Lynne Basehore wrote the following Mission Statement for the Garden:

The Homeless Garden Project employs from 12-15 homeless people to grow organic produce which is sold at the Farmer’s Market, at local natural food stores, and to local restaurants. The Project also recycles organic waste from three local restaurants and local landscapers by making compost with it in sixteen days.

The garden began, above all, as a safe place for homeless people. It continues under the premise of cooperation and mutual respect for the earth, the environment, and wildlife, for the community, our neighbors and their concerns for each other, our co-workers and our mutual goals; and for ourselves, our inner peace and sense of self-respect.

The garden is a context where an exchange can happen: homeless folks “producing” healthy organic food for sale and contributing to the community, and the community supporting, volunteering and keeping viable the opportunities for others.

The garden teaches us capability and compassion.
Bill Tracey wrote: *A Day In the Life of the Garden.*

The morning fog rolls in over West Cliff Drive, muting sound and subduing color. At the Homeless Garden Project, the flowers' bright colors are veiled by the grey sea-mist. Later in the day the garden will dance and sing with the purposeful activity common to harvest time the world over, but now is a quiet time. The workers, most of them homeless people, are quiet, for it is early and the neighbors are still asleep.

Nevertheless, the garden is no different from any other agricultural enterprise. The day starts early and the chores are never finished no matter how long the day lasts.

With this in mind, Manny builds a fire in the grill and sets a pot of water on the grill to heat. There is coffee, tea, a few cakes, and some leftover sandwiches. No one need go hungry to the fields.

Manny is a quietly proud man. He is also a calmly efficient man whose easy, shambling grace belies his sixty years and the amount of labor he performs. As he sips his tea, he walks the garden in his mind. He knows each row, each bed, what's planted where and why. He calculates what's ready for harvest and what the approximate yield will be. Later he will compare notes with Adam, and they will both compare their estimates to the actual yield. It is a game they play. Manny considers the possibilities of winning a few bucks betting against Adam. For an answer, he chuckles to himself and moves off from the fire. There are beds to be dug, weeds to be pulled, dozens of things to be done.
The next to arrive is Bill. He is a tallish man, twenty years Manny’s junior, but despite that his hair and beard are shot with grey. He walks with a limp and finds the morning fog and damp disagreeable. He and his crew will do the brunt of the landscape, carpentry and mechanical work necessary to the project. They handle the daily task of turning as much as 18 cubic yards of compost. The thought causes him to flex his back muscles until the vertebrae crackle. For breakfast, he washes down three aspirin with a cup of very hot, very strong coffee heavily laced with sugar. After a few gulps he lights a cigar. Unsurprisingly he is a former Army Sergeant.

It being harvest day, Lynne will be in. The thought causes him to smile. Lynne, the project director, is a pretty blonde woman and Bill has scar tissue almost as old as she is, but for all that, they like and respect each other and each other’s devotion to the project as a whole.

Bill’s train of thought is interrupted as his work partner, a rough and ready ex-carny roustabout named Skooter, arrives. Skooter kickstands his bike and fixes himself a variation of Bill’s breakfast leaving out the aspirins and substituting a hand-rolled cigarette. “So what’s really going on?,” he asks in a voice that’s about as smooth and silky as the suspension on a gravel truck.

“Ten bins to turn and a mix,” Bill replies. A fifteen year veteran of the streets, the highways, the carnivals and the hobo jungles, respect does not come easily to Skooter. “Eight months on the job today. Longer than I’ve ever worked a job in my life.” With a shrug, he walks over for a brief look at the bulletin board. A copy of the project’s rules is post-
ed there. Skooter respects the rules. He helped to make them.

A brown pickup arrives, bringing the kitchen waste from several local restaurants, a prime ingredient of our compost. Pete, the truck's driver, looks like he fell asleep at Woodstock and just woke up.

Now the arrivals come thick and fast. The pace is picking up, the energy building. Kim, tall and lank, long-haired and full-bearded, looks out at the world through thick glasses. His big hands seems so unsuited to the delicate task of seeding he finds so fascinating.

Michael, the first to admit to an abiding fondness for food, resupplies the depleted cakes.

A class of children will help harvest today. Michael will look after them. He finds it disconcerting that a government willing to spend vast sums on armaments and technology leaves it to him, poor and homeless, to educate its children on where food comes from and how. The thought gives him a certain satisfaction and he plays a little flute to chase the evil spirits away.

Joe wanders in looking like Grizzly Adams, but possessed of a talent for flower arranging and an eye for color combinations.

Dan arrives with dog and van. He will take the harvest to market. Conversations spring up that are no different from any other group of workers except these men are homeless. They don't discuss the wife and kids or who won last night's football game. The wife and kids, if they ever had them, are some-
where back down the road and the memories of them are apt to be painful. No one owns a tv and the condition of Joe Montana’s multi-million dollar arm is not of any great concern to anyone. They don’t watch cop shows, they watch cops. They talk casually about who is in jail and why and are glad it’s not them. They gossip about the day to day affairs of homeless people, so-and-so got drunk, or so-and-so got 86’ed from the shelter.

The sun is fully up now. The garden is filled with workers harvesting, seeding, weeding...

Boxes of produce and buckets of flowers collect at the van. The produce is washed, sorted and bunched. Bouquets are made.

Chairs and benches are pulled up. Co-eds chitchat with carny tramps. A college student planning a hiking trip gets expert advice on what does and does not belong in a backpack from a man who lives out of one. Schoolkids sort strawberries and happily munch the ones birds have pecked. There are bowls full of stirfry and peanut butter sandwiches.

And finally it’s all done. The van loaded and off to market. The dishes are washed and put away. the engine on the shredder dies. Hours worked are logged in. The work area is tidied up.

One by one the workers, paid and volunteer, homeless or not, drift off. Bill mops his forehead, tosses a tarp over the shredder and relights his cigar stub. He fixes himself an evening cup of coffee, just as strong and black as the one he had for breakfast. His limp doesn’t bother him and the ache in his shoulders is oddly pleasant.
Manny walks to the far end of the garden to read the water meter and shut down the irrigation system. Even though the sun is still far above the horizon, there is the beginning of a chill in the air. Soon the fog and mist will come back. "Days getting shorter already," he says aloud to no one and nothing in particular. He walks back to the shed and locks the door.

The Garden has developed a program that has been tried in a number of other communities known as Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), offering seasonal shares of the harvest beginning in the Spring of 1992. Consumers support a farmer who grows the produce. In return for purchasing a share of the seasonal harvest, one receives a weekly basket of fresh produce. As a consequence of this relationship, one knows who grows the food, where it is grown, and what methods were used in growing it.

Here is how the program works: a share is 1/120 of the Homeless Garden Project’s agricultural budget, costing $300 for the entire thirty-five week growing season (about $8.60/week from April 1st through the end of November). The price is calculated by dividing the total estimated expenses incurred in growing the food, by the number of shares the garden can sustainably provide. The costs are “shared” amongst those who will eat the “dividend”, or harvest. A share is based on what one to two people eat every week. More than one share should be purchased for families or collective households.

It is an excellent way to guarantee part of the budget and plan for the next season’s crops.

Newsletter Spring 1992

The homeless Garden Project began two years ago as a “safe place for homeless people to be during the day. At the time there were many people coping with the high penalties of the Camping Ban which levied fines as high as $145 if caught sleeping in public. The streets during the day had little to offer a tired, jobless person except further harassment and
stress. The garden attempted to offer sanctuary, a small income, and a place to regain some meaning and productivity against a backdrop of failures and catch-22's. As Kim, one of the gardener's once claimed "it was good to wake-up and know I had something to do today".

During the first year and a half The Garden has employed over 75 homeless workers, brought in over $100,000, and bridged the gap in services no longer offered by state or federal governments. Many times in the course of providing tours, offering students internships, or simply while appreciating the generous hard work of a volunteer we've asked, why can't these jobs that provide food, sustainability to the land, an a sense of community be the foundation of our local economy? According to the U. S. Department of Agriculture Resource Inventory, our nation loses 4,000 to 5,000 acres of agricultural land each day. Is it any wonder that jobs, and homes are lost when the vitality of a community, it's ag lands are lost.

From the beginning the Homeless Garden Project has held a vision that returns a value of usefulness back to both our vacant lands and our marginalized peoples. We now occupy a 2.5 acre site which is one of the last remaining vacant parcels of city land. While the City is busy at work on a plan to sell the property with a subdivision of 16 single family high income houses we are actively campaigning to save the few remaining areas of prime agriculture land within the urban community. While the City hopes to make a few million from the land to offset the budgets for the next couple of years we hope to preserve the possibility of productive soil and a beautiful garden forever. Limiting growth is a difficult and controversial task. But someone has to do it. The garden has been useful to so many; the elderly neighbors, the local school kids, preschools and university interns, consumers in search of healthy food, the avid composters and naturalists, and to those who simply need to witness life's abundance, but most of all to the long term jobless and homeless citizens of this community it has been a renewal of the spirit.
Chapter Eight
The Homeless Service Center

For years, Santa Cruz has struggled to find a balance between hard economic realities and compassion for the unmet needs of the shelterless persons who reside on our streets. The devastation wrought by the Loma Prieta earthquake of 1989 brought this struggle to crisis proportions, in an upheaval that at times has threatened to tear our community apart. In 1991, two separate reports described a day resource center as a potential solution to this dilemma. The Social Issues Task Force recommended the center as a method of lessening the impact of homelessness on the downtown retail area. The Briefing Paper on Homeless Services and Service Gaps prepared by the County Human Resources Agency, in January of 1991, pointed to the center as a means to provide sanitary facilities for North County shelterless residents.

Without consistent access to sanitary facilities, the difficult journey to get off-the-streets becomes almost impossible. To find a job without access to a shower, laundry facilities, or a place to store one's belongings is an unrealistic, almost hopeless task. Employment counselors are forced to spend an inordinate amount of time attempting to provide these primary services, when their time would be much better spent preparing their clients for the real challenges that they will face in securing and maintaining employment. The difficulty of providing health care for shelterless persons becomes horribly complicated when patients are unable to clean themselves and their belongings, and lack a quiet place to recuperate during the day. Even meal operations are complicated when employees and volunteers are unable to find access to sanitary facilities. By creating a centralized location for direct service provision, many existing services will become more effective.

In March, the Coalition for a Safe Place to Sleep submitted an applica-
tion for funding from 1991 Community Development Block Grants (CDBG). At this time, the management of A Free Meal, under the auspices of the William James Association, submitted a proposal for the Homeless Resource Center, a more detailed and final version of the Coalition's original application for funding.

The Resource Center would be a multi-purpose service center designed to address the unmet primary service needs of homeless people in the City of Santa Cruz. The facility would be available to homeless people seeking a variety of services: storage, hygiene care, information and referral, phone and mail contact. Additionally, the center will be a safe and legal location for homeless people to gather, come in off the streets, and be in a position to access social and other services available to them.

The Center will serve as an outreach location for the many existing homeless support programs. The Homeless Employment Program, the Homeless Garden Project, the Homeless Persons’ Health Project, and the Mobile Outreach Support Team are examples of the groups which would be provided with regularly scheduled hours of operation. A Free Meal will be absorbed into the overall structure of the center, and the site will serve as the pickup spot for the Interfaith Satellite Shelter Program.

Currently, a site selection committee consisting of homeless service providers, City Council members, appropriate technical consultants, and homeless persons is working to develop a site and implementation plan for the Resource Center. Since the exact operational details and hours of operation will depend greatly on the site chosen, at this time we can only indicate ideal levels of service.

Storage of belongings: we will provide a minimum of 150 lockers, of the size necessary to store a large backpack.

Showers: we would like to provide two showers each for males and females. To practise water conservation, low-flow shower heads should be installed, as well as a system of tokens and time meters. Two sets
of two low-flush toilets should be sufficient.

*Phones:* one line should be available for administrative use. One line should be available for incoming calls only, with a pay phone installed for return calls. A system will be established for reliable relaying of phone messages.

