of the rest of your life... on the street. It hits all together like a symphony of despair. The first night is the worst, that first shiver is stunning, as you realise the hole in your pants serves as a way for the freezing air to sneak in and rob you of any warmth you had. At about midnight, you hear the echoes of partners and patriots, making their way home in folly. Meanwhile the square of concrete your bony arse occupies, doesn't seem to be warming up, despite the 45 minutes you have been sitting there. It suddenly clicks in your head, "cardboard! That's why they always have the cardboard". Yes, it all hits at once, the depressing realization that you are the 'bottom of the barrel', a phrase you didn't fully understand until this moment. The moment of acceptance that you have zero, nothing, nil. Nothing but the cold night ahead and the inconceivable notion that despite your efforts to mold yourself into an established minion apart of the society that has drastically let you down, you are in fact HOMELESS.

I do often cry when I give that night too much thought. When I allow that memory of hopelessness to fully wash over me. Terrible feeling, no matter what position of 'security' I find myself in at present. I find no solace in the romanticism of my 'struggle', my transformation from 'zero to hero' does not appease me in any way, nor should it you. Those three months still loom heavy in my mind, heavier still when I think of all the people that are still out there as the weather starts to get teeth chattering cold. For most it's an inconceivable notion, to have no-where to go, no-where to be safe, no-where to call home. For some, it's a reality, a reality of constant improvisation to survive, to somehow fit into a system that sticks to a vigorous routine with zero room for the offcuts. A confronting reality, where the only way out is to stumble upon some kind of anomaly, that fits you back into the cogs of capitalism. Then once you are out or in, depending on what way you look at it, the world has changed from what you once knew and you truly wonder if life was better before, when at least some things made sense.

It was ten years ago, I, by some miracle (not that there are such things) slipped back into 'secure living'. After much thought I have concluded that I was just at the right place at the right time to get off the streets. I won't bore you with the details, because they are not essential. What is essential, is what has been done since and what still needs to be done.

I am hesitant to claim that the homeless population has largely been eradicated, because it hasn't. I am also hesitant to say that it is a problem we face as a society, because A: the only people that actually face it are the people who are truly homeless and B: I don't see it as a problem. I would like to think of it as an opportunity, for a radical and much needed perspective shift. I must admit, the perspective shift has seen progression since my time and into a positive space it must continue. Educating the idle public should still remain high on the priority list. The current work tackling the ostracisation of people on street is feeding well into the work whereby there are an increased number of places people can go to get out of the weather. However, it is still treated as problem and again I must emphasise the need for a perspective shift to that of 'opportunity'. These people are alive, through pure grit and self-directed determination, to say they have nothing to offer society but burden is churlish and the height of ignorance. These people must be celebrated as a testament to human will, no longer viewed as 'bottom rung' citizens.

In closing, I am contrastingly optimistic and pessimistic for what the future holds. I do see more and more people trading in their cardboard for brick boxes and from their brick boxes to bigger brick boxes and so on. However, I do remain skeptical for the strategies that don't go beyond getting people off the street, the current strategies are myopic in that they don't provide support after 'the cardboard trade in'. The next step: full integration into society is not accounted for. There is no 'next step' in their future. This needs to change to avoid getting caught back into that aforementioned revolving door.

Think heavily about perspective and long term solutions to the opportunity that is homelessness.

Calling for more action,
I remain skeptical but dangerously optimistic,

Patience Commoner.

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