

family, it appears, is to defend natural, voluntary patterns of dependency that are unrelated to, but threatened by, the state. At a deeper level, "social biology" reveals the family as natural, innate, and biologically derived—an institution that can generate powerful emotional and economic forces that defy the social engineers. Indeed, the family still survives today because of that power: through its ability to block the egalitarian goals of government by passing on to children the inequalities of class, taste, and culture; and through its power of reproduction, the family's trump card over the ambitions of princes and ambitious bureaucrats whose numbers are growing out of all proportion to the nation's birthrate.

Assaults on the new welfare state—both the relatively timid moves of the Reagan administration and the more hearty efforts of the Thatcher government—also take on the quality of "pro-family" acts: efforts that would reprivatize the relations between state and family, men and

women, parents and children.

The other side, certainly, understands what is at stake. Take this report on a 1983 rally protesting a proposed budget cut in British Columbia: "An extraordinary range of individual women and representatives of women's groups converged on . . . the Budget meeting room. . . . Public sector unionists, teachers, lesbian rights activists, long-time general-issue feminists, church women, artists, writers, left-wingers of gaudily-varied stripes, day care activists, rape crisis workers, students, librarians, old women—all came to argue and act."

That's a fairly good contemporary list of society's enemies, all of whom are making good livings out of the state's war on the family. It's also a good indicator of how the politics of the family has merged with the politics of the welfare state.

HARD LIVING ON EASY STREET *by Dan McMurry*

With the falling leaves and falling temperatures, hordes of newpeople looking for the hungry and homeless descended on the missions and the shelters. Now collectively called Street People, Streetniks (my term) became the "darlings of the press"; every day, in every paper, we are brought up to date about them. *USA Today* for example, recently featured a run-down of their problems, including a photo and a quotation from a "representative" of the homeless from each state—subjective photo journalism and human-interest stories were substituted for objective investigation.

As a teacher, I could not critically discuss the topic with my students, lacking reliable data, reliably collected. As a social investigator, once again I hit the road—or better said, the street.

Easy Street? There were at last count 41 meals served every day to Streetniks in Nashville. If they care to, they can spend all day eating. All you do is line up and eat. No questions asked. No one who wants a warm place to stay is turned away. Easy living? Here is a list of things I got, saw, received, or are advertised as available free for the asking: food, snacks, food to go, clothing, shelter, towels, blankets, soap, personal items, gloves, ski caps, razors, aspirin, cold tablets, Band-Aids, eyeglasses, medical care, prescriptions filled regardless of issuing doctor, emergency medicine, stitches, X-rays, crutches, false teeth, dental care, alcoholism treatment, sermons, sing-alongs, friendship, companionship, opportunities for exercise, walking and strolling, Christmas carols, writing materials, pens, envelopes, stamps, Christmas cards, fruit cake, daily newspapers, magazines, diapers, sanitary napkins, baby food, neck braces, Ace bandages, etc.

Hard living? In a single week, two street people were stabbed to death within four blocks of each other. One stabbing occurred in the *chapel* of the Mission, in the corner



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where I slept three weeks earlier. Also, a ferocious knife fight took place on the steps of the Mission while I was standing there. My notes of the brawl say that the brawlers were too drunk to fight dangerously but not too drunk to kill each other with knives (that is, unknowingly).

Streetniks are also doing time—they have to become skilled at doing nothing, all day, every day. The vast majority smoke, and cough. While you will see a fat one every now and then, most are lank if not thin. The only really skinny ones I saw were mental cases.

It was about 9:00 on Saturday night, and I was huddled in a corner of the chapel at the Mission, on the tile floor, wrapped in a scratchy blanket I got with my attendance at the “service.” Three preachers preach and lead singing of hymns from the songbooks that are passed out at the beginning of each service. For that you get supper and a place to lie down—sleeping is another matter. The smell and the sounds kept me fully awake most of the night. I can’t describe either because I have no comparison to make. I cannot exactly remember the smells and sounds of barracks full of sailors and marines a third of a century ago, but they could have been nothing like these smells and these sounds or I would have lost my mind—or gone AWOL.

It was like one large animal made up of many small parts; all of them were constantly moving and making noises, ranging from soft and smooth to sharp and grating.

The smell was sickening; luckily it diminished in force. I could taste the air as I have tasted the smells on the street of Mexico City—there, a mixture of exhaust fumes and tacos. Around daybreak I dozed off for a while; then it was time to clear the chapel. We put the chairs back in rows and got ready for breakfast.

It’s exactly one block to “Sally” (the Salvation Army). Breakfast starts at 7:30. It was 28 degrees with a light fog and low-lying clouds hiding the top of L&C tower. Willie, however, didn’t notice. He was intent on getting in line and eating. He walked with that characteristic shuffle—head slightly bowed, shoulders sagging, and feet barely clearing the pavement.