*Mail:* shelterless persons should be able to receive mail at the Center’s address. A reliable system of mail distribution will be the responsibility of the Director.

*Laundry:* two sets of washer/dryers will be on site and available for use all day.

*Meal Service:* coffee, juice, and donated cold snacks will be served all day as donations allow. A hot meal will be provided each night, consistent with the current level of service of A Free Meal.

*Outreach:* a quiet, separate area will be provided for other service providers. The Director will work with all groups to schedule regular, convenient outreach hours.

Organized along the lines of A Free Meal, the Service Center Director would be responsible for all fund-raising, bookkeeping, and community relations work. The Director would also have oversight responsibility for day-to-day program operation, and for the hiring and firing of staff members. All employees will be drawn from the homeless community, with current employees of A Free Meal guaranteed at least an equivalent amount of hours as they have at the time of the transition. The Director will supervise all employees, who will in turn coordinate volunteers in their areas. The entire community is responsible for enforcing all program rules. The use of alcohol or drugs will not be allowed on the premises, and violence, theft, or severe disruptions will not be tolerated.
Decisions will be made in weekly community meetings, ideally reaching consensus but voting when consensus is not reached. One of the first tasks of the community meetings will be to determine what the consequences will be when rules are violated.

The Homeless Community Resource Center will fill a crucial gap in the current network of homeless services. It will relieve all other service providers from the burden of locating primary hygiene care for their clients, and allow them to better use their resources to provide their specialized services.

For the Homeless Employment Program, the Center will mean that job applicants can be clean, wear laundered clothes, and store their belongings while they work. It will enable their clients to receive phone messages quickly, and to be waiting at a central location should casual labor be available. The Program will also provide invaluable support to homeless employees of the Center.

The Homeless Persons' Health Project will be able to provide outreach at an indoor, clean, central location. Those who are ill, but not seriously enough to be hospitalized, will have a quiet place to rest and recover. The Health Project will also be able to act as an advisory body on health-related aspects of community living at the Center.

The Mobile Outreach Support Team operated by Supportive Outreach Services provides excellent support for those with mental health concerns. Through this team, shelterless persons are put in touch with Pioneer House. This drop-in center for the mentally ill is able to provide for almost all of the needs of their clients. It is hoped that the team will provide regular outreach at the Resource Center.

County Mental Health has expressed a willingness to schedule regular case management hours at the Center. This will provide a crucial link between the mental health system and those clients on the streets. Many shelterless persons are entitled to benefits they are not aware of, and outreach is desperately needed to enable these persons to enter the mental health system.
The Center will serve as the pickup site for the Interfaith Satellite Shelter Program. Since Satellite hours extend beyond the expected operating hours of the Center, ISSP will assume the financial responsibility for staffing the Center from six p.m. through eight p.m. each evening.

The Free Meal program and all associated costs would be absorbed into the overall structure of the Resource Center.

For years it had been obvious to anyone who worked with the homeless that a day center was desperately needed in Santa Cruz. Unfortunately, the consensus among the powers that be was either: no one would use it; or, homeless people the world over would converge on Santa Cruz to use it. So, the idea was immediately nixed anytime it was brought up.

In the homeless hysteria following the earthquake, Vision Santa Cruz recommended reviving the “Downtown Social Issues Task Force”, (or “The How To Run The Bums Out Of Town Committee”), but with the addition of a few liberals to balance things out, or at least add a little ‘pull’ to the ‘push’. Thanks to the help of Mary Thurwachter from Legal Aid, and a few others who probably wouldn’t want to be publicly thanked, they squeezed Karen Gillette on at the last moment as part of the services subcommittee, with Bob Campbell, the current administrator of the River Street Shelter and Will Lightbourne of Human Resources Agency. Although Karen secretly felt that HRA stood for “Human Regulatory Agency”, she immediately liked and trusted Will and HRA’s homeless analyst, Judy Schwartz. They both had a pragmatic and honest way of laying things right on the line that she appreciated.

Karen knew that if the basically conservative task force recommended a day center, it would be pretty easy to get the City Council to approve it. At first it seemed hopeless, because one Downtown Association member couldn’t cope with the concept of doing anything for the homeless, only to them. But somehow, Will talked them into a lukewarm recommendation and they were on their way.

At first, the cause was championed by the Coalition For A Safe Place To Sleep. They had done an amazing job of generating community support
for the homeless during attempts to get a campground a few months before. A Free Meal seemed to be the obvious choice of management for the Center since they spent less money than everyone else and had more fun doing it. Of course, the big question was “where can we put it?”

At first, ideas ran toward modular units on temporary sites, which didn’t appeal to them very much since they had been “temporary” since the day they opened and were kind of sick of it. Next, someone floated the idea of sharing the River Street Shelter building, which struck terror into their hearts!

Economically it made sense, but logistically it was a nightmare. The energy of the meal depends on the homeless knowing that they “own” the program, and they could never “own” River Street!

Just when the process felt doomed, Harriett Deck, of Schooner Realty, arrived on the scene like a fairy godmother to help them lease the building next door to the Free Meal site. As they watched, she calmly began to help them “control their own destiny” in a somewhat miraculous way. The owner wasn’t interested in leasing the site— the only way they could have it was by purchasing the entire building. Of course, this seemed impossible, but before true hopelessness set in, Harriett had enlisted the help of Housing For Independent People (H.I.P.), a non-profit developer who was already involved in the Community House project.

As they stood back in amazement, Harriett, and H.I.P. representatives, Al DiLudovico and Thom McCue, took on the task of buying the building so they could lease it. It was as if someone had sent in the proverbial knight on a white horse!

As if this help wasn’t more than they had imagined possible, the City of Santa Cruz allocated almost $225,000. toward the Day Center out of Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds to get the Center up and running. They had to keep pinching themselves to make sure they were awake and still in Santa Cruz!

Then, just when the financing of the building seemed most grim the
County of Santa Cruz stepped in to make the fairy-tale complete. In a rather complex arrangement between the County, the City and HIP, over $800,000 in bond money has been set aside to finance the project. For a group born out of utter cynicism at the way Santa Cruz handled homelessness, they were amazed at what the grownups could do when they put their minds to it.

Karen Gillette comments on her experience:

"To see so many different parts of our community pitch in to make our dream a reality was the most wonderful reinforcement of our original philosophy of seeing everyone as potentially helpful, not as potential stumbling blocks. We owe our deepest gratitude to so many people- to the Coalition For A Safe Place To Sleep, who created the atmosphere for it all to happen in, to Hariett, Thom, and Al, for giving us a level of professionalism that we never dreamed of, to Will Lightbourne and Judy Schwartz, for their endless support and pep talks, to the City Council for getting behind homeless services in such a big way, to the Board of Supervisors, especially Fred Keeley, for bailing us out of the real estate blues, and most especially to Don Lane, who keeps saying "we" instead of "you". In a place where there's only "us", Don fits right in!"

Hopefully, the Day Center will open in 1992.
Chapter Nine
The Future of Homelessness and the Possibility of a Solution

What is the future of homelessness? More homeless? In this morning’s paper, we read: “U. S. cities have more hungry and homeless people than they can feed and house and the situation is getting worse, the U. S. Conference of Mayors said yesterday.” (San Francisco Chronicle, Dec. 17, 1991).

No one wants to talk about a solution to homelessness. It is a limiting concept for the imagination. I felt deep resistance whenever I brought up the subject, even among colleagues, just for possible discussion, as if my imaginative (and enthusiastic) excess was exposed at its worst point. There he goes thinking about solutions when there is no possibility of one. Might as well work on a cure for cancer.

It was unacceptable to think of homeless people sleeping on church floors for the rest of time in spite of what it did for the morale of the churches. Band-aid solutions were short term. We had to think about the long haul. We had to be the first community in the United States to solve the problem. Why not? We were to scale. Problems were not outsized for us as they were in greater metropolitan communities. I took one hundred homeless as my starting point. It was the number we supported in our Interfaith Satellite Program for the first few years. The number rose to over one hundred and twenty-five in 1991-2, in terms of the nightly maximum average. This was partly due to the fact that we had extended the program county wide, including Watsonville.

I have no idea how many homeless there are in Santa Cruz County, although the estimate has been given at 2,000. But I am willing to help
find a solution for a hundred. I thought about selling my home. Theoretically, that is. I knew my wife wouldn’t go for it, even theoretically, but it provided me with an example of the problem. At the time, I could have sold it for $400,000, although the recent decline in the real estate market has lowered the value. (I paid $33,500 in 1967). It would pay for apartments for my one hundred homeless for one year. One house against shelter for one hundred homeless for one year! I had the most glaring example of the discrepancy in affordable housing in our community.

At one point, we had the chance to consider renting or buying and moving into the Greenwood Lodge. Page Smith and I went out to take a look at it. It was for sale. An old left wing radical camp in the woods above Capitola. All we needed was a million. Page rolled his eyes. It would have created an instant homeless community for one hundred or more. The beds were all made in the thirty or forty cabins. There was a large lodge with an institutional kitchen. There was a campsite above the compound on a plateau, possibly enough room for another hundred. There was a swimming pool. But it was remote, stuck off in the country, difficult to get to, and the timing was off. Now it is the world headquarters for the Dalai Lama. He needed it more than we did. Instead, we will sink a million into Community House for forty. But it is close to town, behind the shelter and next to what looks like the future site of the service center. We have our centralized complex intact.

The present possibility for an instant community, with accommodations for over one hundred is Beulah Park, an almost abandoned former fundamentalist bible camp, just outside of Santa Cruz, off Highway 17, before Pasatiempo. Lots of cabins, most of them falling down, a large kitchen, a huge quonset type auditorium, which is condemned, although the earthquake didn’t seem to bother it. Lots of space in terms of land, although some of it falls off into a deep ravine. I reeled away in abject disgust at the deteriorated condition of the place, not wanting to put my worst enemies there, although a few came to mind.

Then I got over my reaction and realized it was the very reason for getting it for the homeless. No one else would touch it with a thousand
foot pole. We could fix it up. We know of the availability of rehab mon-

ey from the State. We put together a coalition to prepare the way: The
Homeless Action Network, although the Homeless Service Center was
an immediate concern. After the service center, we could turn our atten-
tion to a large scale homeless community with low cost housing and wave
our magic wand.

After all, when you look at the accomplishments over the last seven years,
there is no reason to believe an end is not in sight. But for the recession,
which no one at present can fathom. Perhaps we are headed for hard
times beyond our imagining—the grapes of wrath may be upon us once
more.

What is needed is a reform of the social services system in this country, in
this state (California) and in this county (Santa Cruz). Without this
reform, we have to fight against an entrenched bureaucracy almost inca-
pable of an original idea on their own and bent upon thwarting those who
come up with one, although this is beginning to change under the current
welfare administration and their attention to homeless services. There are
sufficient resources and there is available space. Take one simple fact.
Not a single high school or grade school gymnasium is open to the
homeless on any given night during the year in this county. Why not? If
the churches of the community can do it why not the schools? Physical
plants abound. Getting into them is another matter. This is true in every
community in the land.

While teaching Ethics at Cabrillo College in the Spring Semester of 1991,
I spent some time reviewing the history of homelessness as a case study in
ethics. I invited the Santa Cruz County Director of Human Resources—
Will Lightbourne—to talk to the class about his views and the agency’s
views on homelessness. I warned him that I would be especially critical of
the General Assistance Program, the bottom rung of the welfare dollar,
and would ask him a number of critical questions about this objectionable
underbelly of the welfare system, as I found myself calling it, once I found
out how it operated. He said, “o.k.”; he was willing to discuss it.

I had heard about General Assistance when I decided to help a homeless
fellow, who, one night, at one of our church sites, approached me and
asked me if I knew of a half-way house for ex-cons. I knew of none in
Santa Cruz. I asked the next question: Was he an ex-con? Not exactly.
He was running from the law over the issue of mistaken identity. He was
confused with a man who had murdered two women in Santa Cruz and
he had been stopped in five or six states, arrested, and jailed, until it could
be determined that his fingerprints did not match those of the murder
suspect, when he would be released, only to have his license plate noticed
by the next patrol, when he would be picked up again. You know, a com-
puter glitch. They even suspected he had altered his fingerprints which
was why they didn’t match those of the murder suspect.

