The House of Charity:
A Survival Shelter for Homeless Men
Spokane, Washington

Jerico Brian Cairns

Washington State University

Honors Senior Thesis
*******************************************************************************
PASS WITH DISTINCTION

Honors College Senior Thesis/Project
UH 452: Community Service Project

April 13, 2001
Dedicated to the staff at the House of Charity for all of the selfless service they provide for Spokane's homeless
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April 17, 2000

Jerico Cairns
213 NW Timothy #2
Pullman, WA 99163

Dear Jerico:

I am pleased to inform you that the Honors College Senior Thesis/Project Committee has reviewed and approved your proposal for UH 452 "Healthcare Needs of Spokane's Homeless: How are they Being Addressed?" We understand that Dr. Samantha Swindell will be your supervising faculty, and that she has endorsed your proposal.

We look forward to reading your final paper and scheduling a presentation of your work for the Honors Faculty and students. You will be notified about oral presentation times over the UHC Flash. Please choose a time that is also convenient for your advisor to attend. Your final paper must be submitted at least two days before your oral presentation.

Good luck with your Senior Project. If questions or problems develop while you are working on your project, please contact me.

Sincerely,

Libby Walker, Ph.D.
Assistant Director

cc: Dr. Samantha Swindell
April 10, 2000

MEMORANDUM

TO: Jerico B. Cairns, Honor College
FROM: Nancy Shrope (for) Dennis Garcia, Chair, Institutional Review Board
SUBJECT: Review of Human Subjects Protocol

Your Human Subject Review Summary Form and additional information provided for the protocol titled "Healthcare Needs of Spokane Homeless: How Are They Being Addressed?," IRB No. 4125 was reviewed for the protection of the subjects participating in the study. Based on the information received from you, the IRB has approved your human subjects protocol on April 10, 2000.

The IRB approval indicates the IRB's belief that the human subjects protocol as presented in the Human Subjects Review Summary Form by the investigator, is designed to adequately protect the subjects participating in the study. This approval does not relieve the investigator from the responsibility of providing continuing attention to ethical considerations involved in the utilization of human subjects participating in the protocol. This approval is valid through April 9, 2001. If any significant changes are anticipated in the study please notify the IRB before implementation.

In accordance with federal regulations, this approval must be kept by the principal investigator for THREE years after completion of the project.

WSU's Assurance of Compliance with the Department of Health and Human Services Regulations Regarding the Use of Human Subjects can be reviewed on OGRD's home page (http://www.ogrd.wsu.edu/ogrd1/) under "Electronic Forms," OGRD Memorandum #6.

Review Status: XMP
Date Received: 04/10/00
OGRD No.: na
Agency: na
Healthcare Needs of Spokane’s Homeless: How are they Being Addressed?

Community Service Project Proposal
Summer, 2000

Jerico B. Cairns

April 10, 2000
Healthcare Needs of Spokane’s Homeless: How are they Being Addressed?

In order to fulfill my Senior Thesis/Project requirement for the WSU Honors College, I have chosen the Community Service Project option. This summer I will volunteer at the House of Charity in Spokane, Washington, for approximately six weeks. The House of Charity is a “survival,” homeless/transient shelter for men ages 18 and older provided by Catholic Charities, Inc. The term “survival” means that its main purpose is to provide the basic necessities necessary to support life: food, water, and shelter.

The purpose of this project is two-fold. First and foremost, I will assist in supporting the general operations of the shelter by performing various volunteer duties. These include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. Working at the front desk:
   - answering the phone; taking messages
   - checking in the men’s personal belongings
   - assisting the men as they do their laundry
   - providing towels, razors, and other toiletry items to the men
2. Working in the kitchen:
   - helping prepare meals
   - helping serve meals
   - assisting with cleanup and other janitorial-type duties

This volunteer service will provide some much needed assistance for the daily demands that the shelter must meet. I have also requested that I be permitted to follow some of the staff throughout their workday as part of my volunteering. Thus, it is my intention to “shadow” the counselor, case worker, registered nurse, and other volunteers provided by the House of Charity as part of my project. This should give me some further insight into the type of resources provided by the House of Charity.

The second part of my project will be to examine how the healthcare needs of the homeless population, specifically males, are being addressed in Spokane. I will analyze the mental and physical healthcare services available to individuals who are unable to pay for it. I will also attempt to get in touch with contacts I have at Sacred Heart Medical Center in Spokane to learn about types of treatment provided to those without insurance, or those without sufficient income to cover such costs. Moreover, the director of the shelter has granted me permission to administer a survey, take photographs, make videotapes, and record observations made during my experience. The purpose of such data will be to accomplish the following goals:

1. Identify the types of healthcare services currently offered free of charge in the Spokane area
2. Identify the manner in which homeless individuals and others with little or no income are assisted in covering the costs for medical related bills
3. Examine what types of healthcare services are or are not provided; of those not provided, determine what types of healthcare needs are not being addressed
4. Use the results of this survey to make recommendations about the need for new programs, and the need to improve upon existing services.
5. Provide interviewees with an opportunity to contribute any information on their experience(s) with homelessness

Note, however, that the use of human subjects in my project will only be employed upon approval from the WSU Institutional Review Board (IRB). I have submitted the attached survey (including cover letter and verbal consent script) and interview questions (including consent form) to the IRB and I am awaiting approval. In having already spoken with that office about my intentions, and shown them preliminary drafts of those documents, they assured me I would not have any difficulty getting approval.

A log of the hours I will work will also be maintained, along with a journal detailing my experience and reflecting on my observations. Attached you will find a list of potential works I will consult in constructing my thesis paper of the entire project. Some of the references have been provided by Dr. Samantha Swindell, my faculty advisor, and others are some I have contributed.

The specific dates I will volunteer will be from about the 6th through the 27th of May, and then again in August from about the 1st through the 25th. In May, I will be working at West 9 Main Avenue in downtown Spokane. In August, there is the possibility that I might be relocated to a newly constructed shelter expected to be completed in July. Its location is only blocks away from the present site of the House of Charity.

My interest in this project comes from a variety of sources. Much of it arises from past volunteer experiences. Over this last spring break I not only volunteered at the House of Charity for two days, but I also slept there overnight during that time. It gave me the chance to meet some of the men who were completely dependent on the shelter and witness first hand the type of needs they have. Similarly, I served as an Emergency Department volunteer at Sacred Heart Medical Center in the summer of 1998, where I frequently noticed homeless individuals would arrive seeking treatment for a host of ailments. Aside from those experiences, I’ve always felt a type of personal obligation and responsibility to assist others, particularly those facing such extreme hardship. In conclusion, I feel this opportunity will be invaluable experience as I pursue a career in Emergency Medicine, as well as in gaining a more general understanding and acceptance of others.
Works to be Consulted


Other Possible Videos:
Entertaining Angels
Through a Blue Lens
Romero
Hello, my name is Jerico Cairns, and I am an undergraduate, Honors College student at Washington State University. I am collecting data for my senior research project on the healthcare needs of homeless individuals, and I would like to ask you for your help on answering a few questions for me regarding the medical treatment you have received in the past, and manner in which the costs of it were covered. The purpose of this study is to accomplish the following goals:

1. Identify the types of healthcare services currently offered free of charge in the Spokane area
2. Identify the manner in which homeless individuals and others with little or no income are assisted in covering the costs for medical related bills
3. Examine what types of healthcare services are not provided, and of those, determine what types of healthcare needs are not being addressed
4. Use the results of this survey to make recommendations about the need for new programs, and the need to improve upon existing services and resources

Your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions you may find objectionable. Your participation in this survey should take about 10 minutes. This study has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at WSU. If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact the WSU IRB at (509) 335-9661 or Jerico Cairns at (509) 332-2281.

(Jerico Cairns)
Hello, my name is Jerico Cairns, and I am an undergraduate, Honors College student at Washington State University. I am collecting data for my senior research project on the healthcare needs of homeless individuals, and I would like to ask you for your help on answering a few questions for me regarding the medical treatment you have received in the past, and the manner in which the costs of it were covered. Your participation in this survey should take about 10 minutes.

These date will be strictly confidential and I will not record your name. Also, your participation is completely voluntary. You are free to not answer any questions you may find objectionable, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or pressure to continue, just by letting me know you would not like to continue any further. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at WSU. If you have any questions about this research project, you can contact the WSU IRB at (509) 335-9661 or myself at (509) 332-2281.

Are there any questions about my study that I can answer for you at this time? Would you like to participate in my study?
Survey:

1. Your Age: ______

2. Your Sex: Male or Female

3. Race or Ethnic Background: (circle one)
   a) Black/African American    b) White/Caucasian/European American
   c) Hispanic                 d) American Indian, Eskimo, or Aleut
   e) Asian or Pacific Islander f) Other ________________________________

4. Are you homeless?: Yes or No
   If yes, how long have you been homeless: ____________________________

5. Do you possess any type of medical coverage (e.g. health insurance, other)?
   Yes or No
   If yes, please describe:
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

6. In the event that you need medical attention, where do you typically go for it?
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________

7. What method(s) do you use to pay for the medical attention you receive from that
   listed in the previous question (#6)? (circle all that apply)
   a) Insurance
   b) Completely Free of Charge
   c) Cash
   d) Have someone else pay for it
   e) Provided through a service (e.g. DSHS, etc.)
   f) Reduced Rate given
   g) Other (please list):
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
   __________________________
8. On a scale of 1 to 7, how well are your healthcare needs met? (circle one)
   Bad ................................. Good
   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

9. Approximately how many times per month do you visit a doctor, nurse, or counselor for some form of treatment? (circle one)
   a) 0 times  b) 1-2 times
   c) 3-4 times  d) 5-6 times
   e) 7-8 times  f) 9 or more times (please estimate: ______)

10. What form(s) of medical attention do you typically receive? (circle all that apply)
    a) mental health counseling
    b) wound/infection treatment (e.g. bandages, gauze, tape)
    c) respiratory treatment (for breathing problems)
    d) medication(s) refills
    e) routine check-ups/physicals
    f) emergency treatment (severe trauma, injury, etc.)
    g) Other ____________________________

11. What types of medical services (counseling, doctors/nurses) are available to you if you’re unable to pay?
    __________________________________________
    __________________________________________
    __________________________________________
    __________________________________________
    __________________________________________
    __________________________________________

12. How do you think they could improve?
    __________________________________________
    __________________________________________
    __________________________________________
    __________________________________________
    __________________________________________

13. Do you have any existing medical bills? Yes or No
    If yes, approximate amount(s): ________________

14. Please write any additional comments you would like to make in the space below:
Hello, my name is Jerico Cairns, and I am an undergraduate, Honors College student at Washington State University. I’m collecting data for my senior research project on the healthcare needs of homeless individuals and homeless life. The purpose of this study is to accomplish the following goals:

1. Identify the types of healthcare services offered free of charge in the Spokane area
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3. Examine what types of healthcare services are not provided, and of those, determine what types of healthcare needs are not being addressed
4. Use the results of this survey to make recommendations about the need for new programs, and the need to improve upon existing services.
5. Provide you with an opportunity to contribute any information on your experience(s) with homelessness

The information in this consent form is provided so that you can decide whether you wish to participate in this study. It is important that you understand that your participation is completely voluntary. This means that even if you agree to participate, you are free to withdraw from the experiment at any time, or decline to participate in any portion of the study, without penalty or pressure to continue.

As a subject, you’ll be asked to answer a few questions for me regarding the medical treatment provided to homeless individuals and your experiences with homelessness. In addition, you will be videotaped while you speak, so that your responses can be shown to others at a Senior Thesis/Project Presentation in the Fall of 2000 and so they can be used for educational purposes. These videotapes will be placed in a locked file cabinet in my office until that time. During this period only Jerico Cairns will have access to these tapes.

This experiment poses no known risks to your health. Your participation will take approximately 20 minutes. If you have any questions not addressed by this consent form, please do not hesitate to ask. You will receive a copy of this form, which you should keep for your records.

Thank you for your time.

(Jerico B. Cairns, (509) 332-2281)

CONSENT STATEMENT:

I have read the above comments and agree to participate in this study. I give my permission to be videotaped, under the terms outlined above. I understand that if I have any questions or concerns regarding this project I can contact the investigator at the above location of the WSU International Review Board at (509) 335-9661.

(Participant’s Signature) (Date)
Interview Questions (Open-Ended):

1. What is your age?
2. What is your race or ethnic background?
3. Are you homeless?
4. How did you become homeless?
5. If yes, how long have you been homeless? If no, what is your experience with homelessness and homeless individuals?
6. Would you please describe in your own terms what it is like to be homeless (e.g. describe an average day)? What do you do with your time?
7. What is done to you if you’re caught sleeping outside?
8. Where have you traveled while homeless? What’s offered in other areas to the homeless?
9. How do you feel other people view you or react to you? What do they do when they see you on the streets?
10. Do you feel people who aren't homeless can relate to you or other people who are?
11. What is it like not having a place of your own (e.g. a place without interruption, with protection, etc.)?
12. Do homeless people choose to be homeless? If yes, what might be some possible reasons why?
13. How many people do you think are homeless in Spokane (men, women, and children)?
14. What do you feel is most important for people in general to know about the homeless?
15. How would you describe your present situation?
16. What kind of temptations, pressures, situations do you encounter on the street?
17. Where do you go for food, water, shelter, and/or protection during the year? What is available in the Spokane area? How well does this place(s) address your needs?
18. Are you required to work or perform some other duty in order to receive help from this place(s)? If so, please describe.
19. Are there any other stipulations/requirements placed on you before you can receive food, shelter, etc? (e.g. religious, work, etc.)
20. What would you do without places like the HOC? Where would you go for showers, laundry, food, etc?
21. What do you think of the staff at the different shelters and agencies in Spokane?
22. Do you have any disabilities (physical or mental)? Do you think they have contributed to your present situation?
23. Are you a veteran? If yes, please specify.
24. Are you able to work? Are you employed?
25. How long have you been employed or how long have you been without work?
26. Is most of your employment temporary work? Are you paid "under the table?"
27. Are you married, or have you ever been? Do you have any children?
28. Do you possess any type of medical coverage (e.g. health insurance, other)? If yes, please describe.
29. In the event that you need medical attention, where do you typically go for it?
30. How many times would you guess you visit a doctor, nurse, or counselor a month?
31. What method(s) do you use to pay for the medical attention you receive?
32. What types of medical services (counseling, doctors/nurses) are available to you if you’re unable to pay? Please describe.
33. How would you rate them overall?
34. How do you think they could be improved?
35. Do you have any existing medical bills? What are the approximate amounts?
36. If you could change your situation, would you want to? What resources or people are available to help you do so if you wanted to? Or, what would you need to escape homelessness (assuming you want to)?
37. Can you tell me about your future plans? Where will you go from here?
38. Do you ever volunteer to help the staff at the shelters? Would you help if you were asked?
39. Do you ever pan handle or beg for food, money, or work?
40. Do you feel other people ought to help you? Is it their job or responsibility to do so? Do you want them to?
41. Have you ever been to jail or prison? If so, what for?
42. Do you have any form of transportation (e.g. car, bicycle, etc.)?
43. Does your family help you out with your situation? How do they feel about it?
44. Do you have any questions for me?
45. Please feel free to make any additional comments you would like.
Hello, my name is Jerico Cairns, and I am an undergraduate, Honors College student at Washington State University. I'm collecting data for my senior research project on the healthcare needs of homeless individuals and homeless life. The purpose of this study is to accomplish the following goals:

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3. Examine what types of healthcare services are not provided, and of those, determine what types of healthcare needs are not being addressed
4. Use the results of this survey to make recommendations about the need for new programs, and the need to improve upon existing services.
5. Provide you with an opportunity to contribute any information on your experience(s) with homelessness

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This experiment poses no known risks to your health. Your participation will take approximately 20 minutes. If you have any questions not addressed by this consent form, please do not hesitate to ask. You will receive a copy of this form, which you should keep for your records.

Thank you for your time.

