

THE LOST AND THE UNWANTED

Who are these people we see standing around on corners with signs and ragged clothes ? They are the the lost and the unwanted.

I'm sitting here in the Boulder Library on the second floor and of the four people sitting around me at various tables, three are homeless. All three are ladies varying in age, I suspect, from mid thirties to early sixties. All three have carrying bags and small backpacks. Two have been on cell phones frantically trying to find a place to stay for the night. The other, has her head laying on her folded arms and has rarely moved since my arrival. The Library is a safe haven for so many homeless that it's heartbreaking.

From where I sit, I can see seven other homeless people milling about the park area just below my second floor window. Of the seven homeless, one is a female and the other are men roughly in their early to late thirties. All have back packs and plastic bags containing their other belongings. They have made an impromptu camp below a stand of pine trees. This camp will soon be moved by library security because it's "unattractive" as one female officer described it.

Through the trees, I can see a few bikes that the more fortunate ones have for mobility. Strewed about under the trees are an array of multicolored blankets, packs, sleeping bags, and bags full of what ever else they own. They will soon be forced to move and find a safe but bitter cold sanctuary in the secret places they know underneath bridges and dark, safe corners of buildings.

The Boulder shelter is located a few miles from downtown. The buses run constantly from Boulder and the surrounding areas depositing their ragged patrons to the front door of the shelter. From there, the men line up to participate in a lottery system for the available 108 beds. Most have on various layers of ragged clothing, worn out gloves and hats that keeps very little of the cold out. The women who number in the few, do not have to participate in the lottery. To have your number called in the lottery, will insure you of a warm bed, a 7:30 pm warm meal and a wake-up call at 6:30 am for breakfast.

The men sit or stand around stamping their feet waiting for the lottery to begin at 5:45 pm. Some arrive with walking sticks and one arrives with a walker, he looks to be in his mid-sixties and exhausted. All the men look beaten down. It's an amazing array of the down-trodden, the druggies, the alchys...the disenfranchised. By now the sun is going down and the temperature is dropping dramatically. Cookies and coffee are distributed to all as numbers and names are called.

Once the beds are filled, the unlucky ones are turned away and advised of a local church (a warming station) a few miles away where they can spend the night on the floor wrapped up in a blanket or whatever they might be carrying with them.

The American Dream has somehow missed this segment of Americans. Possibly some by choice. Others by circumstance. But every day most manage to survive through the night to see the sun rise in the morning. With the sunrise, their hopes are rekindled. Today...maybe today it will get better.

They are the lost, the unwanted. They are our American legacy.