He had been arrested eight times as Gary Partlow, in Colorado, Nevada,
Oregon and California.

As I looked at this bearded fellow, I had the sneaking suspicion that I was
beholding the most abject human being in Santa Cruz. He was the can-
didate for the negative prize—bankrupt on the wheel of fortune. There
was something about him that made me think I had better help him even
though he didn’t have a clubfoot. I told him I would help him. I knew
about General Assistance as the bottom rung of the welfare dollar. It was
the response of the County of Santa Cruz to emergency need of the most
dire kind. If you were penniless, down on your luck, stuck in town, out of
gas, not a dime, nothing to eat, no where to sleep—you were eligible for
GA. Now wait a minute! Isn’t this a description of the homeless? Isn’t
everyone who is homeless a candidate for GA? Well, let’s not make a cat-
egory mistake. We’re talking about this poor soul in front of me, not
about the homeless in general. His name was Hoffman. I told him I
would help him get through GA. I have to admit, I was looking for a
guinea pig. I had heard about the program and I wanted to know how it
worked. I would track Mr. Hoffman through the maze. He would be my
learning experience. I would find out why the homeless in general didn’t
apply or weren’t eligible for GA. I would see for myself why this was the
objectionable underbelly of the welfare system.

Well, needless to say, he didn’t make it through the system. I didn’t
know it then, but I know it now—the program is designed to wear you out.
Tillich makes the point about the quickness of response to need, as one of the critical features of a philosophy of social welfare. Good luck. I found out they deliberately make you wait two weeks before they give you any money in the hope you will go away and take your need with you. I should have given Hoffman out-of-pocket money. I did it in any number of other instances. I just didn't think of it probably because he didn't ask. Three days into the process he stole a piece of bologna from a local Safeway store and was arrested. He called me from jail. "Hello, Mr. Lee. This is Hoffman. I'm in jail." "Not another mistaken identity," I asked. "No, bologna."

I wondered about this guy. Why had he come to Santa Cruz, the very place of the murders he was confused with, like some kind of perverse magnetic draw? I may have asked him, but I don't remember what he said. I repressed my suspicions and took him at his word. He was so beleaguered and abject, so hounded and down on his luck he needed emergency help no matter what his story was. He had all the earmarks of the proverbially drowning rat.

I learned enough from his example to confirm my worst fears about General Assistance. He had mentioned on his GA form a bank account in Nevada where he had $14.00 in savings. GA wanted an affidavit from the bank to that effect. That was a good one. He had to get three different estimates on his car from three different garages, indicating it was not worth more than $500. He didn't have any gas and he had no money to buy any. That was another good one. And on and on. How much would Mr. Hoffman have received in his emergency state had he been declared eligible after the two weeks or more of forms and interviews? $110. A month. This is a loan. It has to be paid back out of the first paychecks in the event of getting a job. Every week you have to list ten places you have applied for a job when every case worker knows these are made up which means complicity in lying.

There is a lien on the loan. A what? A lien. You mean "lean", as in "lean on me", in terms of the whole system wanting to crush you? No. A lien against any future property you may ever own. Who? Hoffman? It was ludicrous. The lien was just to shove your face in it: a lien on the loan
against any possible future property! The word "mendacious" came to mind again. I actually went to the dictionary and looked it up. It means lying, untrue, spurious, false. Deception. In other words, you go to a social agency in the utmost need, absolutely down on your luck, your tongue hanging out, and they are supposed to help you with the law of listening love. Ha ha. Sure. We're talking General Assistance. We're talking mendacity. We're talking about lying deception on the part of a social service agency theoretically devoted to human welfare.

I got so mad I went to the Grand Jury. I had a friend who was sitting on it. I told her about the Hoffman case. She said call up and make an appointment. I did. I stated that I had a case of welfare fraud. You know, mendacity. I meant the system, not some poor single ethnic mother on the fraud hook. They all looked at me with a little twist to their necks. I described the General Assistance Program. They clucked. Bad enough, but where's the fraud? 75% of the money goes to administer it. For every dollar given, it costs $.75 cents to give it. That's fraud. They pay people to see to it that those in need don't get it! That's mendacious! They didn't believe me, but they said they would investigate. It turned out to be true. I had Grand Jury confirmation, but that's as far as it went. It was mentioned in their Annual Report for 1987/88.

So now I had Will Lightbourne, the Director of the Human Resources Agency, in class, recently appointed to the job and for all extents and purposes representing a new point of departure. He was terrific. A Jamaican. Very smooth, very impressive, very cool, but with lots of heart. He had come out of Catholic Charities to head the County Welfare Agency known as Human Resources. He gave a brief rundown on the burdens of the agency. We were all immediately depressed by his account. How can anyone handle such a job all along the line? The described need was so great. He talked about people running down the corridors, the case load is like that, the time is so short, the needs are so severe. We said how about introducing volunteers—I had students in the class ready to raise their hands—to help with the pressure. He said, no way, the union wouldn't allow it. Uh huh.

So much of the budget went to families with dependent children
(AFDC)—I forget the budget figure, but I perked up when he said: “we can cut a check for AFDC applicants in two hours”. “Oh, oh”, I thought, “Wait till we get to the General Assistance lag”. On and on—food stamps, child abuse, health, refugees, vets, public guardian, foster care, adoption, adult services, you name it, need upon need, all into hysterical overload. We finally got to GA. He smiled a wry smile and agreed with everything I said. “It’s not my design, you have to understand, and I have to live with it.” Why?, I thought, people take out the garbage once a week. They trap rats. They report noisy neighbors to the police. There are all kinds of things we don’t have to live with.

Mr. Lightbourne continued: “Well, the State has been talking about taking over the program so its days may be numbered in terms of local administration. The money comes out of the General Fund of the County. It is the toughest dollar. You’re right. The whole system is designed, at the level of GA, to see to it that as few people as possible get it.” He admitted it. “We make them wait two weeks. We can cut a check for AFDC (aid to families with dependent children) in two hours. With GA, it is routine. It is policy.” Hearing it again didn’t make it sink in any deeper.

I had the terrible admission. But it was only over coffee after the class that I found out the bottom line. Why this squeeze on GA when it is supposed to be the emergency need program? It should be the most responsive and the most receptive to need. Because the image of the GA client is what? The homeless? No, it is worse than that. Tighter than that? What? What image is worse than the homeless, most of whom are in genuine need? The Deadhead! Oh, come on! Yes, the Deadhead! The image in the community of Santa Cruz of the person who applies for GA is the Deadhead. I suddenly realized that if he didn’t share this perceived image he had acquiesced to it.

Immediately, I understood that Deadheads, the notorious followers of the Grateful Dead, the psychedelic band of the 60s, still running strong, every performance a sell-out, was the excuse for not responding to emergency need—the Deadhead was the image hovering over the GA program. Don’t give them the money, because they don’t deserve it! Those
Deadheads! They aren’t really in need. They’re on their way to the next concert where they can smoke dope and drop acid and sell their beaded jewelry crap.

They want to be out there in la-la land. They want to be on the hand-out. They want to be homeless, living out of their van, if they have one. They want their chosen way of life. They have repudiated the American Way of Life. They are critics of it! They don’t want to work from 9 to 5. Why should we give our hard-earned tax dollars to the Deadheads? Why, indeed?!

I thought of Hoffmann.

It was the homeless male that was most hurt by this stigma of the Deadhead.

As Peter Marin states it in his article in The Nation: “The Prejudice Against Men”, it is homeless men who are the most neglected because men are not supposed to need help:

> To put it simply: Men are neither supposed nor allowed to be dependent. They are expected to take care of others and themselves. And when they cannot do it, or ‘will not’ do it, the built-in assumption at the heart of the culture is that they are less than men and therefore unworthy of help. An irony asserts itself: Simply by being in need of help, men forfeit the right to it.

The homeless male was a Deadhead.

I found out that the budget for GA was over $400,000 a year. $200,000 went to administer it. I had the solution in a flash. “Mr. Lightbourne,” I said, “we will arrange for the Grateful Dead to play Santa Cruz once a year and we will raise $400,000 from a single concert, just your budget for General Assistance.”

I had thought about starting a nonprofit GA, as a community effort,
funded with $100,000, the amount that went to recipients, administered by volunteers. We’d show them. After a demonstration year, where we would spend less than ten per cent on administration, we would contract for the GA budget and see to it that almost all the money went to those in emergency need. We would force the hand of the County on the delivery of the emergency welfare dollar. I would come to realize that this was one of my more naive and unrealizable ideas.

So here I was offering a check to Mr. Ligh bourne, as the result of an imagined Grateful Dead Benefit for GA, in the amount of his annual budget. He did not extend his hand. “We wouldn’t accept it”, he said, without hesitation.

I was dumbfounded. “Why not?”

“Don’t you understand? We don’t want to give money to Deadheads!”

The image suited me in my worst moods in thinking about the homeless. I remembered my first impression when I went down to help at Peter Carota’s kitchen. I thought I had entered a scene from Dante—you know—“abandon all hope ye who enter here”. I thought this is the night of the living dead, only it’s not a movie. These guys are living it. What I meant was that this perception of the homeless was the perception of the middle class, the propertied, those with a home, my own first impression. I was looking into a mirror in the sense of seeing my own perception, rather than looking straight and true at fellow human beings in need. The homeless were the living dead, lurking around outside, waiting to get into the kitchen to steal a beer and then anything else they could lay their hands on. Any minute now, a greedy, ugly hand will break through the window. They were a threat to one’s bourgeois security. The homeless were the un-grateful dead! They had ceased to exist because they were unemployed and lacked shelter. Therefore, they were as good as dead. They were less than human. They were ghouls. The metaphor fulfilled itself. It was the meaning of “disappearance” applied to the homeless. They had departed from humanity—from all those who had jobs and homes to go home to with loved ones waiting and a hot meal on the table. And they returned as though from the dead to haunt the bourgeois and to
make them uncomfortable to the depths of their bourgeois souls.

And now it was clear: The image of the Deadhead, that counter-culture critic of bourgeois values and meaning, the threat to the American Way of Life, the turned-on dropped-out member of the Timothy Leary gang, who tuned in to the endless riffs of Jerry Garcia and his band, the hippy of old, going back to U.T.E.'s, which stood for the Undesirable Transient Element, which is what the community of Santa Cruz called them in the 60s and 70s, the hippy-Deadhead was the excuse for withholding the welfare dollar from the neediest of the neediest in the County of Santa Cruz.³

To quote Peter Marin again:

> Whatever particular griefs men may have experienced on their way to homelessness, there is one final and crippling sorrow all of them share: a sense of betrayal at society's refusal to recognize their needs. Most of us—men and women—grow up expecting that when things go terribly wrong someone, from somewhere, will step forward to help us. That this does not happen, and that all watch from the shore as each of us, in isolation, struggles to swim and then begins to sink, is perhaps the most terrible discovery that anyone in society can make. When troubled men make that discovery, as all homeless men do sooner or later, then hope vanishes completely; despair rings them round; they have become what they need not have become: the homeless men we see everywhere around us.

The moral of the story was clear—it was impossible to expect from established agencies what they were unable or unwilling to give—the response to the homeless would have to come from the private sector of volunteers and nonprofit corporations, exactly according to our experience over the last six years, although even there we had to learn a lesson.

We came to realize that certain nonprofits mirrored the established agen-
cies. The established and successful nonprofits, that is, the big ones—were professionals with a track record. There was a kind of collusion operating even at the nonprofit level, in league with City and County agencies, although this was seeing it from a particular point of view: ours. We gave our time freely, without pay. No one at the Board of Director’s level received any pay, although we had a fairly large (under) paid staff running our programs. We had no Executive Director and staff to run the programs above the program directors themselves. The professional nonprofits were heavily stacked with well-paid administrators; hence, the inflated budgets. This was understandable. It was their job. But we wondered about the lack of scrutiny over these budgets and the tendency to float larger and larger budgets every year for seemingly less and less services. It looked like the routinization of charisma all over again, that old Max Weber theme. You get the spontaneous response from people with the spirit to do it, whatever the demand is, and then the more organized, the more administration is needed, the more bureaucratized, the more routinized, and the spirit departs, as though on schedule. The current United Way scandal is a good example of skimming money for bloated salaries and perks at the top.