Jerico Cairns

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(Participant’s Signature)  5-26-00

(Date)
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Jerico Cairns
(Jerico B. Cairns, (509) 332-2281)

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(Participant’s Signature)  5/19/00
(Date)
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(Signature) 5/19/00
Part I: An Overview of Homelessness

The persistence of homelessness in America is a problem for which we are all partly responsible as citizens of this great nation. “Homelessness is a recurring disaster in the United States, affecting millions of people, including children” (Hubbard, Lives 7). Whether we are conscious of it or not, we as a collective group contribute either directly or indirectly to one of the greatest social problems plaguing this country. Consequently, we all have a moral obligation to help those who are less fortunate. By working to help alleviate the pain and suffering of these individuals, our lives will become enriched by our shared experiences.

As with any problem, before we can identify a solution we must first define the problem and recognize the exact predicament that we are in. Unfortunately, defining homelessness is somewhat easier than the much more daunting task of solving it – which is usually where we encounter more difficulty. According to the Washington State Governor’s Task Force on Homelessness, “the term ‘homeless’ or ‘homeless individual’ includes a person or persons who lack a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence” (11). The Task Force has expanded and modified the definition of the term ‘homeless’:

It also includes persons whose primary nighttime residence is either a supervised public or private shelter designed to provide temporary living accommodations; an institution that provides a temporary residence; or a public or private place not designed for, or regularly used as, a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings (11).

But is being ‘homeless’ the same thing as being ‘houseless?’ What constitutes a house or even a home for that matter? Joanne Passaro’s answer to these questions is that being ‘homeless’ entails much more than simply being ‘houseless.’ In her opinion, the
former is as much a cultural and moral location as it is an economic predicament (Unequal Homeless 1).

It seems reasonable that her contentions are correct. Based on my limited experiences with the homeless, money and income, or lack thereof, is only one explanation of why people are without houses or homes. For instance, my father presently lacks a house, or at least what people typically think of when they hear that word. Ironically, although he is a carpenter with over twenty years of formal experience, he resides in a one-room shack at a marina in Everett, Washington. Of course, he does so by choice.

Although he earns just over $50,000 annually, he prefers to live simply in order to support three of his children who are attending college full-time. In addition, he has invested part of his earnings in materials to build a forty-some foot catamaran that he hopes to eventually live on. While he might consider himself currently “houseless,” by no means would he characterize himself as “homeless,” nor would he feel comfortable ascribing to that identify. It is obvious then that the conventional use of the term “homeless” can be deceptive. This also reflects the lack of consensus among researchers, scholars, and politicians in defining “homelessness.” What is equally distressing for some is having to consider that one might choose to be homeless, especially since it is contradictory to the standard concept of the “American Dream.”

Despite our lack of a fixed or concrete definition of homelessness, we can still examine historical data in order to gain a better understanding of the true issues surrounding homelessness. In doing so, we quickly realize that homelessness is not a new problem. “Some people seem to believe that the current homelessness problem is
unprecedented in American history, but homelessness has surfaced as a significant problem many times in the past” (Wright et al. 21). As is the case with most other societies, American society has always experienced some degree of homelessness amongst its population. We know from recent historical research that homelessness dates back to at least the Colonial era, if not earlier. Since then, this country has experienced a series of waves of homelessness. The Great Depression era and the late 1970s and early 1980s are just two examples of time periods were homelessness “reappeared on the national scene” (Wright 29).

In addition, we find that new trends are emerging in terms of the “character” of homelessness. The face of homeless individuals has changed dramatically since the 1950s and 1960s. Today’s homeless are younger (the average age somewhere in the 30s), most are relatively well educated, and increasingly more are racial and ethnic minorities. In fact, racial and ethnic minorities (or non-whites) are heavily over-represented when compared to whites in the “new homeless” – a term used to describe the dramatic transformation that has occurred within the complexion of the homeless population within the past twenty years (Wright et al. 22; Wright 30).

Other distinctions that can be seen between the homeless of then and the homeless of now are changes in gender, substance abuse, and economic circumstances. For example, there are a sizeable number of women among today’s homeless population. Coupled with this is the presence of a significant number of homeless children and adolescents. Moreover, the stereotype of the homeless as being substance abusers is actually a fallacy. Rather, evidence suggests that alcohol and drug abuse by the homeless is declining. Finally, the homeless are economically more destitute. The estimated
annual average income of today’s homeless is significantly less than of those from the past. Only recently were these dramatic differences identified (Wright et al. 22). Given this broad perspective of the homeless are, a closer examination of the root causes of homelessness is in order.

Many people, including specific organizations and government agencies, have theorized about the cause(s) of homelessness. Most propose similar and sometimes overlapping ideas on how people end up on the streets. The Washington State Governor’s Task Force on Homelessness describes how this might occur:

For most people, homelessness is the end result of a series of crises, both financial and personal. They have exhausted all the resources which people use when hard times hit. They are often separated from extended families and communities. (9)

However, the fact remains that there is not a single cause for homelessness. Although we know multiple “causes” exist, it is important to realize that various conceptions of “cause” exist and they are sometimes used indiscriminately and interchangeably (Wright et al. 9). Homeless persons are not a homogenous group, and the reasons for them being in their current state are as varied as they are.

So why then should people feel obligated to help others? Well, the answers are numerous. Some people simply feel a personal or moral obligation to help those around them. Others share their sense of compassion and respond in the same manner. And yet for others it takes something more to persuade them that it is worth their time, effort, and/or money.

In order to get this last type of person to help you have to convince them that it is in their best interest to do so. Whether they get a tax write-off for their donation or relief out of knowing they helped improve the lives of others, it is paramount that they help
contribute to the cause. With more support from those within positions of power and influence problems that appear insurmountable become easily solved.
Part II: The House of Charity

Aside from the occasional encounters with the homeless on the streets (mostly panhandlers asking for my money), my first real, direct experience with homelessness resulted from my participation in Urban Plunge. Advertised as an alternative spring break program for college students, Urban Plunge was an “immersion experience” that provided me with an opportunity to volunteer at several social service agencies in Spokane, Washington while serving the poor. Made possible through Washington State University’s Common Ministry and the St. Thomas More Catholic Newman Center, the program cost only $30.00 and lasted four days, March 15 – 18, 2000 (Wednesday through Saturday).

Amongst a group of approximately eleven other college students, all devout Catholics, I traveled to Spokane where I spent the next four days volunteering. Our time was distributed between several social service agencies. My service was primarily divided between the House of Charity and Habitat for Humanity. I found my experience with the former so interesting, challenging, and rewarding that I decided I wanted to return to help do more. Consequently, I made arrangements within the next couple of weeks to return that same summer in order to continue volunteering. The idea was also to incorporate my Senior Thesis Project for WSU’s Honors College into my time spent there.

The House of Charity is best described as a survival shelter for homeless men. The term “survival” simply means that the shelter’s primary purpose is to provide the basic necessities required to sustain life: food, water, clothing, and shelter (or protection
from the elements). In addition to this, the shelter also provides free medical care, case management services, and mental health counseling. At the same time, the shelter's staff serves as an advocate for the homeless. Located at the corner of Division and Main Avenues, or more specifically at 9 West Main, the shelter operates from 8:00 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., Monday through Saturday.

Other services include those of the front desk and the emergency winter sleeping program. Patrons visiting the shelter are able to use the front desk for a variety of their needs. They may store their personal belongings or “gear” with the shelter’s staff for either part of a day or overnight (with the exception of Wednesday night). A free telephone is provided for local calls only. Laundry detergent and a washer and dryer are provided for use free-of-charge. Hot showers are also available at no cost and towels can be checked out with a form of identification. The House of Charity may even be used as a personal mail drop. The Emergency Winter Sleeping Program operates during November 15th and March 15th and can sleep up to 55+ men.

The mission of the shelter is to welcome everyone and make them feel at home regardless of their physical or mental condition. This “liberal, open-door policy” accepts even those individuals who are drunk, high on drugs, or mentally ill. The only stipulation is that guests are prohibited from fighting, drinking, smoking, or using drugs within the shelter or on its property.

The House of Charity is actually one of many agencies that fall under Catholic Charities. Catholic Charities, in turn, is run by the Catholic Diocese of Spokane – the largest private charity in the region and largest provider of social services in the Inland Northwest (“Catholic Charities” B2). With 10 programs in 37 locations throughout
Eastern Washington, Catholic Charities assists over 100,000 low-income people each year (McBride, “Bishop” B1)

Owned and operated by Catholic Charities, the House of Charity shelter has been a not-for-profit social service agency that has been in service for nearly 40 years. The Spokane Diocese’s tradition of providing food and shelter to the homeless dates back to 1958. That year Roman Catholic Bishop Bernard Topel, a champion of the poor, sold the 13-room bishop’s mansion and moved into a four-bedroom home. The money gained from the sell was used to purchase a building at 526 N. Washington (what is now Riverfront Park in downtown Spokane). Here the House of Charity was founded with its mission to feed and clothe the poor (McBride, “Food” A13; McBride, “House” A16).

Initially the shelter was ran by a couple of Franciscan brothers, the Brothers of the Third Order of St. Francis. Then, in 1969, the Diocese announced that the House of Charity was going to be permanently closed, “citing a decline in religious men taking vows to serve the poor “ (McBride, “House” A16). It wouldn’t be until 1974 that the House of Charity would reopen. The Diocese used the money from the sale of the original shelter to buy a building at 9 West Main Avenue. With the coming of Expo ’74 to Spokane, this site served as a better location for the facility that would now offer free coffee and doughnuts for breakfast and hot meals for lunch, but not beds (McBride, “House” A16; Guilfoil E8). In the 1970s, a free medical clinic was added, and shortly thereafter the city of Spokane convinced Catholic Charities to offer beds during the cold months. At the time, engineers guessed the storefront building would last somewhere between five and ten years (Guilfoil E8). Never did they expect it to last 25-26 years
longer until a new, $3 million state-of-the-art facility would replace it at the corner of Pacific and Browne Avenues.

Stark differences exist between the old shelter and new shelter. The most obvious is the state of despair the old shelter was in. Not only was it cramped, poorly ventilated and run-down, but the old shelter at times in its history had been rat-infested. The dilapidated old building only slept 55 men and its dining room was only capable of seating 40-50 people comfortably for meals. In addition, high noise and anxiety levels contributed to many of the "skirmishes" that would often erupt among patrons. Presently, Catholic Charities is negotiating with a developer to sell the old building and property. Odds are that it will probably be condemned and torn down.

The new shelter, on the other hand, is a spectacle to be seen. At 24,000 square feet the building is very "house-like." As a two-story structure it possesses pitched roofs and sleeping dormitories: one large one and a smaller one for snorers. Both include chest-high privacy partitions. The coupling of natural light with new earth-toned building materials helps convey a more "residential feeling." Equipped with night security guards and video cameras, the shelter is much more sensitive to the needs of neighbors. Unlike the old shelter, this one sleeps 107 men and is capable of feeding 200-250 people per day (Guilfoil E8).

The location for the new shelter was chosen specifically because it would be close to the railroad tracks, a popular mode of transportation among the homeless, and because the area was already zoned for shelters. Furthermore, it was felt by some that the shelter needed to be located downtown where the homeless tend to congregate, not in Colbert or Colville, Washington as some had suggested. Despite some resistance by neighboring
businesses, the new shelter obtained endorsement from both the policy committee of the Downtown Spokane Partnership and several groups of downtown business owners (Guilfoil E8).

In terms of staff, the House of Charity relies heavily on volunteers. Aside from the paid professional staff— the director, the mental health counselor, the case management worker, and the cook—the vast majority of people who help at the shelter are unpaid volunteers. The Jesuit Volunteers (JVs) work side by side with other community volunteers. Even the retired doctors and nurses who work in the clinic each week donate their time and expertise to help others.

All though everyone plays a crucial role in helping the homeless, the Jesuit Volunteers arguably put in the most hours each week. Ed McCarron, the director of the House of Charity and a former volunteer himself, has described the important role they perform as being the “backbone of the shelter” (McBride, “Poverty” A15). In exchange for room and board and a modest monthly stipend, they work 40+ hours a week serving meals, gathering and delivering donations, and performing other duties at the shelter.

Every year two college graduates from across the country to serve at the House of Charity. Often they are recruited from their college campuses to give a year or two of their lives to social justice causes. Despite the Jesuit Volunteer Corp (JVC) being relatively unknown, even to many Catholics, there are approximately 500 JVs in service annually throughout the United States. Founded in 1956 to staff Jesuit programs and missions in Alaska, the program has branched throughout North and South America. In its wake it has left its volunteers with a very memorable, rewarding experience that impacts the remainder of their lives (McBride, “Poverty” A1, A15).
Works Cited

Works Consulted

**Homeless in America.** Videotape. Dir. Allegra, Aline and Evan Stone. AIMS Multimedia (Hacienda Productions), 1996. 18 min.


*Other Videos Consulted:*
Entertaining Angels
Through a Blue Lens
Romero
# House of Charity

*Log of Volunteer Hours*

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**Total # of days worked:** 34  
**Total # of hours worked:** 273.0 (average # of hours/day: 8.03)
Note to the Reader

The following journal entries were recorded during the months of May and August while I served as a volunteer at the House of Charity at 9 West Main Avenue in downtown Spokane, Washington. Some of the entries recorded for the month of May were actually hand-written at the shelter immediately following each event that occurred. Others were recorded in the evening following the same day of work at the shelter. In both cases, a form of shorthand notation was used to save on paper and time. In addition, this also ensured that my journaling didn’t interfere with my duties at work and it reduced the amount of attention I received from those who visited the shelter and may have thought I was recording their lives.

I’ve tried to reproduce the journal entries in the exact form in which they were written to avoid changing the context and/or the story. In some cases my journal entries include incomplete sentences, slang, and partial quotes from people I spoke with during my time at the shelter. Nevertheless, at the time I tried to pick the most relevant events from each day and report on those while limiting the amount of description given to the menial tasks that took place on a daily basis. I felt that by maintaining the original story I would be providing the reader with greater insight into my experience of working with the homeless.

The journal entries recorded for the month of August from the 8th through the 26th don’t include specific dates, but rather reflect a series of important stories that occurred sometime in between those dates. In the month of July I was unable to volunteer because I had to pursue a summer job that paid my expenses. However, upon returning to the shelter after having been gone that long, I no longer found it appropriate or as rewarding to continue my journal entries, particularly those written while at the shelter. Instead, I chose to invest all of my time while at work into helping others and focus on the specific duties that were expected of me. Consequently, the journal entries for that month are actually reflections on some of the more interesting interactions I had with the people I encountered at the House of Charity.

In most cases I have used the real names of individuals I encountered, or at least the names I was provided with. Rather than change or alter them to protect people’s anonymity, I felt that it was important to provide the characters in my journal entries with an identity, and maintaining their real names helped impart that. Plus, at the time, knowing and remembering people’s name as a volunteer at the shelter was very advantageous. The homeless were often impressed when the staff was able to recall their name after only having met us once. Given that we were introduced to over 50 homeless people each day, probably 20 of whom we’ve never met before, they appreciated it when we remembered them later on.

In other instances, addressing someone by their first name (or their street name in some cases), often was received with a better response than if we were to use some other description to identify someone or get their attention. Similarly, knowing someone by their name was useful in altercations when we as staff would need to calm people down or later identify them. No matter what the situation, knowing people and their story helped personalize the setting making for a more welcoming climate at the shelter.

Some of the journal entries include descriptions of individual’s race, clothing, behavior, and life histories. Again, this information was useful to me as a volunteer in
helping me identify patrons until the time came when I knew the individual. Although I dislike the use of descriptives, particularly those indicating race or ethnicity, in identifying people, I’ve included some as a reminder to me that poverty and homelessness doesn’t discriminate based on color. In spite of a correlation between race and poverty, I found that homelessness affected all sorts of people, regardless of their race/ethnicity, gender, culture, disability, sexual orientation, or other background.

