

Homeless for the Holidays

It was very early on a foggy, cold, wet, Christmas carol, London type of day. I was approaching the Municipal Auditorium. As I was approaching the building I passed a young hooded homeless couple pushing a shopping cart full of recyclable bottles and aluminum cans from the parking lot. It was starting to rain and they were very bundled up. Not only did they pick up recyclables among the cracks in the pavement of the parking lot, they went up and down and combed the banks of the levee on both sides.

These are hard times for so many. I see people on a daily basis, both young and old, alone and in groups, going through garbage cans and dumpsters searching for recyclables and scraps. I've seen it for years in the parks, and not just in Oroville but in other city parks that I've worked for. For years I've seen people camping out along the bike trail, at Bedrock Park, under the Highway 70 bridge, under the Highway 162 bridge, and in just about every park – both City and District owned. But nothing like I've seen it now. The couple reminds me of the Christmas Carol ghosts of Christmas Past and Christmas Present. Hopefully it's not an indication of the future.

These are difficult and desperate times. It's difficult because people should not live in the parks, and it is certainly no habitat for humanity that they have to search for a place to live. It's hard to enforce the park rules when you see somebody that has no home or money sleeping under a bush. My heart goes out to them.

I've encountered many of these individuals over the years. There is the blonde who rides her bike all over town. There's Tiny Tim who sits on the steps of different churches and in front of the post office. There are other people that I'm sure you have observed. Recently there is one person that I have seen in and out of the parks for a couple of years, although he is usually at Bedrock Park. He has lost a lot of weight over the past several months. He is not in good health. I saw him on the corner of Cal Oak Road and South 5th Avenue with his plastic bag full of belongings and a duffle bag. I had to stop. I gave him five dollars, and told him to get something to eat. I told him I was concerned about him and his deteriorating health and asked him to take the money and to please spend it on food. He nodded, and walked on.

It is this time of year that we realize the true essentials in our lives. Everybody has to decide what those are. For me they are happiness, health, family, and friends. I've realized more as I've gotten older that these are the things in life that are truly important.

So when you hear the bells ringing in different parts of town, contribute what you can if you can, even if it's just a handful of hay pennies. Think about the true meaning of the holidays. Keep the true spirit of the holidays alive in your mind, on your lips, in your spirit, and in your heart. Peace and love be with you.

Quote

"The city streets are wet again with rain.
But I'm walkin' just the same.
Skies turn to the usual grey.
When you turn to face the day.
And love don't show up in the pavement cracks.
All my watercolours fade to black.
I'm going nowhere and I'm ten steps back.
All my dreams have fallen flat."
~ Annie Lennox, *Pavement Cracks* (from the album *Bare*)

"God bless us every one!" ~ Tiny Tim, *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens

"Look, Daddy! Teacher says, every time a bell rings an angel gets his wings." ~ Zuzu Bailey, *It's A Wonderful Life*

Red Kettle History

courtesy of TSA - DFW Metroplex

In 1891, Salvation Army Captain Joseph McFee was distraught because so many poor individuals in San Francisco were going hungry. He resolved to provide a free Christmas dinner for the destitute and poverty-stricken. But how would he feed 1,000 of the city's poorest individuals on Christmas Day? He thought back to his sailor days in Liverpool, England. He remembered how there was a large, iron kettle where the boats came in called "Simpson's Pot" into which passers-by tossed a coin or two to help the poor. The next day he placed a similar pot at the Oakland Ferry Landing, along with a sign that read, "Keep the Pot Boiling." He soon had the money to see that the needy people were properly fed at Christmas.

Six years later, the kettle idea spread from the west coast to the Boston area. That year, the combined effort nationwide resulted in 150,000 Christmas dinners for the needy. In 1901, kettle contributions in New York City provided funds for the first mammoth sit-down dinner in Madison Square Garden. Today in the U.S., The Salvation Army assists more than 4 1/2 million people during the holidays.

Captain McFee's kettle idea launched a tradition that has spread all across the world. Public contributions to Salvation Army kettles enable the organization to continue its year-round efforts at helping those who would otherwise be forgotten.

Upcoming Events

Dec. 24 – **Free Christmas Dinner** at the Municipal Auditorium, 1-4 p.m.

See you in the parks!