I can imagine the routinization syndrome happening to us in a decade, but for our effort to turn the operation of programs over to the homeless themselves, moving them up to staff levels and positions of responsibility, where the talent and ability many of them have can be demonstrated, as, in our experience, it always was. You could count on it. It was part of the internal morale that working together in a common cause necessarily produced. Maybe this avowed aim would keep the spirit moving.

Millions of dollars are being spent on the homeless every year in Santa Cruz. It is something approaching an industry. Not even the generosity of local contributions has been tapped out. We have a good model to show for our half decade work in the five programs detailed here. The Garden has proved to be the most promising from the point of view of rehabilitation. Chronic alcoholics and drug users get another chance to try to kick their dependency with all the support the project can muster. People who will never hold a conventional job take to gardening as if it were made just for them. There is something awesome about the produc-
tivity and fertility of the cultivated land that is therapeutic and transform-
ing, when the corn you have planted is as high as an elephant’s eye. There
is comradery and a sense of increasing morale even in the face of adversi-
ty. They aren’t going to let their stuff, what they have planted, die. So
they themselves take strength, accordingly. They live and grow to make
live and grow. Healthy people follow healthy plants as a matter of course.

Part of the problem is the attribution of homelessness to a group of peo-
ple, which thereby stigmatizes them. It is a kind of double bind. First of all
you have no home to call your own and then you are called “homeless” as
if to fix you in your predicament. How can someone who is homeless get
a home? Part of the intractability of this predicament is the label; once
homeless, it is almost impossible to overcome one’s plight. One has fall-
en between the cracks. We worried about this when we thought about
calling our project—“The Homeless Garden Project.” Wasn’t this
another fix? How would we get the homeless gardeners out of their
predicament if they were labelled homeless? We live in a society that cat-
egorizes with a vengeance. You’re supposed to wear your label on your
sleeve. What do you do for a living? What are you? Who are you? A
salesman, a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher, a cleaning lady, a whatever. We
are defined by our jobs and our positions, instead of our being. Being?
That’s too abstract. Make something of yourself and then be called by it,
or else, which is roughly tantamount to “get a job”.

My initial thought, when we opened the Cedar Street Shelter, was this
question of identity and how to shake the stigma of homelessness. I
thought of starting a local chapter of the California Conservation Corps;
after all, we had helped get the State Corps started in 1976 as it was one of
our original aims in starting the William James Association. The Smiths
were in Jerry Brown’s office when he announced in his State of the State
Address that there would be a California Conservation Corps. We were
invited in on the ground floor and Brown takes pains to credit us with the
idea. Why not start a corps for the homeless— The Santa Cruz
Conservation Corps. Give everyone in the shelter a shirt and a patch
identifying them as members of the corps. Instantly, they would have a
new identity, a purpose in life, projects to develop and execute and a soli-
darity, one with the other.
We went so far as to organize a clean-up campaign for the banks of the San Lorenzo River—some of the members of the shelter actually proposed it after they heard our talk about the C.C.C. They wanted to do something for the downtown community. We went out and picked up trash and refuse on a Saturday. We got our pictures in the paper. It was a good experience. But that was as far as it went.

Recently, I saw a program on NBC News, describing a program called ACCION International, with headquarters in Cambridge, Mass. Begun in 1961, ACCION is known as banker to the poor, creating employment and economic opportunities in the Americas, mostly South America, with small loans, very small. Defining themselves as a private sector Peace Corps, ACCION made its first loans to small businesses in 1973 in Recife, Brazil. This experiment in grass-roots capitalism proved so successful that by 1980, ACCION had decided to make lending the main focus of its program. Funding comes from donations and low-interest loans by foundations, corporations and individuals.

The Ford Foundation recently awarded ACCION a $2 million seven year loan at 1% interest. The loan is made to micro-entrepreneurs. The average loan is $125, just about the amount of the General Assistance ‘loan’. The difference is that almost every single loan is paid back, so keen are the borrowers to establish a good credit history. $38 million in loans is made to more than 67,000 of the smallest-scale businesses, generating over 30,000 new jobs. More than half the loans are made to women. The loans, which are accompanied by management training and technical assistance, allow entrepreneurs to buy goods and raw materials in bulk or purchase machines to boost output, freeing borrowers from usurious rates charged by loan sharks.

Can we translate this program to a community such as Santa Cruz and apply it to the homeless, the candidates for General Assistance? As well as hiring the homeless and having to raise the money to maintain a growing budget, such as the minimum wage salaries for the Homeless Garden Program, loans could be made to help develop cottage industry type employment, based on the industry and initiative of those who apply. It is possible that such cottage industry efforts can be organized out of the
Homeless Resource Center.

It could be that we are stuck in a rut that is only going to get deeper and deeper as times get harder and harder and more and more need piles on need already perceived and goes begging. The homeless problem is worsening. There is no question about that. And no end in sight. And none of us are equal to the task.

Mr. Lightbourn read a draft of the book and wrote me a letter which I include here. It is an example of two different perceptions responding to the same problem. I could have corrected what I wrote in the light of what he says but I thought it better to let him speak for himself and let the reader respond to the two different versions of the same story.

County of Santa Cruz
Human Resources Agency
Will Lightbourne, Administrator
1000 Emeline St.
Santa Cruz, Ca. 95060

February 8, 1992

Dear Paul:

Judy Schwartz gave me a copy of the manuscript of "The Quality of Mercy." Although I normally hate to get between an artist and his work, I do feel the need to pick a few nits with you.

First, some points regarding General Assistance:

We’ve been over this before, but apparently need to look at the dollars again. In FY (fiscal year) 1990/1991, we issued approximately $640,000 in G.A. payments to clients. Our costs for administering the program were slightly under $200,000. The latter
figure is the salaries and benefits of four workers, all office and operating costs, G.A.’s share of Fair Hearings and Fraud costs (which cannot be charged to the State and Federally-funded welfare programs), and County overhead (a pro-rata share of what things like County Counsel, Auditor, Information Services, etc., charge the direct service agencies.)

It is not G.A. policy to delay payments by any period of time. It is a result of the small staff and their workload. In the current fiscal year I have added a staff position to the program to try and cut the backlog. In fact, G. A. clients usually receive Food Stamps on the day of application, and applicants are scheduled as quickly as possible for full interviews for G.A. As a coincidental result of the delays that sometimes occur, however, we do find that a significant proportion of the employable applicants do not keep their appointments and do not appear — I would speculate that these are people who obtained work or were transients.

“It’s not my design....” Please keep in mind that I had been at HRA about seven months when I addressed your class in 1991. Since then we have added staff, reorganized the employable part of the program to provide Work Adjustment Training (essentially, paid on-the-job experiences equal to the G.A. payment, plus supportive services and supplies) for those recipients whose barriers to employment seem so profound as to keep them permanently in the dependency system. We have also formally changed the residency requirement to more realistically meet the needs of homeless recipients. These changes have all been endorsed by Legal Aid.

No funds for Deadheads: You will recall that I
explained to your class that about 85% of the G.A. recipients were pending disability cases, and of the remaining 15%, most were people with short-term problems that necessitated one or two months of aid. I did, however, say that a few applicants were people who were very clear that they did not want to participate in the work world. I then asked your class two questions:

*One* I suggested four hypothetical clients — the evidently physically or mentally disabled person awaiting action on an SSI application; the self-employed tree-trimmer with a broken arm and no unemployment benefits; the late stage alcoholic who might or might not be SSI-eligible, but who was clearly incapable of keeping a job; and, the able-bodied person who didn’t want to deal with the “authority” of the job-place.

My question was this: You are both the voters of Santa Cruz County (my bosses), and the people who are providing the money I distribute in G.A. Who do you want me to give the money to?

Virtually the entire class of 30 or so indicated we should give G.A. to the first two people; a few wanted to give money to the alcoholic; and no hand (including yours) was raised for the last person.

My response to the class (and you) was that we would give G.A. to all of them. However, for the first person we would do whatever we could to get them on SSI quickly. For the second person, we wouldn’t sweat it, because we know he would be a one- or two-month client. For the third, we would try to get a disability diagnosis and/or try to get him into a residential program. And for the fourth, we
would insist that he conduct a weekly job search and would follow-up to make sure he had done so.

No, Paul, I do not see our G.A. clients as being Deadheads. However, we do have a few applicants who might fit that label, and I equally do not think that it is the taxpayer's responsibility to underwrite a counter-culture. I believe we are, to the extent we are physically and mentally able, responsible for ourselves. And to the extent that people are physically or mentally limited, we are our brother's — and our sister's — keepers. Your class evidently agreed with me... and then some.

Two After reviewing the gaps and shortcoming in the public welfare and social service system, I asked your class: Imagine that you are the Santa Cruz welfare director, and imagine also that someone says "here's and extra $250,000—spend it where you want to," where would you spend it? Almost all said they would spend it on Child Protective Services, a few said AFDC, and none said G.A. As I recall, you said nothing. It is an old axiom of Roman Law that silence gives consent.

If I had an extra $100,000 or $1,000,000 G.A. is not where I would put it. I would put it into social services and employment services. The reason I would not put it in G.A. is not because I don't like the G.A. clients, but because G.A. payments are not awarded according to how much money is available. In FY 1990/1991 we overspent the G.A. budget by nearly 150% and no-one—Board, CAO, whomever—objected. We spend according to who is eligible, and in recession years that will almost certainly result in spending over budget. Please bear in mind that every G.A. applicant has recourse to Fair
Hearing if they feel they have been unfairly denied or discontinued, and in my experience, the Fair Hearing decisions split about equally.

The other area I want to comment on is your view of our homeless work. You take issue with our emphasis on case-management and transitional housing (although, evidently, see the parallel Homeless Day Resource Center, which was conceived during the same process, as coming accompanied by a burning bush.)

First, I regret you didn't raise these concerns with me while we were developing the plan. Paul Pfotenhauer, Karen Gilette, and Andrew Morin were all extensively consulted during its development...and all supported it. I assumed that meant the Citizens Committee and William James was in support — again, perhaps, an over-reliance on Roman Law. I also think you will find that Karen will credit HRA with unstinting support of making the Day Center a reality.

You seem to be dismissing our plan as something which is just words and will now disappear. In fact, the first transitional housing for North County was acquired a few weeks ago, and should be rehabilitated and open within a few months. A broader voucher-based transitional system should also be operating within that timeframe. The case management should also come on line in that period. Again, if you disagree with our services that is certainly your right, but it feels a little mean-spirited to just assume that it is a paper exercise; I would certainly give your and similar organizations more credit for your intentions than you seem willing to give in return.
Finally, one small, personal moan. While I appreciate the nice things you said about me personally, my teeth grate on the word "bureaucrat". For seven years, before HRA, I was director of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese — an operating budget of $12 million, a housing development budget of about $10 million per year, certainly a large agency — and yet no-one ever referred to me as a bureaucrat. In moving to another large system, this one in the public sector, how exactly do I metamorphize into a bureaucrat? I assume, frankly, that the word is used so as to prejudice, but between us, I see my mission here as being to de-bureaucratize the system. It's a little point, I know, but I always try very hard not to depersonalize.

Well, those are my thoughts. This has run on longer than I intended. I'm on vacation through February 18, but give me a call after that if you want to discuss any of them. Stay well.