As you read the following entries I encourage you to focus more on the similarities than the differences that lie between you and the people whom your about to read about. Pay close attention to some of the problems these people face on a daily basis, problems that you and I may never encounter during the course of our entire lives. Do not overlook or trivialize the severity of this epidemic we call homelessness and the challenges faced by both these individuals and those who continually offer their resources and support to assist them.
MAY
May 8, 2000 (Monday)

Welcome to the House of Charity (HOC). I arrive at about ten to eight to find myself locked out with all the homeless men. We congregate outside the front door, waiting for it to open and allow us in. I glance around and see about ten to twelve men and maybe two women, but I'm not sure. The women look so rough and rugged that I almost mistake them for men.

The building is brick. It sits on the corner of Division and Main right next to a busy intersection. People drive by daily on their way to work, probably never realizing who they pass by, nor ever giving a second thought about what they see. The ground is littered with beer cans and trash. People linger in the alley. I can see others heading toward us carrying packs, bags, etc.

The door is unlocked and we funnel in. Ed introduces me to a few people and says he thinks I should take a seat at the front office. I pull up a seat behind an old metal desk. Beside me is Tom, another volunteer. He's in his 70s. He rode his bike to "work" today. Tom doesn't look a day over 55. Ed tells me he has a Master's degree in Social Work and used to work with the HOC. The other volunteer, one I've met before, is Al. He's a Jesuit Volunteer (JV).

The desk in the office isn't like that found at the Hilton. It's old, battered metal. I struggle with one of its broken drawers. On top of it are a variety of things at our dispense. A desk calendar sits in the middle to let us know the day so we don't lose track of time. A block of wood, cut from a birch tree, serves as our penholder. An old, tattered book with "Record" written across its cover is the logbook we use to check in the men's "gear." They pack all their personal belongings on their back. When they tire from packing around so much weight, they can check their items in so that we can watch them.

There must be 50 or more bags lining two sides of the office, stacked up on shelves. Each of these items has a tag attached to them with a number on it. This number corresponds to the number on a stub that the men keep. This number, a short description of each piece of gear, and the gear owner's name get logged in the record book. When they want to claim their belongings, the men simply present to us the stub with the number on it. Otherwise, they can leave their gear overnight, even for several days. House rule, though, is that everything must be checked out by 3 p.m. on Wednesdays. The purpose of this is to prevent left items from accumulating. In such a case, they are donated to St. Vincent De Paul's.

Next to the section of birch tree is a little plastic box that holds "community" toiletry items. The men share the same shaving cream, deodorant stick, foot/baby powder, toothpaste tube, etc. I've even seen them share the same toothbrush on occasion. Today I've noticed there is some Gillete after-shave gel. If the guys or gals need aspirin they ask one of the staff and we get it out of a large bottle for them. Same thing goes for Band-Aids or Q-tips. Towels are also available for checkout, but we have to ask for i.d. as collateral to ensure that we get them back. However, to shave they get a plastic disposable razor simply by asking. It's sad to see each guy return after shaving, his face bleeding from all the nicks made by these cheap razors. I'd take my Mach 3 razor any day over those.

We also have envelopes we can hand out if the guys need to mail something. And, for those without a way of receiving mail, we act as their post office. They can tell
whoever they want that their address is the HOC and their mail will arrive here. Each
day a new list is posted with their names on it if they have mail. The volunteers can then
thumb through the envelopes to find one with their name on it. This allows them to keep
in contact with family, DHSHS, employers, probation officers, etc. Most of the time the
guys will give us the mail they want sent and we make sure it gets a stamp on it for them
and gets sent out in the mail.

Today, Tom showed me where they keep some scissors and toe/finger nail
clippers. He cleverly attached each of them to a small tin can full of cement by a wire.
He tells me that this prevents them from “walking off” since most guys don’t care to
carry something that heavy in their packs.

If the guys need plastic bags to carry their items, protect against rain, or whatever,
there are some stuffed into a box in the office. And if they need to do laundry, there is
one washer and dryer they can use for their clothes. Their names get put on a laundry list
and they take turns running their stuff through. Today the dryer stopped working so
nobody was able to do laundry.

Inside our office also sits a phone. It’s free for anyone to use, but it doesn’t allow
people to dial long distance. We’ve got stacks of phone books so they can reach
whomever they need.

When the guys use the men’s room they typically have to ask us for toilet paper.
Inside the bathroom are the two showers they share. At least they have curtains to
provide a little privacy. The guys take to the shower with them small bars of soap and
bottles of shampoo. I think both of those are partially used since they appear to be from
hotels. Yes, they are those small, travel size soap and shampoo you and I get when we
stay overnight in those rooms.

Got the opportunity to help serve food in the kitchen. Cally, the lead cook I think,
is very controlling. She loves to have things done her way. She speaks very loudly, is
somewhat untactful, and doesn’t follow the strictest health/food precautions. She let me
dish up the bread and dessert. We formed an assembly line to dish up the trays. She
made sure they didn’t start serving early – must wait until 11 a.m. I pulled up my sleeves
above the elbows, washed up, and put on plastic gloves. Lunch was green salad (dressing
mixed in), pizza, cake, and chocolate milk. Each guy gets a tray that’s been made up –
no choice. They eat with plastic spoons today – no metal and no forks. On the tables is
salt in large jars with holes poked in the lids. Needless to say, it comes out very fast. I
decide I won’t eat until I’m done serving. I’d guess that there are 40+ people eating
today.

I take a seat among the men at one of the tables. I think some feel uncomfortable
about my presence, but it’ll wear on them. Everyone got a head start on me eating, so
they get up and leave before I’m finished. Many guys swap food or trade for something
better. They’re all good about not wasting anything.

Before long I’m joined by a thirty-something man named Jeff. I met him earlier
when he checked in some gear and checked out a towel. This time we’re able to do a
formal introduction. We both sit there eating out lunch, visiting – mostly small talk.
Surprisingly, he does most of the questioning and I tell him why I’m here, where I’m
from, and what I’m trying to accomplish. He shares with me some information about
himself. I’m surprised to learn he has an Associate’s degree. He says he has battled an
alcohol addiction, job loss, and many other unfortunate incidences. His attitude is bright
and he lets me know he’s working to improve his situation. I notice he is better dressed 
than most guys are and his personality is very friendly.

After lunch I help wipe down tables and chairs. Cally makes it very clear I can’t 
use the same rag on the tables as the chairs for “obvious reasons.” Al and I sweep and 
mop the floor after we put the chairs up. We then head back to the office to open it up.

Spend the rest of the afternoon checking gear in and out, visiting with staff and 
others, etc.
May 9, 2000 (Tuesday)

Today I arrive early again and wait outside until the doors open. Ed decides I need a set of keys so he gets me some. We set out coffee and donuts for the men. Many men fill the office wanting to shower, check in gear, use the phone, or wash clothes. Today the dryer is broke, but a repairman arrives and fixes it. Everyone is very happy to see it working again.

Talk with Cory. He’s only about 3 years older than I am. He tells me he’s just learned his girlfriend is pregnant with twins. I can’t fathom bringing a life into this type of world at such a disadvantage. I ask him about his schooling and he says he’s been in and out of boarding schools all his life – about 7 total. However, he lets me know he did receive his GED.

Also visit with Mary today. Her mustache is thicker than mine. She is short, wears baggy clothes, and her over-sized hat sits crooked on her head. Al tells me she has trouble controlling her anger. I witnessed this when she went into a swearing fit with someone. She’s pushing around a Hot Wheels toy car.

Help out again at lunch adding bread (rolls) and dessert (cake) to the trays. Like yesterday, many people here to eat. More of the same pizza from Rocky Rococo’s. I’m getting burnt out on day-old pizza. Can’t wait till I’m finished and can start cooking more of my own food. Cally fixes me a tray loaded with food. Way too many pieces of pizza on it.

After lunch Al shows me the clothing room where people can come in and take various items. There’s a limit on almost everything. It’s Al’s job to record the number of people who take advantage of it and their ethnicity.

Much of the same sort of thing until the afternoon. An alarm sounds. I think it must be some sort of fire alarm, but JP jumps up from his chair and dashes toward the clinic. He comes out escorting a man out of the building. The man is cursing at him and telling JP not to touch him. I jump up and follow thinking that the guy may take a swing at JP. We get him outside and he’s still arguing. He wants his backpack left behind. JP tells me to call the cops and the guy mellows out a little. I run to get his pack and bring it out to him.

JP comes back inside and turns the alarm off. I ask him what happened and he tells me that it’s a panic alarm. It’s kept hidden in the clinic in case someone gets rough with a doctor or nurse or verbally abusive. Apparently, this guy was doing the latter. JP then lets me know the code to turn it off.

Finish the day this time not having to sweep and mop the place. JP and Al give me a ride home. On the way they comment on how easy a day it was for them. I think they’re crazy! Lucky for them they’re leaving town for a few days and through the weekend to attend a retreat.

Earlier in the Day:

Taxi cab driver comes in asking for “Captain.” I don’t realize he’s a taxi driver and I ask him to repeat himself. I still don’t understand who he’s after so I ask him if he needs me to call a taxi for someone. He gets frustrated with me for not understanding. He acts as if I’m messing with him. When I finally notice his nametag and realize he’s
the cab driver and not someone wanting to call a taxi he’s already in his car driving off pissed.
May 10, 2000 (Wednesday)

Arrive 5 minutes late to find Ed with the office already open. Laundry is already in progress and I feel bad for not being there earlier. Won’t let it happen again.

Cory is here again today showing me pictures. His head is shaved – I hear his girlfriend made him do it. Other guys come in asking for the usual towels and razors. Others ask for aspirin. I get one request for mail. Yesterday I took the effort to alphabetize and group the envelopes; pays off today in my search for a letter.

Mary is back, this time without her voice. She tries to communicate by writing stuff down a slip of paper. I notice her spelling is terrible and I can’t make sense of much of it. Tom explains that she’s trying to say that the new shelter looks like a school. He says some of the homeless say it looks like a prison; he jokes that it’s to make them fell at home. Later she tells me I’m attractive. She does it again during lunch. I tell her that she had better not talk like that around my girlfriend.

Check out more towels. Let guys know that their gear needs to be out of here by 3 p.m. Nobody is supposed to leave stuff on Wednesday nights – house rules – otherwise it tends to accumulate.

Willie, a big black man with pearly white teeth and a very humorous attitude shared with me an experience of his with a very conceited woman. He says that just outside the HOC a woman wouldn’t give him the time of day when he tried to speak to her. He shows me how her nose was sticking up. I look at his eyes and notice how yellow the whites are. Willie is always wearing headphones no matter what he’s doing, but it doesn’t prevent him from hearing you plain as day.

Willie must have an apartment. He frequently talks about the food he fixes – usually meat dishes. His friend, Pete, is with him. Pete is smaller than Willie is, but he grins just as big. Pete has difficulty speaking and so Willie translates for me. I notice during one of Pete’s grins that he has some type of false teeth. The two of them, Pete and Willie, are good friends. I observe how they continually tease and joke with one another, just like I do with my good buddies.

Willie comes in and plays cribbage nearly all day, especially with one of our kitchen staff, Steve. Steve is every bit as big and menacing looking as Willie. He has got a thick silver beard with a pony tail hidden under his hat. Today he’s helping me at the front desk since we’re without JVs. Steve has enough attitude for all of us, and it’s noticed by the guys who come in. He doesn’t like to be bothered and he’s the last to budge a finger. I’m not sure what he thinks of me; I just try to stay out of his way so that he doesn’t.

Met another guy named Steve. Ironically, he had trouble with Steve the cook – call it a personality clash. This Steve, however, visited with me for a while. He told me he was running from his wife’s family in Montana. Apparently her nephews were trying to kill him. I gave him an envelope and pen he asked for. He tells me he’s writing her to end their marriage. He seems concerned that she won’t let him see their 14-year-old son. He informs me that although he doesn’t call, he writes and visits his son as often as possible. Steve wants to earn enough money to purchase a Harley Davidson for his son just in spite of his ex-wife who wouldn’t approve of any motorcycle.

Strangely, both Steves smoke the same tobacco. It comes in a loose pouch, like Red Man, and must be rolled into a cigarette using thin paper provided. I’ve watched
Steve the cook rolls several of these and each time I see him do so I think it looks like a joint I see in the movies. Both of these men are real careful and methodological in how they make a cigarette. This time I watch as Steve the homeless man rolls his as he tells me stories.

I ask where he sleeps and he says near a church with an awning that provides protection from the elements. No one bothers him there and cardboard is available to keep the rain off. When I inquire about jobs he’s held he says he’s been a “tree tramp” (cuts limbs off trees), a restaurant cook, and a few other things. I notice it’s raining outside and so I ask him his plans for the night. He says he’ll probably head toward the church. The other night he stayed behind a grocery store but was woken when some guys showed up to steal pallets at 4 a.m. And on a different night he scared a female restaurant worker when she was carrying out the garbage and found him sleeping under some cardboard. When asked how he feels sleeping out or if anyone messes with him he says that there isn’t too much to worry about. He does say, however, that he usually gets up early and moves before people are awake and discover him. It bothers him when kids find him sleeping outside and ask him why he does so because he doesn’t know how to respond.

Mary is never too far from my side either. She still insists on writing things down to communicate or whispering in my ear. She’s really taken a liking to me and seems to enjoy the attention I give her. When she writes her notes I still can’t get over the terrible spelling and how incoherent her sentences are. Her thoughts must be jumbled. Ed has told me he knows her siblings very well, especially a brother of Mary’s who works for Catholic Ministries. Evidently, most of her family isn’t willing to accept that she has mental health issues. Tom also tells me that Mary lost her parents in a tragic accident and has never been able to cope with her deaths. That helps explain many of the comments she makes to me about funerals, family not thinking she’ll ever die, etc.

We close up shop and I tell George I’ll make sure his clothes continue to dry overnight. He reminds me a lot of my dad in terms of age and looks. I can tell he is very thankful for my efforts.

Outside it’s starting to drizzle. I wait for Dara to pick me up so that we can spend the evening together. While I do so, I decide to venture around the building and investigate. There are several people sitting on cardboard boxes by the dumpster. They’re drinking Budweiser. I see Kim. Minutes ago I told him to check out his gear and he refused to do so. I introduce myself and try to make small talk. A girl sitting there, who looks like she might be in high school, tells me of how her boyfriend punched her in the face five times just minutes ago. I guess the police were contacted and caught him. As she tells me the details I notice she has serious speech problems.
May 11, 2000 (Thursday)

I’m now feeling rather at home in my “office.” The morning goes fairly smoothly. I’m getting a better handle on where stuff is located, how to answer questions, etc. I follow Tom’s example and bring a pack of cigarettes to work today. I figure if I hand them out for free it’ll provide me an opportunity to get to know the guys better.

Ed comes and gets me and tells me that Dr. Arch Logan is in. We’re left in Ed’s office so that we can visit. Dr. Logan is a retired physician who oversees HOC’s clinic. This opportunity provides me with a chance to have my questions answered. He also leads me through the clinic.

Help dish u lunch again today. Surprisingly it’s not pizza for once, but rather chow mein over rice. When I sit to eat I’m by myself this time. I chomp on the chow mein and feel something hard – dry chicken.

When we open the front desk there’s more work to be done. Some of the men, including Kim and Cory, want stuff that they left overnight when they were told it needed to be checked out. I had to go dig it out of a pile in the back room to get it for them. Steve and I had moved everything back there yesterday afternoon just before we closed. He tells me today that if they fail to check out their gear on Wednesday more than once that they can lose their privileges to check it in.

For the first time I notice a small boy in the shelter with, I think, his grandfather. My only thought is that this place is a terrible place to bring kids. Not only is it dirty and unsafe, but it smells bad. Furthermore, I hear a baby crying – another first. A young mother is here with a 4-month-old child and her husband. Again, I can’t understand why. Perhaps given the alternatives this is the best choice. I remember Dr. Logan saying they see some pediatric patients in the clinic.

Sonny today approaches me and bitches that we ought to require the men to shower before they’re allowed in. He says he’s sick of them smelling like “shit and piss” and that it poses a health issue to others. He says he’s gotten bugs (lice?) here from others and fears it could happen again. He wants to do something, but I try and explain that it’s not my decision to make. Despite this, I see a lot of truth and validity in his comments.

Meet a fellow named Tom for the first time. He seems to be a big sports enthusiast. He knows all the latest stats on the Mariners, etc. Tom tells me I ought to watch them play tonight; he even gives me the channel number to watch.
May 12, 2000 (Friday)

Arrive again to find myself locked out. I really need a key to the front or back door. On the way I saw a homeless man walking on the Centennial trail as I crossed the bridge so I snapped a picture. In the office this time I’m with Ed. We visit until Tom arrives. The “lobby,” or dayroom, looks empty and it’s nice because most of the guys seem more sober today. We’ve also got three copies of today’s Spokesman Review. Ed brought one copy and the other two must have been brought in by the men. Ed tells me that the guys frequently scrape together enough change to buy a paper, and once they got the newspaper stand open, they steal all the copies to sell themselves.

I say hello to Roger today. He’s been wearing the same clothes for the last three days. He returns a hello, and to my surprise, remembers my name. JP told me he’s a heroine addict. I can’t confirm that, but I notice he’s very laid back and a little slow. Nevertheless, Roger is very friendly and always smiling. (Roger always wears camouflage cargo pants, an old, blue Dallas cowboy’s jacket, and a tattered hat. He has ratty hair, a full beard and moustache, and is always dirty).

Steve returns. He tells me of a new, better place he found to sleep. This time it’s on a couch somewhere. He also gives me a flyer that was handed to him by some men from Victory Outreach. He asked them for spare change and they told him about their services. They even asked him to get in a van with them right then and there. Steve didn’t. He suspects it might be some kind of cult-like thing.

A guy named Mike gives me his “journal” and says I can read what he did during the summer. It’s a small notebook with scattered or jumbled thoughts written down. I show it to Mark, the counselor, and ask if he’s schizophrenic. Mark says his thoughts are certainly not clear. Mike is also very forgetful, frequently leaving his i.d. or hair brush with us when he returns his towel after showering. He’s very skinny, has long ratty hair, and usually wears a red snowmobile suit with two spoons projecting out of the shoulder pocket. Occasionally he’ll walk around in a green spandex singlet similar to those you see wrestlers wear.

Mary is back. She’s pretty upset today and expresses her dislike of Tom. However, she tells me I’m okay. As Mark the counselor tries to leave the building Mary tries to impede his progress and I see her pushing him. The same happens when he comes back in and tries to make his way to his office. She also goes into cursing fits. Other guys think she’s absolutely crazy and they seem to enjoy antagonizing her. If she keeps up this behavior we may have to ask her to leave for the day.

Head back to the kitchen at 10:30 a.m. today. I didn’t help Mark do the clothing room. It’s purposely not open at the same time as the clinic to prevent any conflict in the adjoining hallway. People are arguing out in the alley just outside the back door. Ed asks if I want to go with him on a run in the van so I enthusiastically say yes.

Ed and I take the white HOC delivery van to different low-income apartments. Today we’re delivering a large box of bread and a large box of dessert to each one. At different places people flock to us since they know we’re bringing food. Along the way Ed points out other apartments, shelters, and clinics. When we return he asks me a little bit about my faith. It really puts me on the spot and makes me feel uncomfortable, perhaps because I’m unable to describe my own beliefs.
Willie and Steve are playing more cribbage. Steve is rolling a cigarette from his yellow tobacco pouch. I notice that the brand is Top. Some of the guys tell me it's the cheap stuff.

George Shaw, another fellow I see who definitely doesn't give the appearance of being homeless is nearby. He shares his experiences at the Union Gospel Mission, or just simply, the Mission. He makes it sound as if many of their volunteers are on power trips and that it's difficult because of their high turn-over rate. George also tells me about how many of the volunteers there used to be homeless themselves, and in order to secure a place to stay, they choose to volunteer. However, bad habits die hard and so they can be seen drinking themselves. A part of the Mission's requirement to stay there is that you must perform a chore each day you stay. Although it may be a menial task, it allows you to stay in a nice environment and entitles you to a good meal. In addition, in order to maintain such a nice environment, men can be asked to take a breathalyzer in order to be let in. From what I can ascertain, there is also pressure on these men to ascribe to the Mission's faith.

In the afternoon a ma and woman stopped by to donate food from what must have been barbecue leftovers. I held the front door as they carried the stuff in. The woman was carrying a "flat" or "palate" of coke. One of the homeless men on the street approached her and stole a 6-pack before she could even say anything. She looked at me with a blank stare; I didn't even know how to respond. I figured it wasn't worth making a big deal over it, although it kind of upset me. My philosophy is that people who steal generally need it more than the person being stolen from does. They left before I could say thanks or even find out where the food came from.

Shyleen, a Native American woman, stumbled to the front desk where Steve and I sit. She's completely intoxicated and decides to check out her belongings. Later, she returns complaining of heartburn, most likely the result of her drinking.

Sonny, a Native American man approaches us and complains of "white boys" asking too many questions about "Indians." He tells me it shouldn't matter. I accidentally offend him when I try to ask what tribe he belongs to in order to figure out what kind of questions they're asking him. Thus, I make the same mistake the others did. I can see that Steve is offended that Sonny is calling us "white boys," but he lets it go.

Cory was here for a little while. I ask him about his work cleaning out hoods. He says it's not bad. He leaves for his doctor's appointment today that he's been talking about all week, but he forgets his mountain bike.

Julio, one of the younger Mexicans who I hear just turned 21, has had an abscessed tooth for some time. Today he finally made it to the dentist and he shows me a reminder slip for a follow-up appointment he has next week.

I also visit with Ron, the biggest black man I've ever met. He's often back by the kitchen picking up food. He picks it up for other low-income people from what I've been told. He always asks me to carry out boxes to the dumpster that he doesn't need. Today he shares with me his views on travel, homosexuality, and religion.

Sit back at the front desk with John and Steve. John is the much more mellow of the two, and he tends to show more respect for the "patrons" of the HOC. His temper isn't nearly as short and he has a much better attitude.

I think about George's situation. He had told me that he was a painter by trade, but is now without work. He has mentioned having gone to college some 25 years ago,
and no is looking at starting at SCC in the fall. I really hope he is able to do so. Guys like him need more education and skills.
May 13, 2000 (Saturday)

Decided to drive today so that I could head home to Creston when finished here. I park in a gravel lot across the street. I’m not sure if I should’ve parked there, but at least my car is within sight from the office windows.

Cross the street and see the fellow that was in here the other day. He’s a big, loud guy with only one leg. He gets around on crutches. I decide to ask him how he lost his leg. He tells me he shot himself with buckshot pellets from a shotgun while cleaning it. He still has pieces of lead in his leg. He’s waiting today outside for an UPS package delivery from his bank. He says he’s been here since 7 a.m. and he’s not leaving until they arrive.

Run up stairs to get clean towels for the day. Help Steve open the front office. We’re out of razors and nobody has keys to get more of them. That’s getting to be a common occurrence around here – a feeling of helplessness.

I see a young guy in his late 20s named Masecio Spice trying to sew a button on his shirt. I notice he’s struggling and ask him how he’s doing with it. I jokingly call him Martha Stewart, but he doesn’t find that funny. I finally convince him to let me do it for him and he obliges. In talking with him I notice he’s not himself – he says he’s high. I ask him what he’s high on and he says alcohol, pot, and coke. Steve tells me probably only alcohol since he couldn’t afford anything else.

Mary is here again asking strange questions as usual. No sign of Cory yet this morning. He left his mountain bike here. It’s a cheap one he got at a pawnshop. I heard that he used to own a very expensive one with front and rear suspension, but someone stole it. It was funny to have run into him at the movie theater last night. My friend Brad and I were there watching Gladiator and he approached me. He introduced me to his friend Casey, but I forgot to introduce them to Brad.

Surprise! Cory is back. He says he’s got to go back to the doctor next week. Yesterday the doctor gave him Ibuprofen to hold him over until then. He mentions that his girlfriend, Kimberly, doesn’t want to go get their daughter from her grandparent’s house in Idaho. The 7-year-old girl is from a previous boyfriend. Cory gives me a piece of paper of his from DSHS. It says he shouldn’t work and that he needs to receive ongoing mental health care. He’s also got a list of counseling resources that accept medical coupons. He jokes that he’s crazy.

Roger is back wearing the same clothes as Day 1. More smiles from him just like yesterday.

Today is the Junior Lilac Parade in Spokane. The weather has gotten nicer so most guys are outside versus in the lobby. Of those that are here, though, more than half are sleeping on the benches (or they’re passed out).

At lunch we had two high school sophomores help serve food. They were a boy/girl-friend couple from University High School in the valley. They weren’t sure where they should help so I tried to “show them the ropes.” That’s been a common thing around here – not knowing what to do or when to do it. Volunteers certainly don’t get much of an orientation, nor do they know their role. Before I could show them more of the shelter they had already left. I go the impression that they had better things to do.

In the afternoon I had to make an emergency call to the fire department. A fellow named Jim came up to me and asked that I call an ambulance for him. He said he was
having difficulty breathing. I had him take a seat and I dialed the medical number for the fire department. I’m not sure if his condition is serious or if it’s something that can wait. However, I figure I’d want someone to take me seriously and do the same thing for me if I was in his shoes.

Within minutes there are two fire trucks and an ambulance outside our front door. About four men from the fire department and two EMTs enter and begin to treat Jim. I observe as they care for him and notice that they treat him just as they would anyone else, regardless of his socioeconomic status. One of the men from the fire department lets me know I did the right thing by calling them. However, before he can send the ambulance to a hospital he has to figure out which one will accept a patient who has been drinking. Jim’s a veteran and apparently the VA Hospital doesn’t like to accept anyone who has been drinking. I suspect that he’ll wind up at Sacred Heart Medical Center.

Later that afternoon I convince Steve to play me in a game of cribbage. I figure that although I’m much rougher at counting points, it’ll be a good way for me to get on his good side. Our first game goes well, especially for me since I win. The second game I lose but I shouldn’t have. I miscounted a few times and didn’t take all my points; otherwise, had I done so I would’ve won. Steve makes sure to comment on all my mistakes so that they don’t go unnoticed.

After a game of cribbage, a medium build, Caucasian man approaches Steve and I. John also joins us. I’ve seen this guy before in the office, yet I don’t know his name yet. He eyes me up and down as if he’s sizing me up. I return the favor. He’s always in blue jeans with an old shirt. I usually see him with a red bandana on. His hair is long and he has a lazy eye that looks off to one side rather than straight ahead like his other one.

Eventually he gets up the nerve to ask me who I am. He introduces himself to me as Rick. He says he also goes by his street name, Rocket. I make the mistake of asking him how he came to be nicknamed Rocket. Before I even finish my question he throws a punch at my face, stopping just a fraction of an inch from it. His punch is so fast I don’t even have time to flinch. I guess that’s better since it looks as if I’m not afraid. I get the impression that rocket refers to the speed of his punch.
May 15, 2000 (Monday)

Today as I arrive the sun is shining and the day looks promising. I’m glad I’m well rested and ready for a new week. I think I’m early, so I’m surprised to find the doors already unlocked and open. I’m in fact on time, but someone opened the doors before 8 a.m. Funny how I was lectured last week for doing just that same thing.

Greet Roger and Mary on my way in. Open the front office and the men swarm in. Today we’re stocked with towels, razors, and other items which makes the morning go much smoother. I would’ve carried the coffeepot down to the office, but Cally warned me not to until the light was off indicating it was ready. She also said there needs to be space cleared on the counter for it to sit.

Rick “the Rocket” is back this morning. I joke with Ed that I won’t make the same mistake of asking a guy how he got his street name. Rick’s crazy eye is going again. Today he lacks his headband, but his forehead is marked by a lighter shade of skin where it would usually sit. He’s with his girlfriend. They check out their bags and leave.

Mary’s having one of her cursing fits. As far as I know, nobody did anything to provoke her. She continues to curse at people she doesn’t even know and stomps around throughout the day room.

For a Monday, there aren’t as many people here as there usually is. A few new guys who have never been here show up. They ask what we provide and how the “system works.” Some catch on quick and are familiar with the routine of other shelters they’ve visited. Others take a little more coaching; sometimes other guys will show them the ropes, otherwise they’re on their own to figure it out.

One man named Dean tells me he just got out of jail and wants his gear he left here two months ago. I tell him I’ll look for it knowing that it has most likely been “recycled” or donated. Sure enough, it’s no where to be found. (Note: sometimes when stuff is left it gets sent to St. Vincent de Pauls. Other times it will end up in our clothing room. Often this results in different men wearing the same piece of clothing, sometimes within the same week).

Another young guy named Jeremy is here. Ed recognizes him. Apparently it’s been some time since he’s been at the HOC. This morning he’s here to do laundry and get cleaned up. He has an arraignment hearing at court this morning at 9:30 a.m. We send him with a letter to mail to us in case they detain him and throw him in jail. The purpose is to let us know not to discard his gear he’s leaving with us. By knowing in advance that he’s been locked up we can make sure his belongings get put in 30-day storage.

Up to the kitchen I go. Today I wait until asked to help serve food. Cally assigns me to serving dessert and bread again. I’m an expert at it now. Macaroni and cheese, salad, milk, bread, blueberry muffins, and of course, pizza. Like Saturday, I see two guys my age come through the food line. I often wonder what the difference(s) was in our lives that made us go such different directions. Why am I going to college while they are living on the streets? As I ponder such thoughts Cally says to make sure the back door is closed. If it doesn’t get closed, guys from the alley try to cut ahead in the food line rather than wait their turn.

More of Mary today. She’s wearing a new hat – bright yellow, v-shaped bill, with a mesh backing. It still sits crooked on her head, just like the old one. I’m not sure if she
was wearing it earlier this morning or if she had the old one on. Perhaps she made it to the clothing room and picked herself up a new one.

George is back. He checked in gear this morning. It’s always the same, old 1980s-looking, blue and white striped duffel bag. I ask to see the book he has in his hand. It’s a hard back on war. The other book he had the other day was a paperback murder mystery. I tell him if he goes to college in the fall they’ll give him plenty to read.

George just came from the Just Like Home Buffet. He got his fill on salad, soup, and fried chicken – lots of fried chicken. He pats his belly with contentment as he tells of all the food he ate. As I’ve said before, he bares a striking resemblance to my dad. I used to think they just looked alike, but today I notice that their mannerisms and temperament parallel each other’s.

Ron is in the kitchen sorting vegetables. As I pass by to wash laundry I volunteer to carry out his garbage for him, not giving him the opportunity to ask this time. It’s almost as if he’d been waiting for me.

Ernie has been passed out in the dayroom for over an hour. He’s slouched over to one side. I guess he hit it (the booze) too hard this morning. He’s much easier to deal with when he’s passed out.

Mr. Green was sitting nearby Ernie, but he and his cane stumbled out the front door. This morning I hardly recognized him because he was, for the first time in a long time, sober. I didn’t realize how polite he could be without alcohol in his system. Unfortunately, he doesn’t last long. Only three hours later I find him blitzed out of his mind.

I’ve been with Tom all morning. I decide to ask him something I’ve been wondering about for some time. Frequently I see guys with purple or yellow fingertips. I’ve always been curious as to the cause of that. He informs me that it’s most likely caused by burns from a cigarette, cigar, or pipe. Occasionally the men are so high, drunk, or stoned that they don’t realize what they’re holding in their hands is burning them. Either their cigarette burns too short or their pipe (e.g. crack or pot pipe) gets too hot.

Just before we close I snap a few pictures. I get one of Steve Jackson as he sleeps. He looks really rough and I’ve always wanted to take his picture. I also get one of Ernie. He hasn’t yet awoken from his drunken slumber. Kieran has to struggle to wake him and tell him we’re closing for the day. Outside I take my last photo of three guys sitting up against the brick wall. I can tell they’re not as enthused about me taking it, but they give me their consent so I seize the opportunity.

Earlier in the Day:

Bernie (a.k.a. Bernard) was in here with his wife Star and their two kids. They have a 10-year-old son and an 11-year-old daughter. Both kids are dark skinned and have round faces. They look more like their Indian mother than their Caucasian father. I visit with his kids. They’re both well behaved and funny. With grins stretching from ear to ear I entertain them with the only two card tricks I know. Fortunately for me, they can’t figure out my “magical secrets.”