Sincerely,

Will

Will Lightbourne
Administrator

So you can see from this very careful and painstaking letter how complicated the problem is beyond my superficial point of view. I have never been to the General Assistance office. I don't know what goes on there. I have to correct my understanding of what we talked about over coffee by what is stated in the letter. I never called him a bureaucrat. He is the opposite of an apparatchik, as demonstrated by the efforts he has made since assuming the job. But there is something massively wrong with the system and it needs overhauling in a radical way. Will Lightbourne, to me, represents someone you can work with in a cooperative way to effect the changes that are needed. I am grateful for his response.
In a way, the impression I had of the Welfare System is rather like my first impression of the homeless. I was caught in a circumstance where I was observing my own response rather than critically appraising a system I knew very little about. Therefore, I was dealing with predispositions rather than the reality of the matter. Predispositions are something you hopefully grow out of as you learn from experience. I still have a lot to learn.

The following is the "Mission Statement" of the Human Resources Agency:

The Human Resources Agency of Santa Cruz County serves those among us who suffer hardship: the poor, the vulnerable, and the exploited in our community. We assist in many ways—with income and direct benefits to help meet daily needs; with employment training and placement services to enable economic self-sufficiency; with protective services to shield against abuse; and with social services to help each individual develop their fullest human potential.

With the public as a whole, we work to develop a socially and economically healthy community. We serve as conveners and supporters of the wider human services movement, and as facilitators of economic vitality to ensure that there will be productive opportunities for all to participate in.

We are motivated by the recognition that each person we assist is an individual with worth and dignity. The services we provide are theirs by human right. Each client is treated with absolute courtesy and compassion, and is empowered by being involved, to the greatest extent possible, in the decisions that will affect his or her life. We succeed in our mission to the extent that the people we serve are prepared and supported to meet the challenge of their lives with a greater measure of hope.
As the staff of HRA, we emphasize team-work, a spirit of “si se puede”, and a commitment to mutual respect and support of each other’s dignity. We emphasize shared involvement in decision-making, and the responsible delegation of authority to the levels where key tasks are implemented. The most important role in our agency is service to our clients, and all support and management functions are committed to assist staff to perform direct services. The County developed two position papers on the homeless in 1991. They provided an inventory of services currently available to homeless people in the county and an assessment of major remaining service gaps. In the first paper, the conclusion reached was that many services were being provided; the second paper addressed the remaining needs to be met.

The inadequate services identified were: case management and service coordination. This is the big question. The costs far outrun the delivery. Case-management is the name of the problem not the solution, if we are to listen to Tillich about what it means to be turned into an object to be managed, even if it is unavoidable. Of course, it is the necessary condition of social welfare efforts, but who wants to suffer it? For this reason, people in need often avoid the system and look elsewhere for help or despair of finding any. Better to visit every church in the community and look for someone who might help than go to the Human Resources Agency and apply for General Assistance. Better to scrounge in dumpster dumpsters. Not one remark is made about the General Assistance program in the County Briefing Paper. They do not even take into account what is wrong in their own system in their effort to address the problem. Obviously, it is easier to begin new programs than overhaul existing ones.

The report does recognize the need for a nonprofit implementation of the case management need. This is construed as a “Homeless Case Management Center.” Just the choice of words to be avoided at all costs although the nonprofit aspect in terms of management is wise. It is the main point of the recent report developed by the Mayor of New York’s
commission on the homeless. City run shelter programs are an acknowledged failure. Nonprofits can do it better and cheaper.

"As envisioned by the Human Resource Administration staff, the HCMC would be implemented by a private nonprofit agency and funded by a combination of private and public sources. We estimate the program's first-year budget at $315,000." The program would be funded from private funds, outside of the County Budget, with some token funds provided by the County. There is no mention made that the program could be funded and staffed by the General Assistance Program.

The bias against single males is indicated when it is clear that the program would be aimed at 120 families rather than single males. It shows how complicated the situation is, or, how simple. It is a matter of figures. Work out your budget for 120 families. Divided into $315,000. Formally, it sounds like taking the GA Budget and moving it to AFDC.

Without prejudging it, figure it out. What is $315,000 divided by 120. Figure $3,000 a family. It is cheap at twice the price. In order to ameliorate the case management stigma, and the worry about being objectified, the entrepreneur concept could be introduced. The $3,000 is broken up into $1,000 loans and cottage industries are introduced with the appropriate training. The market will take care of the industry. But none of this is considered within the context of "case management".

According to the report many homeless people are unable to make a direct transition from the streets or emergency shelter to permanent housing. Transitional housing is defined as subsidized housing in which clients may stay for 6 to 18 months, while paying rent and participating in programs toward self-sufficiency. To qualify for transitional housing, clients must have achieved a fairly high level of functioning, which, given their homelessness, is contradictory. What are we talking about? Former computer programmers temporarily out of work?

We tried this effort. It was a disaster. Well, half disaster, and half not so bad. We rented a house a few blocks down from the River Street Shelter. It was home for seven homeless males. It needed regular super-
visorial management which we were not prepared or organized to give, although Paul Pfotenhauer responded to all of the emergencies and did his best to befriend those living there. We got stuck with the rent when someone left in the middle of the month. We had no contingency funds. There was shaky morale in the house. An eccentric guy named Pinky (he always wore pink) annoyed his housemates who periodically beat him up and the police had to be called. Stuff like that. But we managed to carry it for almost two years. It was an experiment that tested our limits. We exceeded them, our limits, that is. Partly because we rented another house. Drug addicts moved in before we had time to fix it up—it was a mess. Before we shut it down we owed the landlord hundreds of dollars he is still trying to collect. We gave up on renting houses without a strong support system.

Conditions are developing for a concerted and organized plan to help the homeless in terms of long-range solutions to the problem. I am aware of my own ambivalence toward official efforts and how long they take to be implemented and at what cost. But the report makes it clear that nonprofit agencies are important for implementation; without them, the County is stuck in their own lack of resources, although a cursory glance at the Annual County Budget ($250,000,000.00) demonstrates a wildly distorted sense of priorities beginning with new desks and chairs for practically everyone employed.

In a more recent report—October 16, 1991, the following proposals are put forth:

"Goal No. One  The private and public sectors should work together to facilitate the provision of case management services for homeless and at-risk families and individuals throughout the county who are ready to take the steps necessary to achieve independence. The services should be closely linked with transitional housing and could be provided by a nonprofit agency which operates its own transitional housing, and/or by a social service agency working cooperatively with nonprofit developers who provide and manage transitional housing units. To facilitate the development of countywide case management services, the following actions are being taken or are recommended:
The United Way of Santa Cruz County and the Greater Santa Cruz County Community Foundation have indicated their willingness to participate in developing a plan for providing case management services to homeless and at-risk families and individuals throughout the county, and obtaining support for these services;

The Human Resources Agency will continue to coordinate with the Greater Santa Cruz Community Foundation, United Way of Santa Cruz County, and interested service providers to determine how case management services can best be provided, to identify appropriate agencies to provide these services; to identify potential funding sources; and to develop a detailed design, budget, and implementation plan.

In the event that a new private nonprofit agency is needed, and is created to provide case management services, the United Way of Santa Cruz County has agreed to serve as temporary fiscal agent until the new agency receives its tax-exempt status.

The Human Resources Agency has agreed to provide ongoing technical assistance and consultation regarding both fundraising and program development.

Although it is anticipated that the bulk of the funding for case management services will come from private sources, local governments are encouraged to consider providing support to program operations in partnership with the private sector.

“Goal No. Two Local jurisdictions and housing development agencies should work together to facilitate the development of new transitional housing units for homeless families and individuals. A reasonable initial
goal is to develop units capable of housing 40 homeless families (35 in North County and five in South County) and 20 single adults. Once these units have been developed and operated for some time, the remaining need should be assessed.

Potential funding sources for transitional housing development include HUD programs administered by the Housing Authority of Santa Cruz County, the HUD McKinney Transitional Housing Program, County and City CDBG funds, County and City Redevelopment Agency funds, and other developmental agencies. In addition, several local nonprofit agencies are currently developing housing projects that could potentially provide a number of transitional housing units.

To facilitate the development of transitional housing, the following actions are being taken or are recommended:

The Housing Authority of Santa Cruz County, in collaboration with the Human Resources Agency, has recently been awarded HUD McKinney funds to acquire and operate 6 units of transitional housing for homeless families with children in northern Santa Cruz County;

The County Redevelopment Agency’s Board of Directors has authorized a grant of $196,875 from the County Redevelopment Agency’s Low and Moderate-Income Housing Fund to assist in acquisition and rehabilitation of a transitional housing facility by the Housing Authority;

Housing agencies, local Redevelopment Agencies, and social service agencies are encouraged to work together to identify potential sites and funding sources, and to develop an implementation plan to provide new transitional housing units;

Local community development agencies and non-
profit service providers are encouraged to consider incorporating transitional housing units into projects currently being planned or developed; and

Local governments are encouraged to develop mechanisms to address the development of transitional housing in their General Plans.

"Goal No. Three  The public and private sectors should work together to facilitate the development of a day resource center for homeless individuals in the City of Santa Cruz, in order to provide daytime access to sanitary and laundry facilities, storage space for personal items, and a central location for contact with outreach workers from other service programs. Funding and support should come from public and private sources.

To facilitate the development of a day resource center, the following actions are being taken or recommended:

The operators of the highly successful Free Meal program have announced their intention to develop and operate the day resource center and have begun to seek funds for the program;

Housing For Independent People, (HIP), has agreed to serve as landlord for the day resource center and is working with the City of Santa Cruz and the Free Meal Program to purchase and renovate the site;

The office of the City Manager of Santa Cruz and the County Human Resources Agency are working with the Free Meal Program to identify potential federal, state, and private funding sources, and to develop a detailed program design, budget and implementation plan;

The City Council of the City of Santa Cruz has set aside Community Development Block Grant funds
in the amount of $175,000 for homeless facilities and $45,916 for homeless services, and has identified the day resource center as a priority for the use of these funds, pending submission of a final proposal;

The Board of Supervisors of the County of Santa Cruz has approved the preliminary reservation of $818,000 in Series C Revenue Bonds proceeds to assist in the purchase of a facility for the day resource center, pending development of a mutually acceptable agreement among the County, the City of Santa Cruz, and Housing For Independent People;

The Chair of the Board of Supervisors, County Administrative Officer, City Manager of the City of Santa Cruz, and Housing For Independent People are encouraged to continue to work together to develop a mutually acceptable agreement for the use of Series C Bonds proceeds to assist in the facility purchase; and

The Human Resources Agency has agreed to continue providing the day resource center with ongoing technical assistance and consultation regarding both fundraising and program development.”

The County, therefore, is developing a plan. Administrators were quick to respond to the need for a Homeless Service Center and it is hoped that one will open this year (1992). The process hit a snag when a toxic problem was located in the vicinity of the proposed center. At first it looked like a major obstacle with thousands of dollars needed to clean up the area as the problem had developed over decades, but the word is that a monitoring device may be sufficient to respond to the problem which is not as bad as was thought. Unforeseen problems like that loom up when least expected.

Obviously, daytime access to sanitary and hygiene facilities is a great need, if you are forced to leave in the morning, in terms of whatever shel-
ter you may have had for the night, and not allowed back until 5:00 p.m., what do you do with yourself in a community that is hostile to the way you look. We couldn’t believe it when this condition was imposed on us when we ran the River Street Shelter. We didn’t have a daytime use permit. None was offered. The process struck us as insurmountable—public hearings, etc.

The authorities at the time, John Laird and Mardi Wormhoudt, were buckling under pressure from the guy across the street—Rick Santee—and so they stuck it to us. Rumour had it that he had contributed to their campaigns and he was outraged that we had opened a shelter across the street from his business; you know, a personal insult. He had already organized a neighborhood group to keep a previous shelter from locating in the area and he was furious when we were able to procure the facility at River Street from the university. Our landlord for our transitional house some blocks up on River Street had been a part of his original group and then had had a change of heart. He was the soul of cooperation and no matter how difficult things got while we were renting from him, he was willing to work it out. Mr. Santee, however, remained obdurate in his opposition to the shelter.

As mentioned, the lack of a day time use permit meant that everyone had to leave at 8:00 am and not return until 5:00 pm. We had daytime programs ready to develop, cottage industries, classes, volunteers willing to come in and help, but none of this was possible. And then we had to face the constant complaints of the downtown businesses that the homeless were on the streets and bothering customers. What do you expect if they have no where to go during the day?