I think back to how I was raised and how concerned I was with the amount of money my parents made. Seeing kids like Bernie’s makes me realize how truly fortunate I was. Whereas I grew up in mobile homes and was raised most of my life by one parent, there kids have next to nothing even with two parents. My dad always had a job and
never relied on anyone but himself; their dad is jobless and couldn’t make it without assistance. I can’t even fully begin to realize the disadvantages these kids are at from birth.
May 16, 2000 (Tuesday)

Two blocks from the dorm room and I find a homeless man sitting under a tree. He’s got his gear carefully wrapped in plastic bags. As I walk by he doesn’t pay any attention to me. I want to stop and help him in some way, but I’m not sure I can help. I keep on walking, continuing to ponder what I could’ve done.

I pass over the river as I do every morning. On the opposite side of the bridge I see another man with all of his gear. Cars zip by in both directions paying little or no attention to either of us. My eyes track the man’s progress and I begin to notice that he’s heading away from me. I figure we both have our own things to do today, even though they’re much different.

The sun is shining from above as I approach the HOC. There are already a dozen men standing outside the front door. I proceed to the back thinking I can enter alone. I’m wrong. Another dozen men are waiting in the back alley for the door to open. I squeeze through them and head upstairs to get towels for the morning’s men who’ll desire showers. When I come down the doors have already been opened.

By the time I’m at the front office more men are already waiting on me. Most want on the laundry list. Others need to use the phone or get toiletry supplies. Many of the same faces as yesterday – Masecio, Roger, Mary, and later, Cory.

A black man named Kevin is here doing his wash. He’s generally well dressed, clean, and smiling. He’s a size smaller than Willie is. While he waits on his laundry he challenges me to a game of chess. He ends up beating me in minutes. Kind of a blow to my ego since I never thought I was a poor chess player.

I notice fewer people than normal are sleeping in the dayroom. On any given day men are sprawled out all over the benches, some resting and others sleeping. It’s not uncommon for some to even be on the floor sleeping, hidden away under the benches. The guy I see sleeping most is Steve; he’s the fellow whose picture I took yesterday. It’s very probable that he stays up all night for his own safety, then comes to the HOC to get his sleep.

We’ve got a full staff today. Seems like everyone is here. It’s quite nice having more of us to spread around. Having more people on hand makes it easier to balance answering the phone, answering questions, and getting other things done.

The kitchen had enough hands to serve food so I wasn’t needed. I more or less just stood around and observed. Willie needed let into the office to throw his wash in the laundry so I obliged. As he threw his clothes in the washer he told me about how he lends out money to other people. He charges 100% interest for his service. In other words, if you borrow $20 from Willie he expects $40 back. Willie says if you don’t pay up you might get a fist in the face.

Tom informs me that Willie isn’t the only loan shark. Another black man named Slim has been doing the same thing for years. Slim is in the HOC today with a pen and pad that he uses to write down debts. When not meandering around he’s on the phone; I’d suspect he’s busy calling people who owe him money.

Another fellow Bill is here today. I try to wake him to get him to have lunch. He tells me he’s too sick and doesn’t want to eat. He asks for juice instead. Bill thinks it will settle his stomach because it’s not acidic like milk. I decide not to tell him he’s got it backward in order to avoid an argument. Instead, I run to the kitchen and fetch him a
glass of orange juice. When I return to give it to him I ask why he’s so sick. He tells me it’s from an entire month’s worth of drinking – every day! Bill slams down the glass of orange juice and lies back down on the benches.

Later I see Bill running toward the bathroom. As soon as he makes it past the stall doors he’s puking. I go into the bathroom and I can hear him vomiting up a tremendous amount. Over the next 20 minutes I see him make at least two more trips back in there to puke. Both times he has to leave his spot in line for the clinic.

Sonny gives me hell how the white man/boys are oppressing his people, meaning Indian Americans. For him, race is always an issue and he always gets defensive over it. Today he lectures me from the toilet he’s sitting on – I mean that literally. While I was at the urinal he started voicing his opinions. And as I washed my hands he continued with his plight. I hear him loud and clear since there is no door on the bathroom stall and I can see him doing his business plain as day. I take everything he says with a grain of salt, and allow him the chance to air his grievances.

I forgot to mention lunch today so I’ll return to the menu. It consisted of cheesy pasta with chicken, green salad, dessert cake, bread, milk, and always, pizza. I got my fill on the pasta. It really wasn’t that bad. I ate with George today during lunch. When I finally got up the courage to ask him if he’d allow me to interview him on tape he politely turned me down. I’m getting the feeling that most of the men are going to share this same sentiment when it comes to having to reveal a little about themselves.

Al invites me to take a trip to the pig farm with him. Well, I actually kind of invited myself when I learned that he needed an extra hand. Our load today is bread. We take with us everything we can gather from the bread room and put it into the back of the white HOC delivery van. From that point we drive out past Airway Heights to the farm out in the country. The people who live there raise pigs, cows, and chickens. Their property is littered with garbage, old vehicles, etc. and I can tell that Al isn’t impressed with the place. We dump our load into a big pile in one of the barns. A lady there visits with us and shows us some of the 100 pigs they have. Apparently the pigs love the bread. While we were there Al and I were tripping over the four dogs they have.

Upon our return I settle back behind the front desk. As I sit there I see Ed escorting Sonny out. Sonny’s cursing and he’s evidently upset about something. He throws some papers about and demands his backpack. Kieran fetches his gear and Sonny is sent on his way. Ed tells us that the doctor wouldn’t give Sonny the pain medication he wanted so he became angry and had to be asked to leave.

Tom today tells me a very interesting story about Steve the cook. I guess years ago he was attacked by a police dog while sleeping outside in the weeds. The dog mauled his arm pretty bad, sending him to the hospital. The reason for the dog being there was to clear out any vagrants living in the area. A lawyer caught wind of Steve’s story and decided to help him sue the city of Spokane for $125,000. The city made the decision to settle for $75,000, of which Steve got just over half after his lawyer fees were paid. Rather than put it in the bank to cover his future expenses, Steve hopped the first plane he could and flew to Las Vegas. When he returned he was penniless. He told Tom that he lived “high on the hog” for a couple of weeks, most likely drinking continuously, and now he had nothing to show for it.

With Kieran around I was able to ask him some more questions. I’d been noticing a fellow who had been in the shelter quite regularly. I’ve always thought he looked
Spanish with his jet-black hair and mustache. And although I may never know his ethnicity, I do know that his clothes are two sizes too small. But on a stranger note, I’d come to realize that he never speaks to anyone, including me. The only things I’ve ever heard escape his lips were only a few words and nothing more. Never do I see him speaking to anyone. Kieran and Tom tell me that this is perfectly normal for him and has been the case for the 15+ years that he’s been in and out of the HOC! I’d guess then that I won’t be able to get him to open up to me, but then again, who knows?

Kieran told me a somewhat humorous story today. He said that each year when the new JVs arrive the “patrons” of the HOC get very intoxicated. Their intention is to give the new guys a hard time – break them in, so to speak. Apparently it’s become an annual tradition for them to initiate the new volunteers.

Tom told a much different story about the homeless men. He said that over a year ago one of the old JVs was jumped by a man up on the sleeping porch. Apparently he didn’t like the JV because of the requests the JV made of him. When the two were wrestling on the ground, nobody intervened to help the JV; even those homeless men who had befriended him wouldn’t come to his aid. Fortunately for the JV he wasn’t hurt too seriously, but he did sustain some minor injuries. Tom communicated that it was disappointing that nobody wanted to get involved and break it up.
May 17, 2000 (Wednesday)

This morning I chose to drive so that I could run some errands after the HOC closes. I parked across the street again. This allows me to keep an eye on my car through the office windows. I’m fearful of it getting towed, ticketed, or broken into.

A guy came in and pleaded for clothing this morning. He was still shivering from having slept out in the cold last night. We helped him find a long sleeve shirt and coat from our clothing room. He was very appreciative and grateful for them. I could tell that he’d had a rough night. Originally he had asked Rhonda for clothing, but she told him that he couldn’t get into the clothing room until 1:30 during the 30 minutes that it’s open. Not satisfied with that response, the man persisted to ask Ed and I and we were more than happy to help him out.

Helping out at the shelter this morning are several 8th grades from Cataldo Catholic School. Ed has put them to work making bedrolls, putting address labels on newsletters, and doing other miscellaneous tasks. They’re here with their teacher so I suspect that they’re missing school in order to help.

During lunch I more or less twiddled my thumbs. All the 8th grade volunteers helped serve food so there wasn’t much for me to do. Today’s menu was pizza, leftovers, watermelon, milk and delicious soup. I don’t know why some of the guys complain about the food.

After lunch I did more visiting than anything else. I shared some of my own stories and listened to many more from JP, AI, and Ed. I’ve only been at the HOC for 9 days, while these JVs have been here 9+ months. Not surprisingly then they have many more stories than I do. As part of our sharing I discuss with them my desire to do some videotaping. They seem open to the idea and willing to help, but they caution me in my approach to the homeless. Many of them aren’t comfortable having their photo taken or being videotaped, especially without their permission, and such privacy needs to be respected.

When I was speaking with JP I told him of my interest in researching the Census Bureau, particularly their count of the homeless. Since this is the year for them to take another “accurate” count that will dictate how funds are allocated, I feel it is essential that they make the effort to seek out all homeless individuals to determine their exact number.

JP told me, in response to my comments, that in 1990 people from the Census Bureau came to Spokane to count the homeless. They stopped in at the HOC in the late afternoon and, seeing only 9 individuals in the dayroom, used that number as their count. Sadly, they neglected to consider that there are usually many more people in the dayroom earlier in the day. Similarly, just because they’re at the HOC doesn’t necessarily mean that they’re homeless. Many of the men who come in here have apartments or live with friends. Of course, the Census Bureau didn’t take the time to consider that.

I decided to ask JP his opinion on why some of the guys’ fingertips were stained yellow or purple. He told me that it was from the hand-rolled cigarettes that the men like to make. The nicotine and other chemicals in the tobacco seep through the rolling paper and literally burn the skin on their hands. The skin dies giving it that color. It then has to be removed with bleach or scraped off.
The guys also shared with me additional stories about the sleeping program. They encouraged me to return in November and help out with it. It sounded as if I could learn more from the men on those nights than I ever could during the day.

One night last fall one of the volunteers was attacked by one of the men. During the fighting and arguing a fire extinguisher was thrown at the JV’s head. Fortunately for him it missed, but it struck the top of the dryer. The dent can still be seen there today.

Since it was Wednesday, all gear had to be checked out by 3 p.m. Like last week, many of the guys who had checked their gear in forgot about it and weren’t here to pick it up before we closed. Others intentionally left it since they had no other place to take it. They’d rather take their chances leaving it with us than having to lug it around themselves. I don’t blame them. We provide them with their only sense of security.
May 18, 2000 (Thursday)

This morning I spent an hour setting up my video equipment. That was the easy part. Not the difficult part is finding someone who’s willing to allow me to interview them. Guys aren’t willing to volunteer information about themselves, especially to someone they don’t know very well. In addition, it’s even more difficult because I have nothing to compensate them with for their time. The end result is no incentive for them to want to participate.

I’ve wondered why some guys are so unwilling to cooperate. The more I think about it the more I begin to understand. Some of these people are at the lowest point of their life. Who would want that recorded? These men also have few people they can trust. Why should they trust me? And some are simply shy or suspicious of my intentions. Perhaps it’s a result of my position at the HOC – one that is wields more power than theirs since I have the power to give or take things away from them.

Mary is up to her same old antics. One minute she’s very cordial, smiling, and visiting with everyone. The next minute she’s throwing a tantrum, cursing and yelling at whomever gets in her way. Today she shared words with one fellow who was trying to sleep. A little bit later she marched back into the HOC and screamed at us four volunteers while we sat in the office. None of us can determine what it is that has upset her. It’s usually never clear.

During lunch we had an older gentleman come into the kitchen to give us a donation. It was two buckets of pinto beans from 1978! They had been on dry ice and sealed well so he thought we could use them. Jack in the kitchen said to toss them in the dumpster. Even though they probably wouldn’t make anyone sick, that just seems like way too long of an elapsed time to risk it. He said it’s not uncommon for other people or businesses in town to donate food that is way beyond the expiration date.

Today’s lunch, I hope didn’t consist of anything that old. We had pizza, strawberries and cream, milk, bread rolls, and an egg and cheese casserole. Instead of serving the usual bread and dessert, today I got the job of pouring milk.

After lunch I asked a few more guys about doing an interview. I was lucky to find four who would, but none were willing to do it until tomorrow. We’ll see if they keep their promise.

The remainder of the afternoon seemed to drift by without any major incidences. To be quite honest, my head was in the clouds the whole day. It didn’t matter much; if it did anything it just made me fit in that much more.

Sitting behind a desk for such an extended period of time tends to make me very restless. I hate to be inactive and sit idle when I know other things can be done. For example, the other day I took the time to alphabetize all the mail. And today I used the computer to type up a spreadsheet for mail checkout. The response to me taking the initiative to improve things wasn’t the most favorable. Rhonda questioned me if I had asked Ed’s permission and Al made it clear that he preferred the old system. I tend to forget how resistant some people can be to change. It’s often easier to maintain the status quo. Rather than force it I simply left things the way they were and told them they could choose to use my ideas if they wanted. I doubt they’ll ever agree to do so.

Just before we closed I videotaped the upstairs of the building. I went through each room trying to catch on film just how deplorable this place is. I have much more I
want to do in the way of film and photography during my time here, but I must proceed cautiously.

Earlier in the day I promised a fellow named Bill Callahan that we could use my car to move some of his personal belongings from Detox to his apartment. I kept good on my word. At closing him and I drove down to Detox and got his stuff out of storage. The place was very interesting. I'd like to learn more about it. In speaking with Bill I learned that he's been in and out of places like these for years. I couldn't seem to figure out how they were failing to keep him sober.

With his stuff loaded in my car we drove to the Red Lion where he lives. I helped carry his stuff upstairs to his small, quaint apartment. It was one room with a sink and mirror, bed, small stove, a dresser, and a tiny closet. Although most of the furnishings were quite old, the place wasn't all that bad. It reminded me of the dorm room that I used to stay in at WSU.

Bill let me know that he couldn't afford to pay me anything for my help. I told him I hadn't expected anything and that it was just a favor. Before I left he hit me up for cigarettes and I obliged. He went so far as to continue to ask for $2. I was surprised that he had the never. I turned him down on the money. It left me feeling pissed off that he was trying to take advantage of me and my help.

Note:

While driving with Bill he asked me where I was from. When I told him Creston, he said he knew two women from that area – a mother and a daughter. He produced their first names and I knew their last names. I had gone to school with the daughter and her younger brother. Bill said he'd "fooled around" with the mother, Joanne and that a friend of his used to date the daughter, Toni. It left me thinking what a small world it is.
May 19, 2000 (Friday)

I’ve made it two weeks today as a HOC volunteer. It’s been an interesting two weeks to say the least. This morning starts the same as any other. One quick trip upstairs to get towels for the guys. Open up the office and start the laundry list. Today, however, I’m trying to get some of the guys to allow me to interview them on tape.

After a few denials from different people to do the video, some finally give in. The first fellow I take upstairs to record is Larry Jones. He’s been at the HOC for some time. He’s a very mellow guy who has never caused any problems. The interview goes extremely well and Larry shares some very valuable information about himself and being homeless.

When I returned to the office a fight broke out before I could even get comfortable. A man named Frank, who I’ve never seen any problems out of, started yelling at another guy named George. Frank was in George’s face cursing at him and claiming that he was following him on his bike. Al, Kieran, and myself tried to intervene. Frank kept trying to push our way past us to get to George. Eventually he succeeded and began to chase George around the day room. At one point I tried to impede his progress and he struggled to get around me. Mark Jones, the counselor, did the same thing and got himself kicked. By the time we had ordered Frank to leave it was obvious he was enraged. Mary tried to yell something at Frank as he left and he struck her in the neck as he ran out.