It was part of the same set of complications imposed by the officials, in this case, John Laird, where we could not pick up people for our Interfaith Satellite Program in the large protected area behind the shelter, a condition so ludicrous we had to live with it for a year just to teach us a lesson. We had to have a permit and he wouldn’t issue it. He said it would have a negative impact on the community, which, of course, meant Mr. Santee. Sometimes, when the issue is so patently absurd, you just live with it, like the pet rats at Cedar Street. The energy and the latitude of
action is lacking to overcome it. A certain residue of bitterness remains, often for years after, some of it aimed at yourself for not having the means to overcome the obstacles, namely the obtuse bureaucrat or official in your way.

We complained to Mr. Laird, who was the Mayor at the time and he finally worked out a compromise. Instead of picking up the homeless at the River Street Shelter to take them to churches, they would walk another five blocks into the neighborhood, to the municipal bus garage and we could pick them up there. What sense did that make? So much for the impact on the community. We just went ahead and did it.

There was a point before this where the pickup van had to cruise around downtown for homeless to flag it down to get on to go to a church. Can you imagine the absurdity of it? When we complained that the homeless had to stand in the rain at the bus barn, there being no shelter, Mardi Wormhoudt had to come and take a look thinking that the small overhang at the top of the wall might be sufficient. It was three feet wide and forty feet high.

When we argued for a cover at the River Street pickup site, once it was clear that this was the obvious place for people to gather, she said we couldn’t have a tent because it had to be open to public scrutiny. Only a canopy was acceptable. I laughed out loud. She said it wasn’t funny. I said yeah that was the problem. She was worried about what the homeless would do in a tent.

Working with the homeless has made me wonder when perestroika will come to Santa Cruz. When will we be able to purge the equivalents of the bolsheviks, the apparatchiks, ensconced in power in our local governmental agencies? Russia can exchange democracy for communism. Democracy is what we have got. We’re stuck with it in terms of the current forms of organization. The City Council, the Board of Supervisors, as forms of government, strike me as inefficient and insufficient, as a system of political organization, at least when reviewed from the bottom up, from the lowest rung of the welfare system. I consider it intolerable that so much unrelieved suffering is allowed in a community such as ours.
What a dream to dismantle the system and start over from scratch, just to have a breather. Our so-called democratic institutions are in need of reform, beginning with the welfare system.

I still remember my first response to City Council meetings—I thought they had been given their scenario by some devotee of the theatre of the absurd. It was one long rehearsal for “Waiting For Godot”. The intimidating atmosphere of approaching a kind of fence and talking through a microphone to other citizens a few feet away just like yourself but who are elevated above you, ensconced in their leather swivel chairs, and looking at you as though you were some further annoyance they have to put up with. They look like high school students sitting around a table in the (non)presence of their principal (the city staff), trying to play at politics and not knowing how. They have received no training for it and they are ill prepared for the moves. They are mostly window dressing for the infra-structures.

At least I discovered one specific law of political action—you can call it “Lee’s Law”. To get something passed you need the sound of twenty people standing up which is better than one hand clapping when it comes to getting something enacted or at least to get the attention of the elected officials. At the appropriate moment, you turn to the audience from your place at the podium and microphone, after you have made your brief spiel and in a loud and commanding voice, you say: “Would everyone in favor of this proposal, please stand and indicate your support.” At that point you want at least twenty people to stand up. The sound they make is what counts! One hundred people would be ideal. It is the sound of the people standing, that peculiar whoosh, and then sitting down, another kind of whoosh, more like a rustle. It is the sound of voters standing up to be counted. You could even record it and play it in lieu of warm bodies and it would have almost the same effect. It’s all you need to make them take notice—the city officials. The sound does it. All you have to do is make that sound, otherwise known as “Lee’s Law”. It is democracy in action.

It was insult on injury when a national church group descended on Santa Cruz and began their earthquake relief, shortly after the Loma Prieta
Earthquake (1989) and didn’t want to consider the homeless before the earthquake. Forget them. They actually made the distinction in our presence between those who were homeless before the earthquake, whom they would not help, and those who were homeless after the earthquake, whom they were prepared to help, especially those who had homes before the earthquake, the propertied ones, the real Christians. It was an odd application of double predestination, the ultimate theological application of triage, those who were to be saved and those who were left to be damned. I was appalled. I was depressed at the matter-of-fact application of the principle of triage.

Triage had become the key word for my involvement with the homeless. It was the word I had to learn. I went to a County Review of Alcoholism Programs one evening. I wanted to know what was being done for alcoholics. I was to learn that teen-age alcoholism was the big concern, taking precedence over homeless drunks. My homeless drunks, left on the sidewalk at our pickup point (the Loudon Nelson Center, at the time) for the Interfaith Satellite Shelter, would have to pick themselves up in the morning, or whenever they woke up, if they weren’t dead, and figure out the next day for themselves.

I worried about them; these dead drunk guys, lying out there on the grass, or sidewalk, abandoned to the elements. What was going to happen to them? They had no where to go and they had no shelter against the night and they were dead drunk, so we couldn’t take them to the churches scheduled for the evening. We promised to bring homeless who were not drunk and who were not on drugs. We had to screen them. It was our own self-imposed rule, in order to make the program work, to maintain order. I had a word in my mind when I looked at the drunks we had to leave behind, but I didn’t know what the word was. I went to the lecture to find the word.

It came up rather early in the talk. As soon as the speaker used it, I knew it was the word I was looking for, although, to tell you the truth, I didn’t really want to find it. It is a disheartening word, a demoralizing word, a tragic word. Everyone who has been to Vietnam knows the word: “triage” is the word. I knew it as soon as I heard it, even though, at the
time, I didn’t know what it meant. The speaker used it with a sense of
familiarity as if everyone knew it and used it. It stuck out in my mind like
a sore thumb. I went home with it in mind and I looked it up in the dic-
tionary.

Triage:
A system designed to produce the greatest
benefit from limited treatment facilities for
battlefield casualties
1. by giving full treatment to those who may survive
2. and not to those who have no chance of survival
3. and those who will survive without it.

A system used to allocate a scarce commodity,
such as food or housing, only to those capable
of deriving the greatest benefit from it.

French. < trier, to sort

Isn’t that terrific! It is a rationalization for giving up or not even making
the effort. No question about it. There are a number of fallacies operat-
ing to make the rationalization appear logical. The first analogy is with
warfare—the first fallacy. It is the worst possible situation applied to
peace-time. We are not at war. And yet war is the model for applying
triage to the homeless. In fact, the homeless male is the targeted victim.
He is the object of triage: no chance of survival. Don’t even go near
him. No wonder the homeless Vietnam vet makes up a significant part
of this group.

Next fallacy: limited treatment facilities. The commodities, the resources,
are not scarce; they are in wasteful abundance. Take a horrendous storm.
Mud slides. People evacuated from their homes. Shelters are available,
with beds, blankets, pillows, hot coffee, t.v., and food, within 8 hours or
less, for as many as there are rendered homeless. No triage practised
there. The resources are inexhaustible when they want to be. But you
had best be a homeowner before you become homeless to have them
available to you.
When you see an African-American and a Latin-American lying drunk on the lawn or the sidewalk try to find the resources then. It is applied triage. 50% of homeless men, nationally, are black or Latino.

Take the principle of triage up a level and apply it to the organization of the social welfare system. One third of the system is inoperable and where one withholds scant and scarce resources, remember the phrase—"limited treatment facilities"—there you find the practice of triage at the institutional structural level. General Assistance is our version of institutionalized triage, although the situation is not as grim as I first thought. Reforms have been made even though the system itself is in need of reform. It costs $200,000 to give the money to the triaged victims of our social system of welfare.

I became obsessed with the word. I wondered: does God practice triage? It was the one thing I thought God wouldn’t do. Not my God. God is no respecter of persons. God does not do triage. In fact, the rejected third, according to another meaning of the word, in French, are just those God cares most about. God does reverse triage. God makes them the object of salvation. Like Jesus said: “The last will be first.”

This was the biblical teaching on the homeless. They really were the favored of God. The victims are the ones God goes after. The last will be first. Blessed are the homeless for they will enter into the many mansions where a place has been prepared for them.

This view of the homeless is unacceptable because it is the Gospel; it is a paradox; it contradicts conventional wisdom; it is foolishness to the Greeks and even worse to the residents of Santa Cruz. But the message is getting across: we are too susceptible to the ironic notion, reversing the above, that there, but for the grace of God, go you and I, and we find resources among us to reach out and help those in need. The work has just begun. I hope to see the problem of homelessness in Santa Cruz solved in my lifetime.

What’s wrong with tents? What’s wrong with yurts? What’s wrong with cheap, low-cost, buildings, like log cabins? What’s wrong with garden cottages?
It is impossible to put up a donated mobile home for the homeless in Santa Cruz County. I can show you the letter I got from the County CAO, formerly the head of HRA. She said it would cost over $30,000 and you would have to get permits to open a mobile home park. I didn’t want to get a two page letter on why I can’t hook up a donated mobile home. Obviously, it died there.

The obstacles are transparent and the people who man the barricades to see to it that people in need are not given shelter are in power. They need to be replaced before a solution can be found. I bear a grudge against them. They were not willing to cooperate then and there is little reason to believe they will cooperate now. They have to be forced to comply. We need a set of resolutions to implement against the bureaucrats who stand in the way of solving this problem. They must be forced to comply.

See what I mean about old grievances dying hard. Actually, the situation has changed dramatically in the last half decade. Much progress has been made. The tide turned when Don Lane was elected to the Santa Cruz City Council. He ran on a platform pledging his concern for the homeless. He has done much to fulfill that pledge. It has to do with making oneself available. When Mardi Warmhoudt was Mayor her official stand was to refer to the Federal Government—they had to do something, not her. It wasn’t a local problem, she argued, a pretty dumb argument when you look at the local homeless. She was devoid of ideas and admitted as much, which hardly needed stating. Don Lane changed all that. He brought up the camping ban for discussion at a City Council meeting. They stared him down. Nobody said a word. It was like walking past someone in need in order to get home for the evening news and a martini. It was both the worst moment in City Government and the turning point. Now Don Lane is the Mayor of Santa Cruz.

Then came Katherine Beiers, who has been the chief advocate of the Homeless Garden Project, and Scott Kennedy, who is willing to help in every way, with his unfailing sympathy for the underdog. Suddenly, a new political climate, in support of programs for the homeless, had emerged in Santa Cruz.
Mention should be made of the S.S.I. Program run by the State. If you are mentally disturbed and cannot function in any kind of normal job environment, if you are disabled and cannot work, you can apply for what is called S.S.I. (Supplemental Security Income). You receive a monthly check and you become a permanent welfare client, supported for the rest of your life. I remembered how LSD casualties, those who never recovered from their acid trips in the 1960s, and therefore would never have a normal life, applied for S.S.I. and were supported with a monthly stipend. The problem with applying now is that you are routinely denied. Everyone who applies is denied, as a matter of course. What the hell kind of a welfare program is that? Then you have to appeal. Usually, the appeal is denied. Then you have recourse to appeal again and often the third appeal is granted. If not, you can take it to court, where, sometimes, you may be granted S.S.I., by the judge. One of the difficulties with this routine is that people end up with a large “retro” check, often many thousands of dollars, accumulated from the months of appeals. The windfall brings with it more problems than the monthly check for people unused to handling money. In a way, it is worse than General Assistance on the County level, so skewed is the welfare system in this country.

The homeless, of course, are at the bottom of the barrel in terms of eligibility for social services. It brings one to a theory about the homeless we have as yet to develop. Triage was bad enough, but it did not give rise to a theory. It only accounted for the argument in behalf of scarce resources, what was the phrase—“limited treatment facilities”! It did not account for the attitude toward the homeless without a war to justify that attitude in the application of triage.

My wife warns me about being pedantic. Well, here it comes.

The theory about homelessness I have recourse to is about victimage. It has been developed by Jacques Derrida and Rene Girard. Derrida writes about it in terms of the scapegoat ritual of ancient Greece and Girard develops it into a full blown theory about the sacred. According to Girard, it is a theory of religion because he makes an equation between violence and the sacred. It has a certain relentless logic if you take the crucified Jesus as the reference point.
I will only repeat a number of points here and the reader will have to repair to the texts in question for the full discussion:


Derrida refers to the old ritual of Ancient Greece, the 6th Day of Thargelion, in the Greek calendar, an annual event, when two men, (they could have been homeless), saved for the occasion, and fed well, are taken to the outermost precincts of the city, on the day of the festival, and there, after they are beaten on their genitals with leeks, are murdered and burned, “in order to rid the city of pollution”. Old rituals die hard. These men are the homeless in our midst and I am ready to believe that vigilante posses in our community could still be summoned to take their unfortunate victims out to be burned, in the spirit of the old Greek festival. To rid the city of pollution.

It was called the Festival of the Pharmakon. It was a variant of the “wounded healer”. They were a medicine, a drug, a remedy, for the ills of the city. They were the scapegoats, one of the meanings of pharmakon. Poisons in proper doses are medicines, according to the appropriate ritual.

“Tzetzes gives the following account, based on certain fragments by the satirical poet Hipponax, of the ceremony:

“The (rite of the) pharmakos was a purification of this sort of old. If a calamity overtook the city by the wrath of God, whether it were famine or pestilence or any other mischief, they led forth as though to a sacrifice the most unsightly of them all as a purification and a remedy to the suffering city. They set the sacrifice in the appointed place, and gave him cheese with their hands and a barley cake and figs, and seven times they smote him with leeks and wild figs and other wild plants. Finally they burnt him with fire with the wood of wild trees and scattered the ashes into the sea and to the winds, for a purification, as I said, of the suffering city.”

Derrida, *Disseminations*, p. 133.
Walter Burkert, in his *Greek Religion*, makes this comment after his discussion of the Pharmakos ritual:

“To expel a trouble-maker is an elementary group reflex; perhaps in the most distant background there is also the situation of the pack surrounded by beasts of prey: only if one member, preferably a marginal, weak, or sick member, falls victim to the beasts can the others escape. The outcast is then also the saviour to whom all are most deeply indebted.” (p. 84)

The scapegoat ritual was also enacted in Israel as in the so-called mocking of Jesus, in a ritual known as the “Cabbage-King”, where the victim is dressed as a King, given a crown of thorns, and run through the gauntlet of Roman soldiers, mocked, beaten, and finally crucified. And the phrase from the above quote—“the most unsightly of them all”—is an echo of Isaiah regarding his prophecy of the coming Messiah who would be a leper and therefore the ugliest of them all.

Girard develops this victimization ritual into a full-blown theory. You have to read it and re-read it and then re-read it again. He is even more dense than Derrida which is some distinction. It takes unusual effort to absorb the argument. But the insights are there, with ample borrowing from Freud.

I am at a loss to summarize it here in reference to the homeless; the scapegoat theme and the theme of victimization are all we need to mention, obvious enough in themselves, as a means of interpreting the plight of the homeless and the role they play in their rejection by the community.

I don’t want to be a victim anymore than you do. I don’t want to become homeless. I don’t want to be abandoned to the streets and then arrested for wanting a place to lie down for the night with or without a blanket. I don’t want to lurk in doorways. I don’t want to panhandle and then be arrested for that. I don’t want to be found by the police and beaten. I don’t want to be murdered and thrown into the San Lorenzo River. I don’t want to be pushed off a bridge in San Lorenzo Park. I don’t want to be arrested for
urinating in public when I have no place to go but in my pants. I don’t want to be abandoned to dread and despair and the anxiety of emptiness and meaninglessness—with my only relief in drugs and alcohol.

One could ask: why don’t more homeless people commit suicide? We have Mitch Snyder to think about as one who did just that, reduced to self-destruction, self-victimized, hanging himself in his room in the huge homeless shelter he organized in Washington, D. C.

After I recovered from my first impression of the homeless as members of Dante’s Hell, and after we opened the Cedar Street Shelter, I got over my sense of their despair and despondency, watching all the guys get up in the morning, I was amazed at how basically cheerful and full of vitality many of them were. I was reminded of the saying of the early Greek philosopher—Heraclitus: “The sun is new every day.” I had the sense it was life-itself, manifest life, expressing itself, in and through them, in spite of their abject situation. And, after all, many of them were young and full of beans.

But the question of suicide as the end of despair still comes to mind. Isn’t homelessness the final index of the human predicament, the boundary line beyond which one cannot go? No, homelessness is not this state itself, unless, in the situation of homelessness, one falls into despair, something not all homeless do. Homelessness is not the end of possibilities. In fact, we see it now as a whole new context for possibilities, a challenge for anyone to address. But, in despair, a person has come to the end of his or her possibilities.

As Tillich writes in his Systematic Theology, II, in the section on “Despair and the problem of suicide”:

“The word itself means “without hope” and expresses the feeling of a situation from which there is ‘no exit’ (Sartre). The most impressive description of the situation of despair has been given by Kierkegaard in Sickness Unto Death, where ‘death’ means beyond possible healing.”

“Despair is the state of inescapable conflict. It is the conflict, on the one
hand, between what one potentially is and therefore ought to be and, on
the other hand, what one actually is in the combination of freedom and
destiny. The pain of despair is the agony of being responsible for the loss
of the meaning of one's existence and of being unable to recover it. One
is shut up in one's self and in the conflict with one's self. One cannot
escape, because one cannot escape from one's self. It is out of this situa-
tion that the question arises whether suicide may be a way of getting rid
of one's self."

Tillich goes on to mention a suicidal tendency in life generally, "the
longing for rest without conflict. The human desire for intoxication is a
consequence of this longing."

This certainly explains the prevalence of alcoholism among the homeless,
as well as those who have homes.

Why did Mitch commit suicide? Was it the penalty he had to pay for his
commitment to nonviolence and his following Gandhi? Gandhi states
that satyagraha, which is what he called his movement of nonviolence, is
the willingness to pay the penalty for noncompliance with evil. Gandhian
nonviolence is a curious decision to be self-victimized in the willingness
to pay the penalty for the refusal to cooperate with evil. Mitch got
cought in this snare. His resistance to the evil of homelessness, for which
he was willing to pay the penalty, probably more than anyone else in the
country, this resistance, wore him out and he succumbed to non-resis-
tance to threatening annihilation: his unconscious will to live was under-
mined.

“In every moment of intolerable, insuperable, and mean-
ingless pain there is the desire to escape the pain by getting
rid of one's self.”
Tillich, p. 75f.

We had to witness a suicide upon my return from a summer in Wisconsin
in the Fall of 1991. One of the workers in our garden had been fired; days
later, he threw himself in front of a truck on the freeway adjacent to the
River Street Shelter. Everyone around him knew he was going to do it.
His name was Dave McGall. He was twenty-seven.

We had a memorial service for him in the garden.

The garden is our place of refuge from such blows. Gardens have always symbolized a place apart from the conflicts of the world, a place to withdraw to where one can be refreshed and enjoy the pleasures that gardening brings. Nothing restores the spirit like gardening.

It is in the garden that the homeless find a home, a place to work, a place to be productive, a place to observe the principle of plenitude thanks to the bounty of the earth—an ethic of abundance. Gardens have always been a harbinger, as well as a memory, of paradise. Paradise is a Persian word meaning a walled place, closed off from the worries of the world, which is why gardens are often enclosed by a wall. Gardens are a place of affirmation for which Eden and Arcadia are the ultimate symbols. It is in the Garden that the affirmation of the unambiguous goodness of creation is made, a defense against everything that would conspire to undo us and defeat us.

The garden, more than anything, establishes a sense of place. It is the best antidote to homelessness.

*The “garden” is the place where the curse upon the land is overcome. In it vegetable nature is liberated from chaos and self-destruction; “weed” there is none. This “garden of the gods,” of which every human garden is a symbol and an anticipation, will reappear in the salvation of nature.*

Paul Tillich: *The Meaning of Health*
Appendix 1: Remembering Mitch Snyder


“In May of 1981 I moved to Washington, D.C., to live and work with the Community for Creative Nonviolence on their “Call to Prayer and Resistance,” a month-long campaign challenging the Reagan administration’s policies of militarism at the expense of social programs. It was then that I first got to know Mitch Snyder. To tell the truth, Mitch and I didn’t get along with each other all that well. “He is arrogant, dominating, demanding, and he uses people,” I often said, “and those are his good qualities!” Which of course in many ways they were, for in Mitch (as in all of us) those traits which were his greatest strengths were also his greatest weaknesses.

Mitch was absolutely clear in his vision of justice for the poor, which translated into a certainty he was right when he spoke and acted on their behalf. Arrogant, yes, but an arrogance rooted in the conviction that Jesus meant exactly what He said when He told us to shelter the homeless and feed the hungry, and give all we have to the poor. Anything less was compromising the Gospel.

This certainty gave Mitch a compelling quality. When he spoke to an issue in a group he spoke with an instant authority. In a community of equals, he was dominant, sometimes through charisma and sometimes through the sheer forcefulness of his vision. Mitch possessed a prophetic tenacity that often seemed to overwhelm even those very friends who wanted to work with him. Like a brilliant flame, he illuminated, yet at once consumed the atmosphere around him, so that those who tried to share his light often found themselves trapped like moths in his aura.

Mitch was demanding. Seven-day weeks were his norm, and he expected no less of those he worked with. How could we give less, when all around
us the Body of Christ was dying in the person of the poor? There was an urgency in Mitch that was never satisfied. This driven character in the end drove countless people away from community with Mitch; some (those who tried to meet his demands) into burnout, some into the cynical decision that helping the poor just wasn’t worth the bother, and even more (like myself) into other communities where we continue to struggle with the questions Mitch confronted us with. For Mitch was right: We are not doing enough. Yet somehow we have to come to terms with that inadequacy, confess it humbly before God, and find some way to continue our meager efforts through the long haul.

Undergirding all this blessed hubris was his love — a fierce love, and often angry love. Over the years, Mitch’s motives were often questioned by many who chose not to love (or were unable to love) so intensely. Particularly during the 80’s, as Mitch became a “success” in his cause, drawing national attention to the scandal of homelessness in this country, he was accused of being an “egotist” whose tactics were simply a form of grandstanding. The possibility that a man could love so passionately as to repeatedly risk his life through starvation while he fasted or through exposure as he chose to spend winters on the grates of Washington’s streets, or to endure the stress of ongoing confrontations with power and the harassment of arrest and trial, were simply incomprehensible to the “me generation.” And so Mitch was alternately lauded as a saint or castigated as a fraud. He was neither. He was simply a man who loved Jesus, and who loved the poor because Jesus told him he should. Love endures what ego cannot.

_The Logic of Love_

It was because of this love that many of us who usually didn’t get along with Mitch so well continued to work with him over the years. Even when he was being arrogant and dominating, even when you felt he might be using you, you just couldn’t escape the compelling logic of his love. He might be a pain, but he was usually right.

Because of Mitch’s love (and a few sit-ins and a dramatic Congressional feast prepared from dumpstered foods), food that grocers and caterers
used to destroy each day in dumpsters is now distributed to the hungry through food banks and community agencies. Because of Mitch’s love (and a grueling summer fast in Kansas) food that the government used to let rot in caves below the ground in the name of “supporting agriculture” now feeds the hungry from soup kitchens and food pantries around the country. Because of Mitch’s love (and a winter encampment called “Reaganville” in Lafayette Park, and numerous fasts, and ongoing campaigns of civil disobedience) the dozens who used to freeze to death on Washington’s streets each winter now find shelter at the model Federal City Shelter run by CCNV, and for six years have found legal shelter under the provisions of Initiative 17, which guaranteed every person’s right to clean and decent shelter.