Although it wasn’t clear what caused him to lose his temper, we think it may have been paranoia. Frank has had verbal outbursts with staff in the past, but usually isn’t violent. George, on the other hand, is a very mellow guy who always minds his own business. It’s very unlikely George was the culprit in this situation.

Following that incident I spoke to Willie about having him do an interview. After some explanation of my intentions he agreed to do it. I could tell he was little apprehensive as we first began, but he loosened up and became a natural in front of the camera.

That interview took me through lunch. I came down to the kitchen and Callie helped me scrape something together to eat. I had corn on the cob, a chocolate pie, a roast beef sandwich, and salad for lunch.

Once done eating Al approached me and asked if I’d like to make another trip to the pig farm. I said I’d be happy to accompany him. I knew that the job is a lot easier with the help of two people.

When we arrived no one was around so we quickly unloaded and left. I think Al enjoys my company. I share with him many of my experiences having grown up in the surrounding area. He’s probably sick of me doing all the talking. I need to quit that habit.

When we get back I talk Steve into an interview. He’s shared so many stories with me in the last two weeks that I figure he’d be willing to speak a lot on camera. He asks for a beer in order to do it and I tell him I’m unable to provide him with one. During the course of the interview I find Steve really sounding bitter about some people in the area and the way in which they treat the homeless. He’s only been here about two months and doesn’t know a lot about Spokane or where to get help. Another complaint of his is how he’s treated when he seeks medical attention. I listen attentively to what
he’s saying, but I question if he’s giving me the entire truth. When we finish he’s still inquiring about money for having done me the favor. I decide to give him $3, all the cash I have on me. After I do so I really being to wish I hadn’t. I fear that the money will most likely be blown on alcohol. Steve, though, doesn’t strike me as a person with a drinking problem. I’ve never seen him intoxicated nor have I ever smelled alcohol on his breath. It’s possible he might use the money to buy a pouch of Top tobacco or he may spend it on bus fare.

Before closing I film some more of the shelter. This time I shoot the inside after everyone has left. Many of the guys don’t like to be caught on film and get very defensive if they’re in a picture that they don’t want to be in. Thus, it’s much easier to get footage of the shelter when the place is empty.

Outside I film the exterior of the building. I wish to show others how rough the place is and how much work it needs done on it. I take the same precautions so that I don’t invade anyone’s privacy. Aiming at the ground I capture footage of garbage, beer cans and bottles, and sleeping places. There are also a few abandoned cars in the gravel lot next to the shelter.

Before I’m able to finish I’m approached by a Native American woman named Lisa. She tells me she prefers to go by the name Pebbles. Pebbles, or Lisa, is apparently very intoxicated. She introduces herself to me and asks my name. She continues to talk telling me how Ed is bossing her around and telling her that she can’t do certain things (e.g. drink, be rowdy) once the new shelter is built. Lisa is upset over this and repeatedly tells me that Ed can’t boss her around because she’s “full-blooded Catholic,” because she’s known Ed since he was a JV, and that she’ll talk to his boss and get him fired if he does.
May 20, 2000 (Saturday)

This morning I decided to avoid any more filming, partly because I’ll only be here half a day, and partly because I don’t want to upset anyone. Instead, I pull up a seat with JP at the front desk to perform our usual duties.

At one point Rick “the Rocket” comes in with a kitten. It’s small, black, and has no name. Mary carries it over to show me. I feel bad having to ask her to take it outside, but I know we’re not allowed to have pets inside (I think it’s a Health Dept. regulation; it also avoids problems such as messes, people getting bit, etc.) The other day I decided to look the other way when I spotted someone with a puppy in the dining room. I tried to pretend I hadn’t seen it. Sometimes something as little as that can brighten these people up so much that I hate to deprive them of that.

While at the desk JP spotted a guy named Bear sharpening a knife. He asked if I wanted to handle it and I said sure. I approached the guy and asked if he could do that outside since we can’t have any weapons in the HOC. He agreed and didn’t cause any problems. Upon closer examination I notice that it’s not actually a knife, but a meat cleaver. When I ask what he uses a cleaver for he tells me cutting off fish heads.

I tell JP that it was a cleaver and not a knife. He laughs and says that once a guy brought in a samurai sword. Nothing really shocks these JV’s any more.

Over the past two weeks I couldn’t help but notice the body odors that these guys give off. Today as I move through the day room I wish I were immune to the smell of urine, alcohol, and other unfavorable stenches. Many of these guys don’t shower for a long time, and even if they do, they often wear the same filthy clothes day after day.

Today before lunch I reflect on the fight that erupted yesterday. All the volunteers are good about peacefully resolving disturbances and they tend to refrain from using force if at all possible. Since they don’t carry any weapons themselves, they’ve become fairly skilled at diffusing conflicts by talking. Surprisingly though, none of them have received any formal training or information on how to handle such disturbances. I’m surprised they don’t lose their tempers more often and strike out at the men that are causing problems.

Cory was in the office briefly. He’s been wearing brand new clothes from Eddie Bauer. He mentioned that he purchased new shorts, pants, shirts, and two backpacks with a credit card. I found this very surprising since he has little if any income coming in. Although I know he works for a duct/vent cleaning company (the kind that go above restaurant grills), he only made about $1,600 last year – I know because he showed me his W-2 form. JP questioned how he was going to pay off the charges and Cory just sort of shrugged his shoulders.

One of the pairs of new pants Cory has been wearing is already stained with grease. He had no choice but to wear them to work since he doesn’t own any work pants. This means that he’s ruined a perfectly good pair of jeans that he can’t even afford.

Cory has also made some other purchases that surprised me. He used to have a very expensive mountain bike until it was stolen. Consequently, he replaced it with a simpler mountain bike from a pawnshop. I’ve also seen him with a gift-wrapped necklace he bought for his girlfriend from a jewelry store. On another occasion, he had spoken about buying her a pair of earrings. It’s probably not place to tell him he
shouldn’t be buying those items, but even the poor deserve something new every once in a while.
May 22, 2000 (Monday)

I’m back at work this morning, but this time with a skin condition. Over the weekend I notice small, red bumps under my hair on my scalp. The surround my head running from my temples to the back. I’m not sure what caused them, but I suspect it might be something I acquired from working at the HOC. It’s not uncommon for me to handle men’s clothing and towels as they’re being laundered. Perhaps I picked up some type of bug or mite and transferred it to my head. I hope that it’s not lice. The only other possibilities I can come up with would be an irritation from having my head shaved during a recent haircut or perhaps another occurrence of shingles (but it’s been years since I’ve had those).

The morning passes by slowly without any disruptions. Same routine: laundry, showers, and gear. The only think I notice today is a young lady about my age. Rarely do we see any women that young in the HOC. Most who are on the streets either “run with a man” or go to the women’s drop-in shelter on Howard Ave. That shelter is a safe-place for women; it doesn’t allow men in. JP says it well when describes the young woman as an “innocent girl in a not-so-innocent” place.

More pizza at lunch today. It was accompanied by bean soup, watermelon, milk, and cold sandwiches. There were an unusually high number of people who ate today. The line of people waiting to be served seemed to stretch the whole length of the building’s interior. Cally and Kenny claim that it’s not uncommon to have 100+ people for lunch. The way in which they count meals is interesting. Ed explained to me last week that they keep track of the number of meals served as well as people, since some people are served seconds and thirds. The number of meals, he contends, is more reflective of the amount of food the HOC gives out.

A fellow in the office today expressed concern about the new shelter being built. He wanted to know why none of the homeless men were part of the construction. Tom and I tried to explain that the company (Garza construction) building the shelter was made up of union laborers – if a non-union construction worker were to come on site they’d set down their hammers. Secondly, these men have solid credentials and experience in construction. Similarly, they’re contract has already been agreed upon and is in writing. Homeless men at the shelter who might want to help in the shelter’s construction tend not to be reliable or responsible enough to depend on. This explanation didn’t satisfy him and he walked away upset with us since he’s out-of-work.

After lunch I sneaked into the office to get some typing done and make some calls. At one point, I was interrupted by a strung-out woman in need of some shoes. Somehow she had made it to the HOC without a pair, but now she demanded some before she left. She stumbled around barefoot until I was able to find a pair that she’d accept for her tiny feet. Moreover, another fellow named Scott kept repeatedly asking me for towels and his mail. Although I couldn’t locate his mail, I did find him some clean, dry towels so he could take his shower. The end result was that I succeeded in only making a few calls and setting up an appointment with Sacred Heart to learn more about their services for the poor.

Just before we closed Ed asked if I could help make a load with him. He gave me keys to the van and Larry (the gentleman I interviewed last week) and I drove to South Crest. South Crest is an old medical facility (i.e. hospital/nursing home) that has been
sold to Sacred Heart. Evidently, all the items within the building must be sold so we were there to pick up things for the new shelter. We made three trips, or seven loads, of such items as mattresses, pillows, office equipment, shelves, etc. Sacred Hear wanted to get rid of the stuff so badly that they’d take just about whatever you wanted to offer for it. I think all said and done the total for all 7 loads only cost $150! That included everything mentioned above plus tables, bulletin boards, and even a microwave for me. The woman responsible for selling the items within building named Monique had called Ed and some individuals from other shelters and agencies in town and encouraged them to come and purchase the cheap stuff. Surprisingly, Ed (the HOC) was one of the few that actually took advantage of such a great opportunity – everyone else chose to wait, saying they needed to consult their board of directors, etc. Boy, did they miss out!

When we returned to the HOC to unload we had a ton of stuff. Ed asked three homeless men lingering around if they’d like to help. All of them refused. We finally convinced two others to lend a hand on the condition that we would allow them to leave their gear overnight. It was disappointing that the others wouldn’t even contribute to something that would directly benefit them more than it ever could us.

Several hours later we finished hot, sweaty, and exhausted from all the lifting. Ed invited Larry, Al, and me to a pizza dinner. Ed’s 4-year-old son Amen joined us as well. It was nice getting to sit down to eat with the guys, especially having a homeless man in our company who was so grateful for the food. The three older guys had a beer with their pizza, while Amen and I stuck to our soda.

As we left Al agreed to give Larry a ride to wherever it was that he was going to spend the night. I couldn’t help but feel bad knowing that I was heading home to a nice, well-furnished apartment that was safe and quiet, whereas Larry would be sleeping out on a cold, dangerous city night. How truly fortunate I am.

Note:

Larry and I saw Robert and another woman panhandling with cardboard signs on the sidewalks as we drove by with one of our loads. Robert seemed a little ashamed that we saw him and he even tried to hide his sign from our view. It read, “Homeless, Hungry, Need Food, Money, or Work.” Larry tells me these guys take turns, working the corners for money. He says it’s something he’d never do unless he absolutely had to.
May 23, 2000 (Tuesday)

Note:
Outside before I enter the shelter I ask Terry Hoff if I can take his picture. He agrees and willingly poses to my surprise.

Once again I find myself to be the first on the job today. No sign yet of any of the JVs. I decide to open the office since it is near eight. This time I wish I would’ve gotten more towels from upstairs first. Before I even have a chance to lift the windows or get settled the men are already crowding in, waiting for razors, towels, and a chance to get their name on the laundry list. Even though our dryer has been running fine for a couple of weeks now, it would be nice if we had a second one.

I get a few of the guy’s gear checked in. I look over my “To Do” list for the day and realize I’ll be lucky if I get half of the stuff done. Without other staff to help out at the desk, there’s no possible way for me to get to a computer or phone.

At 9:30 a.m. I decide to open the clothing room. On Tuesdays and Fridays it’s open from 9:30-10:00 a.m. rather than 1:30-2:00 p.m. to avoid conflict in the hallway. On those two days people are competing to get into the clothing room and clinic at the same time and the hallway connecting the two gets over-crowded.

My job at the clothing room is to only allow three people into the room at any one time. They’re allowed to pick out only one pair of just about anything they want or need (e.g. shoes, socks, shirts, coats, belts, ties, hats, etc.). As they enter I approximate their age and race and record it for our records. A separate set of letters and symbols are used in the event that a woman uses the clothing room. Today there are probably about 15 people who take advantage of free clothes, most only picking up one or two items. The new socks we have seem to be the most popular item. I have to argue with Rick “the Rocket” over the limit on items since he insists on taking two pairs of socks. Fortunately for me Ed arrives and prevents him from taking both, thus peacefully resolving the situation.

By the time I finish with that task it is nearing lunch. I found out that JP has been in Ed’s office being lectured by him about failing to wash towels and perform other JV duties. Ed has been upset that the JVs haven’t been doing their jobs completely and that they’ve been leaving work early. I think JP feels that all he’s getting is a lot of lip service, especially since he knows better than Ed what really goes on in this place.

During lunch I get assigned again to serving milk. However, it’s much easier since we have individual bottles of milk, versus having to pour from a gallon jug. Like always, we have pizza to add to our expired yogurt, plus bread and butter, old watermelon, and rice casserole. The food really isn’t all that bad although I do continue to hear some guys complain about it. It’d be much better if we had metal silverware to eat with, or at least plastic forks instead of plastic spoons. With my tray heavily loaded with food, I decline an invitation from John to sit beside him on a milk crate in the kitchen. Instead, I head to the dining room to sit among the guys. I’ve been forgetting to do this and I wish to make it clear to them that I don’t feel I’m better than them, that I feel I can associate with them, or that we have something in common.

Following lunch I check laundry and get ready to reopen the office. I know we’re not officially supposed to open until noon so I sneak in alone to have a little time to
myself before then. I make sure though, that the men’s laundry is going in the washer and dryer.

Precisely at noon the clinic doors open. Numerous men and women rush into the hallway to get their name down on the appointment list to ensure that they’re seen today. Many new faces, most of whom I don’t see on a regular basis at the HOC, fill the seats to wait their turn to be seen by the doctors and nurses. I try and squeeze past them to get to the back office for supplies. The hallway is over-filled; it needs more seats, is hot and stuffy, and people stink. Each time I try to get by is a challenge and I feel that I’m about to lose my patience.

Many of the trips I must make to the office are either for supplies or to pass on messages. Frequently people will call and I’ll have to get Ed or Rhonda to pick up the line. Other times I’ll bring back patrons to Rhonda who wish to inquire about work or housing.

On one of these trips I have to squeeze by a young, stocky Native American man. He’s not wearing a shirt and I must ask that he puts one on. He claims that we have all his gear and says he was just released from jail. To remedy this problem I grab him a shirt from the clothing room that he reluctantly puts on.

Later this same guy finds JP and I in the office. Again, he’s asking for his gear and is growing impatient with us. I know very well that it’s been recycled long ago and is no longer here, but in order to humor him I tell him I’ll go look. When I return without having found his stuff I’m fearful about breaking the news to him. He’s very large, very drunk, and seems somewhat aggressive. Once again Ed is around and he helps me explain to this guy, Lee M. Allen, what has happened to his personal belongings. Our response doesn’t please him, but there is nothing more we can do for him other than to help him start replacing his stuff.

While we’re contending with that other issues are arising. Mr. Green has been drinking heavily and is falling down outside. He’s so intoxicated he’s getting to the point where he’s almost unable to walk. It doesn’t do much good to call a cab to take him to his apartment since most taxi companies know Mr. Green and his reputation as a drunk. None are willing to transport an incontinent man in their car.

On top of this, the hair clippers that George Shaw donated are being used by the men to cut both their hair and beards. The men are lined up in the bathroom to use them and they’re making a tremendous mess, leaving shards of hair all over the floor. One of the culprits responsible for the mess is Roger, who at this point has effectively removed his entire beard making him nearly unrecognizable.

I’m getting so stressed that I decide I must leave. I drive my car a few blocks away to check out the CHAS Clinic and the Sydney Project. My goal is to get a hold of some free bed sheets that a fellow from the Sydney Project wants to donate to the shelter. Coincidentally, I end up gathering information on the clinic and meeting with a woman whose willing to help me with my project. With sheets in hand and some contact information from the clinic, I leave satisfied that I got at least a little accomplished today.