The homeless are sheltered, the hungry are fed, the naked are clothed, the thirsty are given drink, the sick are cared for, prisoners are joined, and the homeless dead are claimed and cremated. Mitch neglected none of the corporal works of mercy, and in the process he also embodied the spiritual works of mercy: he counseled those of us who were doubtful, instructed the ignorant, comforted the afflicted, admonished fools and sinners, forgave those who abused him, prayed for the dead, and in the words of Mother Jones, “worked like hell for the living.”

During the last six months of his life Mitch showed me a side of himself I had never experienced before. One conversation in particular, at the Plowshares sentencing in Norristown, PA in April, introduced me to that side of him that was vulnerable, that shared some of the same hopes and fears of every human being. He was tired and demoralized that in recent months there had appeared a growing backlash against the homeless. They were no longer a “chic” social issue the media had decreed, and since they had the temerity to be with us (as Jesus had promised) even after a few programs had been thrown their way, there was a growing resentment towards them in our culture which prides itself on “eliminating problems.” Mitch felt this all as a crushing personal responsibility. He spoke of his own hunger, of his disappointment at missing out on a month-long retreat that he had hoped to take. Yet even in the midst of all this personal disappointment he took the time to discuss with me how my pregnancy was going and how my little three-year-old was doing. It was almost as if
children were speaking to him of fresh promise. I found myself realizing that not only did I respect and admire Mitch (which I always had, even when he was being his most irascible) I actually liked him.
Appendix 2: The Philosophy of Social Work
Paul Tillich

We include the following address by Paul Tillich on the philosophy of social work as a basis for discussing the meaning of homelessness in Santa Cruz. Tillich defines some of the main principles of working with anyone in need, the object of social welfare, e.g., the homeless. His brief discussion is one of the best statements of a philosophy of social work.

*The Philosophy of Social Work*
by Paul Tillich


The following excerpts are from a talk given by Paul Tillich, on November 12, 1961, the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of Selfhelp, Inc., a nonprofit social service group aiding refugees, who had fled Hitler’s Germany, to settle in the United States. Tillich was the Honorary Chairman of the group.

The basis of all social work is the deficiency of every legal organization of society. A perfectly functioning organization of the whole society, a social mechanism embracing all mankind would not leave room for social work, but such a mechanism is unimaginable. It is prevented by two factors, one of which is rooted in what we call today in philosophical jargon "our existential predicament", our insufficiency. The second factor is rooted in our existential nature, the uniqueness of every individual and every situation. No total regulation, even if given in the best interest of everybody, ever has adequately functioned either in war or in peace. The disorder produced by totalitarian regulations in Nazi Germany during the Second World War is equaled by the disorder in food distribution in Soviet Russia during the present cold war. Neither intellect nor charac-
ter of men or women are adequate to such a task. And even if they were in one part of the world, interferences from other parts would spoil the functioning of a perfect social organization. The fact on which Selfhelp is based, the European immigration, was for a long time beyond the reach of any existing legal organization of social needs. Spontaneous social work was the only way to solve the immediate problem.

But this is a minor part of our question. More important is the fact that even in the best legal organization of social needs, every individual represents a unique problem. Only in a society which suppresses individual claims for help can this problem be put aside, and not only individual persons but also individual situations between persons, or persons and groups, transcend the reach of any legal organization. It is the greatness of human beings that their freedom implies a uniqueness which prohibits being absorbed into a social machine so long as they remain human. For this reason social work is more than emergency work, unless one defines emergency as a perpetual concomitant of the human situation—and that probably is true.

Certainly all social work tries to make itself superfluous and many forms of it have done so. And in all our discussions we often have asked ourselves whether we have already reached that stage, but each time we found a large amount of emergency situations which required the continuation of our way of social work.

We tried to listen to the situation as we did in the years of our foundation, and in doing so we tried one of the great laws of life, the law of "listening love". It is one of the decisive characteristics of love that it listens sensitively and reacts spontaneously. As one of our early friends, Max Wertheimer, has indicated, situations have a voiceless voice. "Things cry", he used to say, but also what cries most intensively are situations.

It was the cry of a particular situation which we hardly could have ignored and which drove us to found Selfhelp. And it was not only the beginning of our history in which this happened. Again and again we had to listen sensitively and to react spontaneously. It is certain that in some situations we were not sensitive enough and reacted not sponta-
neously enough, but it was a fundamental principle of our philosophy of social work.

Social work is centered in individuals. The most concrete, and therefore most important, representative of social work is the case-worker, and what is valid for the case-worker is valid for the whole organization in relation to the individual. The case-worker also must listen sensitively and respond spontaneously. The case-worker meets the individual and is in the understandable temptation of transforming care into control. The case-worker is in danger of imposing instead of listening, and acting mechanically instead of acting spontaneously. Every social worker knows this danger, but does not always notice succumbing to this temptation. The case-worker should not make a harsh judgment about it, but from time to time should restate the principle of "listening love" in order to dissolve any hardening mechanism in those who do social work.

The danger of which I am speaking is a tendency in every dealing with other persons to treat them as objects, as things to be directed and managed. It was always a symbol for me that the patients of the social worker were called cases. I do not know whether a better word can be found but the word "case" automatically makes of the individual an example for something general. Who, I ask all of you, wants to be a case, but we all are cases for the doctor, the counselor, the lawyer, and certainly the social worker. The case-worker is not to be blamed for this inescapable situation but would be blamed if in dealing with the patient, with this case, makes the patient into an object for whom everything is determined and in whom spontaneity is suppressed. The question is whether the caseworker is able to see in the patient not only what is comparable with other cases or identical with what has been experienced with other patients, but that the caseworker sees the incomparable, the unique, rooted in the freedom of the patient. It is the amount of love between the social worker and the patient which here is decisive—the listening, responding, transforming love.

Here, when I use the term love, as before, I certainly do not mean the love which is emotion; nor do I think of φίλε—of friendship which only really develops between the social worker and the patient, nor do I think of the
love which is *Eros*, which creates an emotional desire towards the patient that in many cases is more destructive than creative; rather, it is the love whose name in Greek is *agape* and in Latin *caritas*—the love which descends to misery and ugliness and guilt in order to elevate. This love is critical as well as accepting, and it is able to transform what it loves. It is called *caritas* in Latin, but it should not be confused with what the English form of the same word indicates today—namely, charity, a word which belongs to the many words which have a disintegrated, distorted meaning. Charity is often identical with social work, but the word charity has the connotation of giving for good causes in order to escape the demand of love. Charity as escape from love is the caricature and distortion of social work.

Critical love, which at the same time accepts and transforms, needs knowledge of who is the object of love. The social worker must know the patient. But there are two different ways of knowing. We may distinguish them as our knowledge of the other one as a thing, and our knowledge of the other one as a person. The first is the cognition of external facts about somebody. The second is the participation in their inner self—as far as any human being is able to participate in another one. The first is done in detachment, through an empirical approach; the second is done through participation in the inner self of the other one. The first is unavoidable, but never enough in human relations. The second gives the real knowledge, but it is a gift given alone to the intuition of love. Here the social worker is in the situation of all of us in our daily encounters with each other. No amount of factual knowledge about each other can replace the intuition of love, which remains love even if it judges.

This leads to the last and perhaps the most important question—the end, the aim, of social work. The aim has several degrees. The first degree is the conquest of the immediate need, and here the factor of speed is important. The necessity of accepting and being willing to bear the consequences of possible errors, even of helping someone who doesn’t deserve help, must be taken by the social worker. It is analogous with love which has the principle that it is better missing several guilty ones than condemning one innocent one. The second degree is the self-abrogation, the self-conquest of social help, as far as possible, by guiding the person into independence. This is attempted always in all social agencies,
but we know it is not always possible. Then there is a third stage about which I want to say a few words. On the basis of the present situation as I have seen it in the young people in all the colleges and universities, and in many other people, we mainly need to give the people of our time the feeling of being necessary.

Being necessary is, of course, never absolute. Nobody is indispensable. Nevertheless, somebody who doesn’t feel necessary at all, who feels that he or she is a mere burden, is on the edge of total despair. In all groups I found this widespread feeling of not being necessary. There are many reasons for every effect, but one of the reasons for this is that in our secularized society one thing is lost, namely, that, whatever their external destiny may be, people no longer have an eternal orientation, an orientation which is independent of space and time. It is the feeling of having a necessary, incomparable and unique place within the whole of being. Herein lies a danger for uprooted and migrating millions. It is a danger for mankind itself, namely to feel that their existence as a whole is no longer necessary. The easy way in which politically we are playing now with collective suicide is analogous to the phenomenon of individuals who have lost the feeling of a necessary place, not only in their work and community, but also in the universe as a whole.

This leads to a final aim of social work. In helping all individuals to find the place where they can consider themselves as necessary, you help to fulfill the ultimate aim of human beings and their world, namely, the universal community of all beings in which any individual aim is taken into the universal aim of being itself. That is the highest principle of social work and, of course, transcends the limits of its techniques. It is certainly understandable that this aim is not always conscious to those who have the burden of the daily work. But it may help them if they remember it in moments in which they may despair as we all do about the meaning of their work. On the other hand, it may give them a spiritual lift in moments when they feel grateful to hear a response from one of thousands whom we may have helped. It may be of inspiration to us to think that we contribute to the ultimate aim of being itself in our small way—and every individual’s way is small. To give such inspiration may be a function of an hour of memory such as the present one.
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John Jeavons has done more than anyone to communicate the Chadwick method world-wide. He has a newsletter available from the above address.

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Footnotes

1. p. xiv The full text of the Shakespeare passage:

The quality of mercy is not strain'd,—
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the places beneath: it is twice blest,—
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes:
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest: it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptered sway,—
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice.

That, in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. p.xiv

This is what Simone Weil meant by learning how to give as if begging. It is the same prayer.

2. p. 3 "Finally, poverty also had a social dimension. In the Middle Ages, to suffer a loss of status meant literally to fall from one's estate, to be deprived of its instruments of labor and of the marks of its condition. For a peasant this meant the loss of farming implements and animals; for an artisan, loss of the tools of his trade; for a merchant, loss of his shop; for a
cleric, loss of his books; for a noble, loss of his horse and arms. Without these things a man ceased to be anything, because he no longer possessed the means to carry on a social existence. Stripped of his social position and excluded from the community, he was forced into emigration and vagabondage. The poor man was uprooted and alone.” Mollat, p. 3.

3. p. 92 Deadheads would have been called Gueux in the Middle Ages. Hostile to the established order they lived in bands on the edge of society. “Recruited from the indigent population and living in indigence, these asocial individuals blackened the reputation of the “true” poor who shared their destitution.” Mollet, p. 7

“In keeping with the logic of this conception of society, those who had no social function had no place in society. Some had withdrawn voluntarily from social life, others had been expelled. What placed these people outside the community was not poverty but marginality. Their only salvation was to reenter ordinary society. Given the context, however, it is not difficult to understand why, a century earlier, efforts to rehabilitate such people by men like Robert of Arbrissel and Fulk of Neuilly were considered by many to be aberrations as outrageous as the asocial or rebellious behavior of those whom they sought to save.

From the spiritual standpoint, however, things looked somewhat different. Poverty, like any form of suffering, had potential spiritual value. Through this spiritual function poverty recouped its standing and indeed found some justification: It could be useful to the pauper as well as the rich man, for whom it served as a means of sanctification. In some respects the sharing of poverty in the broad sense of the term grouped its victims into a sort of spiritual ordo, an ordo with no existence outside the economy of salvation, the communion of saints. The poor thus acquired a new social standing, and it is here, I think, that one finds the key to twelfth-century thinking and attitudes toward poverty and the poor.

Most authors apparently conceived of the poor man in terms of his relation to the rich man. The pauper would seem to have been created and placed in the world for the sake of the rich man’s salvation. Men never tired of pointing out the reason why: it was more difficult for a rich man
to enter the kingdom of heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle. The giving of alms became the subject of countless treatises, letters, and sermons. The primary function of the pauper was to receive, because it was a duty for the rich man to give. In theory as well as practice the twelfth-century reaffirmed the teaching of the ages, further analyzing, articulating, and extending the tradition in keeping with the twin principles of charity and justice.” Mollat, p 106.
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