Back at the shelter things are finally winding down. We struggle to get everyone out at 3:30 including Mascio Spice who is passed out on one of the benches. Even though we’re being time efficient, we can’t leave until the last patient from the clinic has left. This means JP and I don’t get to go home until after 4 p.m.
After all the patients have left JP and I speak to the doctor about the skin condition the two of us have developed on our scalps. He gives us some directions on some different over-the-counter products (shampoos) to try. His best guess is that we’re both suffering from some type of skin inflammation, irritation, or dandruff. It’s relieving to know that it’s not bug-like and probably not something we acquired from the homeless, but rather stress induced.

Note:

Tonight I joined the JV’s at their house for dinner. I more or less supplied all the food. I brought steaks to be barbecued and stuff for baked potatoes. We spent about an hour visiting and the guys introduced me to their female roommates. Six of us sat down for dinner and enjoyed a terrific meal. I could tell it’s not usual for them to eat so well based on how thankful and appreciative they were.

Following dinner Al and I ran to the grocery store, Safeway, on a beer run. We picked up a case of Busch Light and brought it back to drink. The rest of our evening together was spent drinking beer and sharing stories. Al, Kieran, and JP had more to share about their experience at the HOC than I could have ever imagined. In a year’s time they’ve witnessed first-hand some pretty incredible stuff. They told me of seeing men walk naked around the shelter, of guys passing out and getting into fights, of threats made to their lives, and of the staff who serves at the shelter. One evening wasn’t nearly long enough for them to speak on all their experiences – their list is literally endless. However, I felt that they enjoyed reminiscing and I myself felt privileged to have been in their company that night.
May 24, 2000 (Wednesday)

Al and I are in command today. I’ve brought a joke in with me today for Mark Jones, the counselor. It tells of a man going to a psychiatrist only wearing underwear made of plastic saran wrap. The psychiatrist says, “Well, I can clearly see your nuts!” He and Ed both got a kick out of it.

George Shaw is in this morning. I ask him where he ate dinner last night. I know he likes to eat at the Just Like Home Buffet when he has the money. Yesterday I saw him looking through the yellow pages for an all-you-can-eat restaurant. He says he went back there and loaded up on chicken, ribs, and other food entrees.

Before yesterday I was always curious where he got the money to pay for his meal. He told me that he donates blood plasma for money. They allow you to do it a maximum of twice a week, and pay $20 and $25 each time. This means he can make up to $180 a month. I ask him if they screen very thoroughly and he says yes. He admits to fibbing on some of the questions that they ask him to ensure that he can be accepted as a donor. Apparently he has to provide them with an alternative address other than the HOC so that they won’t suspect that he’s homeless. (I’ve overheard other people discuss donating eggs or sperm for money; one person even brought in the phone number of a place that accepts eggs, but she told me that she was beyond their age limit).

Roger, Manna, and Mary are in. Roger still looks strikingly different without his beard. Manna is trying to buddy up to me – he wants free cigarettes. The more I learn about him the more scheming I think he partakes in. He certainly knows how to use the system. Mary is same old Mary. She’s got on the same blue jeans, jean jacket, and yellow mesh hat (crooked of course) that she’s been wearing for several days.

Also in our company is Ivan Brooks and the “mafia” man. Ivan has a barbell through the septum of his nose that protrudes out both nostrils. He wears leather, chains, and denim. Al says he’s one of the nicer patrons in the HOC. The “mafia” man is here to reclaim his red hand exercise tool. The last time he was in he left it at our desk. I used it to the point I had blisters. It’s supposed to improve your grip strength.

Out in the dayroom Bear is helping a teenage girl shave her head. They’re working over a garbage can to keep their hair from falling everywhere. When I ask if I can take their picture they say yes, so I do.

On my way to the kitchen to help with lunch I notice a Native American man passed out on the steps leading up into the dining room. He must’ve made it in line for lunch, but didn’t have the energy to stay awake. I contemplate taking his picture but decide not to since I can’t get his permission. Besides, I’m fearful he might wake up and catch me in the middle of taking it and get pissed off.

Up in the kitchen I help dish out lunch. Today we’re serving macaroni and cheese, fruit, bread, milk, and leftover chicken. I work the milk line offering three different types of bottled milk: vanilla, chocolate, or regular. They seem to be popular since they contain more ounces than we normally serve.

After lunch I get towels ready for afternoon showers. I head back to the office and reopen it. The first thing I notice is that a lady has skipped ahead in line for the dryer. Somehow she managed to get her clothes in before some of the other guys. Needless to say, this angered the guys, especially Larry Jury. He wanted to get his coat washed before we closed and now he fears he won’t be able to. I remedy this problem by
agreeing to do some of the guy’s laundry upstairs for them. Even though this remedies the problem, I continue to hear Larry dwelling on it as if it were a bigger deal.

Linda, the lady who tried to cheat the laundry list, is here with her husband. They arrived without any gas in their car asking us to help them. I gave her the names of several churches and other agencies to contact since we don’t provide money for that type of thing. While here she also snuck in a second load of laundry. Normally each guy is only permitted to do one load unless nobody else is waiting.

Troy, one of the bigger guys I’ve seen in the HOC is pacing back and forth across the dayroom. Occasionally he looks toward a corner or wall where nobody is and yells something at an imaginary person. For some reason he really thinks someone is there and he feels the need to tell that person off. It’s very odd to watch him do this. I decide that it’s best not to say anything since he’s not hurting anyone.

Later, when I visit with the JVs about Troy they tell me he’s a veteran. I guess he used to be a blue barrette in the army. He certainly looks like he’s got the build for it. I’d speculate that he might suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) by the way he behaves. Kieran tells me in the past that he’s even pretended to ask the imaginary person to leave in order to calm Troy.

After a long afternoon of phone calls, favors, and answering questions, Kieran showed up to save me. He needs me to help him with deliveries. The two of us wait until Al finishes with the clothing room before we leave the office. Our destination today is three different apartment complexes owned by Catholic Charities.

Kieran and I have little difficulty finding the first set of apartments. There we drop off mostly paper towels, toothpaste, and tissues. At the second one we’re unable to find an office manager or person to leave the items with. Eventually we locate the right person and leave her with the same type of products. The third complex we visit is Summit View. Again nobody answers the door when we knock so we decide to leave the items under an awning where they should be discovered. As I dolly some boxes toward the drop-off spot they tip, spilling canned goods all over the road. Although it takes a little bit of time to get all of them picked up, nothing is broken or ruined.

After we close at 3:30 p.m. I drop off Al at the JV house. From there I head to the ECCO clinic. My plan is to gain information on the services they provide.
May 25, 2000 (Thursday)

This morning I drove again. That’s been my habit lately even though I’m staying only five minutes walking distance from the shelter. It allows me to get 15 minutes more sleep.

The JVs and I have been making sure that we have plenty of towels for showers. They were lectured the other day by Ed and so they’ve made sure that the towels are washed twice daily.

This morning is quieter than most. I’m not sure why that is, but it just is. I notice that there are fewer drunks in the dayroom. That my account for the difference.

We give out a bedroll to a fellow we haven’t seen before. We also fetch out some gear from storage for the guys who forgot to check it out yesterday. Even though we remind them to take it with them on Wednesdays, they still choose to leave it since most have no where else to take it. Often when they stash it in the bushes or elsewhere somebody else finds it and steals what they want from it.

Cory is in briefly. He’s now working at Perkin’s as a dishwasher/custodian. He seems to like it much better than his old job of cleaning kitchen hoods. This morning he’s showing off his new Bon Marché charge card. He just received it and he has been given a $500 limit. I learn that all the clothes he bought the other week at Eddie Bauer were also charged. How he gets credit, I do not know. One thing I do know is that he’ll probably never pay off his charges with his spending habits. I laugh when I think of how stores give credit to just about anyone in order to sell their merchandise. Little do they know that Cory is homeless and has such a minimal income.

Yesterday I spoke to Russell about doing an interview, but he’s not here yet. He probably won’t show. I also ask Mark Linza if he’s still interested and he asks to postpone it once again. His first excuse was that he wouldn’t do an interview until the swelling in his hand went away. Now he’s saying I must wait until he finds housing.

For lunch we ate pancakes with syrup, scrambled eggs, and fruit salad. I didn’t serve today. Instead, Cally had me do her monthly count of ages and ethnicities of those who were fed. Today we served over 100 meals, the majority of which went Caucasians.

Later in the afternoon I received a call from a mother in Post Falls, Idaho. She was looking for a place for her 20-year-old daughter to stay while she works at Godfather’s Pizza out in the valley. She said she didn’t have enough money to get her daughter into an apartment because of the first and last month’s rent and damage deposit being due in advance, plus her lack of rental history. However, she knew her daughter needed to leave that area in Idaho to escape a failed marriage and what sounded like an abusive husband.

A young man named Joseph also calls looking for food and a place to stay. I tell him to come to the HOC and he does. I pass him on to Rhonda who is better prepared to help him.

Reggie, a big black man new to the area is also in. He’s from the South and I’m not sure what brought him to Spokane. Rhonda’s been helping him find housing and other resources. Today he asks me for a bedroll so I get him one. Each time we do that we’re required to take down the person’s age, name, and race. This ensures that each guy only gets one bedroll. Otherwise, guys tend to lose theirs, have them stolen, or sell them (sometimes to get money for drugs or alcohol).
While Reggie is in he also mentions something about his stay at the Union Gospel Mission (UGM). He says they asked him to work in the garden to earn his dinner, but he was unable due to his diabetes. If he were to get a cut on his hands it would take a long time to heal. This explanation upset one of the staff who allegedly told him that they didn’t want “niggers” there and that he ought to leave. This put him in the position he’s in now – without a place to stay. All the apartments he’s been looking at take two weeks to get into. He says he’s also waiting on some type of SSI check to arrive so that he’ll have some money.
AUGUST
On one particular day Cory is in the office searching through the phone book for the number or address to a clinic. He is asking me and one of the other volunteers where he can be tested for a sexually transmitted disease (STD) free of charge. I can't help but wonder who this guy had sex, whether it was his girlfriend and pregnant mother of his child, or if it was someone else. Why also did he fail to wear protection (i.e. a condom)? I'm not sure if anyone provides free STD checks, let alone treatment if a person finds out their infected.

Rick "the Rocket" is extremely drunk today. He likes to drink Steele Reserve beer out of the can. It's very cheap, has a higher alcohol content than ordinary beer, and contains more fluid ounces – everything an alcoholic could ask for. In the past I've caught him with a full can inside the shelter and I remember asking him to either put it in his pack or take it outside. Ed has also had to ask him to move away from the front of the shelter when he's been caught drinking there. He and the other men (and some women) like to sit on the sidewalk near the front entrance and smoke and drink beer. We as staff usually have to ask him to move down the street or to the back alley where his drinking is less noticeable. If we don't, we get many complaints from neighboring business owners and the police.

As drunk as Rick is, he expects us to do everything he says. We check his gear out for him and tell him to take it with him when he's asked to leave the shelter. He's upset that he has to carry all the weight and doesn't want to take it with him. Rick is also demanding a pair of socks since he's been kicked out of the shelter before the clothing room opens today. I'm having difficulty getting him to leave so Rhonda comes to my rescue. She's able to compromise with him by giving him some socks on the condition that he doesn't come back until he's sobered up and agreed to stop causing problems.

This morning one of the most humorous accidents occurred. Dean, while washing towels upstairs, discovered some clothes in one of the dryers. Assuming they had been donated, he hung them up in the clothing room for the homeless men to try on. That afternoon we opened up the clothing room and many of the shirts, socks, and pants that came from the dryer were picked out by the men. Unfortunately for Dean, he didn't realize that the clothes weren't actually donations, but rather they belonged to Ted, our custodian! Ted doesn't own a washer or dryer so he brings his clothes to work to wash them upstairs when the washer and dryer aren't in use.

That afternoon Ted looked around in dismay at seeing many of the homeless men wearing some of his favorite clothes. At that point, it was too late to ask for them back. Realizing his mistake, Dean offered to buy Ted some new clothes to replace those that he'd accidentally given away. All afternoon Dean was apologetic. I couldn't but help laugh at the situation.
On this particular day while serving lunch I couldn’t help but notice the cups we were using to serve milk. Unlike most days when we use ceramic coffee cups to pour the drinks into, today we were forced to use plastic Budweiser keg cups that had been donated. Since the coffee cups were dirty, the kitchen staff thought it made sense to serve the milk in the plastic cups. To me it seemed ironic to see our shelter serving milk in Bud cups since we as staff actively seek to prevent alcohol from entering the shelter. On top of that, many of the men drinking from the cups are chronic alcoholics. I guess it just kind of reminded me of being at a “kegger” with all these people standing around drinking from their plastic Bud cups.

I used to think that the staff were the only ones who recycled clothing and gear. The past couple of days, though, that changed as I witnessed on several occasions homeless men exchanging the clothes they had on for new stuff out of our clothing room. Rather than throw their stuff away, they were kind of enough to give it back to us to wash and pass on to the next person. Although the thought was appreciated, most of the clothing wasn’t worth keeping and some was so dirty or worn that it probably should’ve been burnt.

On one particular day I remember Kelly donating a pair of boots to the clothing room when he found himself a new pair of Nike shoes. He figured someone else could use the boots, and since he didn’t have a use for them, he wanted us to find a new owner for them. On a different occasion I recall one of the men taking the shirt off his back and swapping it with one hanging from a hanger in our clothing room. Evidently, he shared the same sentiment as Kelly.

In observing Richard Carlin as he slept, I couldn’t help but notice the fine details of his appearance. Coincidentally, he looked very similar to the comedian Richard Carlin. Both are close in age, have long, silver hair, and share a similar build. Aside from that, Ed pointed out the number of patches that Richard had hand sewn onto his pants. On the rear of his cotton pants were literally dozens of small, non-matching patches of fabric sewn in to help cover holes where he had worn through the material. Upon closer inspection I could see all the delicate stitches he had used which probably equated to dozens of hours worth of time keeping his pants intact. Ed reminded me of the fact that Richard rarely, if ever, takes advantage of the clothing room. He sleeps outside and is never seen during the sleeping program. Since I’ve been here he’s never changed clothes.

During many of the days at the shelter I was often responsible for sorting incoming mail. Ed would bring mail sent to the homeless men from the chancellery to the shelter for us to distribute. We would then sort it by name, update the mail list posted where the guys could see it, and deliver any mail to the men that requested it. Essentially, we were these men’s local post office. We could even send mail for them if necessary; we would frequently supply men with paper, envelopes, and stamps.
While doing all this sorting I was surprised at the types of mailings these men received. Often times there would be letters from court, probation officers, hospitals, bill collectors, etc. Other times I would see letters containing credit card offers and campaign propaganda (e.g. George Nethercutt). I was just blown away by the fact that these men were receiving credit, despite them being penniless and on the streets. Moreover, I was taken back by the irony in that people seeking public office were campaigning to the homeless, whether they realized it or not. Most of them have probably never stepped inside a shelter or have even experienced poverty in the broadest sense, and one might even argue that their policies have contributed to the plight of these people from whom they’re seeking votes.

Although it was never uncommon for us to have to dial 911, today I was surprised when a man in the day room was having chest pains. We immediately dialed 911 for help and within minutes several firefighters and EMTs had arrived. I’m not sure who the man was – it’s possible he may be new to the shelter. Someone else had spotted him having difficulty breathing and clutching his chest and asked me to make the call.

Ed reminded me that these kinds of thing do occur quite frequently. Having called 911 in the past for people having seizures, people coming into the shelter with injuries, and fighting, I knew it wasn’t far off. His recommendation was to always dial for help or allow someone else to. Even if you’re unsure if it’s serious, he’d rather risk making the call than having a situation escalate or where someone might have to take matters into their own hands.

In August I met the two new JVs that replaced Al, Kieran, and JP. Unfortunately, the departure of the old JVs didn’t coincide with the arrival of the new ones. It would’ve been neat for the two to have met. The old JVs could have passed on their tips on how to handle dealing with the stress of the shelter.

Without the old JVs, it became my job to introduce the new JVs to the shelter, the staff, and the patrons. I was responsible for orientating them to their new surroundings and answering any questions they might have. The two of them, Mark and Pete, were obviously anxious to begin. I’m not sure they knew what to expect until they actually arrived and began working.

While it was sad to see the other three go it was enjoyable to have two new, energetic, and enthusiastic volunteers to help. However, it meant that we were now with one less person than we were accustomed to. According to Ed, the HOC usually only receives two new JVs a year. It was just a fluke that three were assigned to the shelter last year.

A big, Indian American man named John told me a joke today. It goes as follows:

Q: “Why did the white man go to the moon?”
A: “Because he thought the Indians also had land there!”
One afternoon while the clinic was open a middle-aged black woman approached me with a complaint. She claimed that the doctors working in the clinic were discriminating against her because of her race. Although I was skeptical of her claim I had her speak with Ed to try and resolve the situation. I figured he was better prepared to handle such a sensitive and potentially volatile issue.

Whenever people complain about the treatment they receive in the clinic I'm always somewhat skeptical. I spent an afternoon observing and helping out in the clinic under the supervision of one of the doctors, Arch Logan. In every instance he treated every patient with the utmost respect, confidentiality, and compassion during the care he gave. The nurses who assisted him were equally professional and caring. I find it difficult to believe that they would refuse treatment to someone without a valid explanation.

Regularly our clinic is visited by drug addicts and other users. The doctors and nurses work in a cramped area, with impatient people, under high stress conditions. They're frequently asked to prescribe narcotics and other heavy medications. Often times the prescriptions they write are sold for money or the drugs purchased with them are misused or sold. The money earned from this type of behavior is often used to feed an addiction. Thus, the doctors are placed in a really difficult predicament when they're forced to decide if treating the patient is actually helping them or if they're simply being taken advantage of.

One morning while working in the office I found our desk being overtaken by homeless men. Bob Twist and Kelly had made themselves at home in our chairs when he had gotten up briefly. They were fumbling through the desk drawers, some of which contain the personal belongings of others (e.g. we keep men’s wallets as collateral for our towels). Realizing that they were in the way and making our job that much more difficult, I politely asked them to move out of the office and into the dayroom.

Twist was really slow to do as I asked. He didn’t see why I needed the desk and he needed to move. Kelly, on the other hand, was already on his way through the door into the dayroom. However, in seeing that Twist wasn’t relinquishing his chair Kelly grew upset. He felt I was kicking him out, but not doing the same to Twist. I tried to explain to him that they both had to go, but I made little success. Eventually I coaxed Twist out of the office.

Kelly, upset that I kicked him out first, grew angry with me. He started “mouthing off” about how I don’t have control over him and he can do what he wants. I warned him that if he kept it up I’d ask him to leave. He proceeded to flip me off and curse at me.

Moments later Mark, the counselor, came out of his office and chewed me out. He claimed that Kelly told him I wasn’t going to let him see the doctor or pick up some clothes that day. I patiently explained to Mark that that wasn’t the case at all, and I went on to describe the events that had transpired. All in all is wasn’t a major deal, it was just frustrating how these men, like children at times, will go behind your back when they don’t get what they want until they find someone who can give them what they’re after. I must admit that these guys are great and scheming and being manipulative, and if you’re not careful, they’ll take complete advantage of you.
As a staff member at the shelter it’s my responsibility to answer the phone for any incoming calls. Not surprisingly then, I often feel like a personal secretary to Spokane’s homeless population when all I do some days at the shelter is take messages for the men. Frequently people using the phone will exceed the five-minute time limit we allow them. Other times we have to ask that people calling to ask for the homeless men limit the number of times they call.

On one occasion a fellow named Fred had been receiving calls all day. I repeatedly told the caller I hadn’t seen him all morning and that I’d be happy to leave him a message for when he arrived. The caller insisted that she’d prefer to call back unless I was willing to look outside for Fred. I tried to explain to her that I couldn’t leave the front desk unattended. After some compromise I agreed to poke my head out the front doors to see if I could spot him.

Seeing Fred sitting on the sidewalk I walked up to him to tell him he had a phone call. I didn’t get his attention when I called him by his name so I gently tapped his shoe with mine to let him know I was talking to him. This was a big mistake on my part since he took offense to me “kicking” him. He stood up, berated me for my action, and threatened me not to ever let it happen again. Although it wasn’t my intention to upset him, he quickly taught me that I had made an error of judgment.

Dean, one of the other volunteers, has always been less tolerant of the way the homeless men treat us. He grows very impatient and upset with those who try and cheat the system or are disrespectful to the staff or the facility. I’ve overheard him say that the men in the shelter are guilty of “biting the hand that feeds them.” In other words, they tend to abuse those who are doing the most to help them. In addition, he has claimed that they “like to shit in their own nest.” That is, the men tend to trash the shelter since they know very well that they’re not the ones that have to clean it.

On this particular day a fellow named Geno was causing problems. I’ve suspected Geno of smoking pot in the bathroom in the past, but I’ve never been able to catch him in the act. Geno isn’t usually drunk, but today I think he’s had something to drink. Dean asked him for a small favor earlier and Geno responded with a “Fuck you.” Dean, who doesn’t appreciate being cursed at, quickly decided to ask Geno to leave. It took some physical force to get Geno out of his seat and out the door.

As Geno was leaving I could hear him continue to swear at Dean. Dean had asked him to leave for the day, but because of the way Geno continued to treat him, Dean told him not to come back for a week. Geno, as a sign of protest, plopped down on the sidewalk just in front of the shelter.

When Ed got the news of what happened he confronted Dean about his decision. Ed hates to put anyone out for a while, fearful that they may have no place else to go. Dean on the other hand views it more as tough love. Everyone realizes that we hardly ask anything of the guys who come into the shelter and that we’re discouraged from following through with our threats to kick someone out of the shelter for an extended period. As a result, many of the guys love to test our patience and stretch the rules. They love to “test the waters,” so to speak. Dean decided that day that he had just about enough of it and Geno was the first to push his buttons. In talking with Ed he pleads his case and convinces him that he made the right decision.
Kelly, one of the Native Americans is frequently in the office visiting with the staff. He loves to share stories, jokes, and have laughs with all the guys. Ever since I arrived I’ve gotten a kick out of him. He’s very laid back and takes everything in stride.

Today Kelly has a real, genuine eagle wing with him. He claims he bought it at a pawnshop, but I’m suspicious of where it really might have come from. The wing is over two feet long and he keeps it wrapped in a black, plastic garbage bag within a box. Kelly says he might sell it during this weekend’s Pow Wow at Riverfront Park. Otherwise, he might keep it for himself and use in his ancient Indian rituals. I find it peculiar that he would’ve picked it up at a pawnshop. As far as I know, it’s illegal for people to possess parts of protected birds, or at least it is for non-Indians.

During another afternoon of talking with Kelly he offers to share with me a letter he received. He claims that it is from the daughter of Robert Yates, the serial murderer who has received so much press lately. I scoff at the idea that somehow he would know anyone related to that family, particularly since he’s been locked up in prison for so many years.

Kelly hands over a letter to me and asks that I read it. As I read through it I can’t help but notice all the references the letter’s author makes to her father and family. She accurately describes the trial, her father, and what has been going on with the serial murder case. The signature on the bottom of the letter reads Amber Yates. I recall from having read many newspaper articles about Robert Yates that he has an older daughter named Amber. I also remembering reading that the family moved to Walla Walla shortly after Robert Yates was apprehended. To my surprise, the return address on the envelope is a Walla Walla address. I can’t help but be convinced that he actually knows her.

In the body of the letter it also mentions something about Kelly being sick. In asking him what that meant, he explains to me that he is HIV positive. He acquired the virus either just before he went to prison or during his stay there. He asks that I not share that information with anyone else in the shelter and I give him my word I won’t.

Despite all the mentally ill people I see at the HOC, the one who catches me off guard the most is Troy. With his huge stature, military apparel, and stern demeanor, I can’t help but be intimidated by him. I’ve only spoken with him briefly a couple of times, and in each case he was very friendly. I’m not sure why it is then that he scares me.

One of the reasons I’m probably so intrigued by Troy is how he can spend hours in the corner talking to a person that doesn’t exist. Usually he is barely audible, but sometimes he raises his voice to the point where I think a fight is breaking out in the dayroom. Usually all it takes to calm him down is someone approaching him and asking if everything is okay.

Although I’ve been tempted to follow Kieran’s example of asking the imaginary person to leave, I’ve been hesitant that my actions won’t be well received. I could just imagine what Troy might do if he thought I was personally trying to embarrass him. Oddly enough he never notices the attention he draws to himself when he has a cursing fit with someone whom the rest of us can’t see.
In watching guys sit around at a shelter all day I often wonder why it is that they’re not out seeking work. It’s somewhat understandable why people develop such negative attitudes toward the homeless. Often all they see is a person sleeping on the streets, panhandling for money, or sitting inside a shelter not doing anything to better him or herself. They question why they would want to give their hard-earned money to someone who won’t even help themselves. They argue that these people are lazy or that they don’t work hard enough. And although I can sometimes see their point, I feel that their position on the matter is flawed.

In talking with many of the homeless it becomes clear why many are unable to hold down a job. For some, it’s because they’re uneducated or lack the skills necessary to find a job to support themselves. For others a disability, either physical or mental, keeps them from working. Still others can’t find work because of their age. And even others are prevented from working because they’re either illegal aliens or they have a felony conviction somewhere in their pasts. With so many explanations it becomes much easier to understand why these people can’t find work.

Perhaps one of the biggest factors I’ve found preventing people from holding down a job is their addictions. Those with chronic alcohol or drug addictions are unable to perform their duties, and without treatment, are unable to get and stay clean as required by most employers. It’s a diffuse sort of problem where one aspect of a person’s life tends to govern another.

A good example of this may be how the lack of resources sets of a cascading chain of events that prevent people from escaping poverty and homelessness. Without being clean or sober a person can’t hold down a job. Without a job they have no money. Without money they can’t pay their bills, nor can they afford a home, a vehicle, or even clothing and food at times. Without good family connections they have nobody to bail them out when they’re strapped for cash. Once on the streets they have to rely on others for food, clothing, shelter, and even medical care. Without these basic needs taken care of most of these people’s time is spent acquiring these necessities that most of us take for granted. And even when people get their lives back together, they still find it difficult to find a job when they lack the proper attire for work, a phone number where they can be reached at, or even a mailing address where they can exchange correspondence. Given that the odds are stacked against them, it’s somewhat easier to understand why the homeless often remain homeless for so long. There has to be more incentive for them to want to change their situation. Until that occurs, it will be a gigantic task to get everyone off the streets.

Despite our preconceived notions of what a homeless person looks like, many take pride in their appearance. This became evident to me while working in the clothing room where I would carefully watch people select their clothes. Aside from simply finding the right fit and the appropriate clothing for the weather, many of the homeless often tried to match their outfits and make sure that the clothing they were choosing was somewhat color coordinated given our limited selection. Sometimes I’d even be asked for my opinion on what looked good on a particular person or what I thought was in style. I couldn’t help but be impressed by the amount of human dignity that remained in these people despite their grim circumstances.
One of the most frustrating things I had to deal with as a volunteer was seeing people take advantage of others. Call it human nature or call it greed, but nearly every homeless person I dealt with was guilty of trying to take something from their neighbor to ensure that they had more. I suppose the same probably occurs amongst the rest of the population, but given that we have so much more it isn’t as noticeable as when something is taken from someone who has so little.

Every day at the shelter I would witness someone doing something ruthless to someone else. Often times it would be as trivial as cutting in line, taking more than one’s share of food or clothing, or demanding more personal time from the staff than other people received. Yet other times the offenses would be much more severe. For example, we had some cases where some men’s gear disappeared and had been taken by someone else. In addition, almost everything belonging to the shelter or staff was subject to theft if it wasn’t bolted down or kept under lock and key. For me, this was one of the most difficult things for me to comprehend: Why do the poor steal from each other rather than help one another out more often?

Perhaps the prime example I can describe of someone putting themselves first before anyone else involves Bernie and his children. Bernie, who has two kids with his wife Star, often relied on the clothing room to provide his young children with school clothes. Whenever newly donated clothes arrived at the shelter, Dean and I would make the effort of sorting through them to find children’s clothes. Knowing that school was going to begin in a matter of weeks, we felt it was important that Bernie’s kids have the appropriate clothes for school. Nothing is worse than being a child and being teased by your peers for your clothes either looking cheap, old, or dirty.

Like most instances, we would pass on whatever clothing we found to Bernie to give to his kids. The expectation was that it would be given to his kids and not sold or given to someone else. Unfortunately he disappointed us one afternoon when we caught him wearing a shirt that was intended for his son. Despite it being way too small for him, Bernie thought for some reason that he deserved it or that he needed it more than his son did. Obviously he didn’t care enough about his son to make his son’s needs and wishes a priority before his own. It was disheartening to think that he felt it was more important to put himself first.

During one of the days the clinic was open Ed introduced to the clinics director, Arch Logan, M.D. (Internal Medicine/Gastroenterology). In speaking with Dr. Logan I learned much about the services the clinic provides, a brief overview of its history, and some of the problems it has encountered in the past. Open two days a week, Tuesdays and Fridays from 12:00-2:00 p.m., the clinic sees patients on either a drop-in basis or by appointment. In either case, visits are free of charge and they’re available to men, women, and children.

In talking with Dr. Logan he discusses some of the ailments they commonly treat. They include, but aren’t limited to the following: asthma; respiratory and urinary tract infections; alcoholism; acute aches, pains, headaches and other injuries; lice; athlete’s foot; ear infections; skin and joint problems; anxiety attacks; diabetes; common colds; arthritis; and some vaccinations (e.g. influenza). Dr. Logan explains that alcoholism is often the cause of many of his patients’ symptoms and that most of the treatment the
The clinic provides non-invasive care; rarely do they perform sutures or injections. In addition, the doctors are able to prescribe medicine and dispense some from the tiny in-house "pharmacy," or medication room. Also at their dispense is a limited amount of medical equipment including crutches, air casts, etc.

When cases of venereal disease and STDs are spotted the patient is usually referred to the Health Department. Similarly, dental needs are referred to the Community Health Association of Spokane (CHAS). And although most diagnoses are routine, doctors have located cancerous tumors in two past patients — one had a mass in the abdominal region and another person in their neck.

According to Dr. Logan the clinic first opened its doors in 1976. Since then care has typically been provided by two RNs and one MD, all of whom are retirees who volunteer their time. Currently, ten nurses work twice a month and four doctors alternate shifts twice a month. These individuals are responsible for maintaining patient files. A log of patient visits that records their demographics (gender, ethnicity, homeless status, etc.) is also kept.

Dr. Logan tells me that they see anywhere from 1-10 new patients per day and receives roughly 2,300 patient visits per year, the majority of whom aren't street people, but rather addicts. He states that there has been a rise in female patients by about 33% recently along with a rise in mental health patients. Many of the patients are "repeaters" or "frequent flyers" who visit on a regular basis. Despite this flow of people the clinic goes unregulated by both the city and county of Spokane, let alone the State of Washington.

The space that the clinic fills is very limited. With no lab and a tiny pharmacy, the clinic consists of two small rooms. The majority of equipment and medications available for use have been donated either from other doctor's offices or they come from patients who no longer need them.

One of the major problems the clinic faces is treating people who abuse drugs. Many people come in seeking treatment for heroin or other drug addictions. Often they're asking for "kickpacks" or other medicine for their addictions. Recently the decision had to make that the clinic would no longer provide narcotics or other heavy, addictive medications. The reason for this is that most are frequently sold on the street. The same thing often occurs with certain prescription medications, including antibiotics. Instead of treatment, the doctors have had to settle on only providing advice or referrals in such cases.

Another minor problem includes the occasional fight outside the clinic amongst those waiting in line to be seen. As a precautionary measure a hidden panic alarm has been installed in the clinic to signal a volunteer in the event that a doctor or nurse would need assistance from a patient or protection from one. Dr. Logan reassures me that it is rarely ever used.