Willie had drunk two pints of Thunderbird late yesterday evening and felt bad, plagued by diarrhea, a common by-product of fortified wine. Music City Liquor Store is the attraction of Lower Broad to Willie, its proximity to historic Ryman Auditorium notwithstanding. The store specializes in fortified wine at \$1.25 a pint with 20 percent alcohol. Willie would have to drink over five cans of beer at \$1.00 a whack to get the 3.2 ounces of pure alcohol they pour into a pint of cheap wine produced expressly for Streetniks.

There were 22 in line when Willie got there. They all looked a great deal like him. Breakfast. There are only two workers this morning—one, Pop, a regular employee of Sally who came off the street for the job some time ago. Pop was putting two pieces of white bread on a rather flimsy paper plate, spooning gravy over them and handing the plate to the men. Willie got his own plastic fork. The other worker beside Pop was partly, and sloppily, filling styrofoam cups with coffee from a big thermos and handing each man a doughnut. Willie and the others were eating in an annex the Army had acquired to meet the needs of the burgeoning crowd. Long temporary tables were covered with paper tablecloths, overlapped to cover the tables completely.

Chairs were at a premium, and pew-like benches were used for one side of the back two tables.

It wasn’t too bad for Willie. The gravy was pretty warm and went down smooth compared to the Thunderbird. There were no napkins, but if there had been, Willie would not have used them to wipe the spots of gravy off his untrimmed beard. In a swiping motion, he used the palm of his hand, which he then wiped on his pants leg. Not a word passed between Willie and his breakfast companions. He ate everything on his plate, put his doughnut in his jacket pocket, picked up his plate and empty coffee cup, dropped them in the garbage can by the door, and hit the streets. Again. Long time till 11:30.

As he walked up Demonbreun Street and then over to Broadway, Willie was unaware that the fog had lifted, that the tops of the downtown buildings were visible, or that the sun was shining.

Storefront Ministry was open, but Willie couldn’t get in. Because of nice weather they were going to give out the lunch tickets on the sidewalk in front, so he waited some more. He had spent a lot of time in SFM last week, waiting for clothes, talking and smoking, until they put up that *no smoking* sign.

Here they come with the tickets. Even though they give out tickets, Willie had never seen anyone turned away. The line snaked up Eighth Avenue, turned left, went down a block, came in the basement of the parish hall at Christ Church Episcopal. There they took Willie’s ticket, handed him a bag lunch, and he sat down. There was a cup of hot chocolate by each place. In the bag: a styrofoam bowl of veggie soup, chicken salad on light bread, banana, and chocolate cake. Just as Willie began eating, a big black man said, “Let us return thanks.” So Willie stopped (but did not take his stocking cap off, neither did anyone else, since “the man” did not tell them to) and then commenced eating again.

Finished, Willie got extra hot chocolate. He put his banana and a piece of chocolate cake he picked up from the table in his jacket pocket for later. On the steps leading from the basement back to the street, there was a nicely dressed man in an overcoat shaking everybody’s hand and saying “Merry Christmas.”

Since it was only 12:00, Willie went back into the chapel. He pulled four chairs together and snoozed a while. (Many others did the same thing.) The noise didn’t bother him much, and he slept till about 3:30. There is no mooching money to be had on Broadway—too much competition and too much resistance. He wandered over to Church and Second last week, made a killing off those folks in the fancy district, but was run off by the bulls. They said, “Hey fellow, get over there on Broadway where you belong.”

Supper was soup, as he knew it would be. A soup line, that’s what it was. But the soup was not bad. It was tasty hot onion soup. And light bread. Always light bread. Never any other kind. But that’s the only bread fit to eat, anyway. An apple for later.

Willie lucked out tonight. He had drawn the last bunk upstairs. Before he went to bed upstairs in the Mission, the best place to be because of the soft double-bunks with sheets, Willie ate his banana and chocolate cake and apple.

And thus Willie finished his menu for the day. About

2,900 calories; 300 more than necessary to maintain his relatively inactive 170 pounds.

Willie wore a very colorful ski cap, a T-shirt advertising Coors, two long-sleeved shirts, a brown nylon jacket with four big pockets (in one of which was a pair of blue cotton gloves), two pairs of pants, three pairs of socks, and a pair of two-toned leather loafers with built up hard-leather heels. All the clothes and accessories were given to him, most within the last few days.

The Mission, the Sally, Storefront Ministry, the churches, East Nashville Co-op, Ladies of Charity, and Metro Schools Clothing Room supply clothes free. Willie has been to most of them. The SFM has a "clothes person" as they do a "food person" and a "shelter person." There is more clothing than anyone realizes—churches play musical clothes, calling on the places they think might need them so they can get rid of the stacks and hangers and mountains of clothing in their basement and make way for the never ending flood of apparel from caring parishioners.

The deluge begins in subdivisions and rural areas where the clothing is collected by agencies and churches, bundled and moved toward bigger towns, filling basements and storage rooms, growing and collecting until it all flows into Nashville. Here all the clothes, large and small, tops and bottoms, new and old, are sorted, bundled again, and taken to the dispersal points where staff and volunteers hand them out. At SFM the needy are signed in, lined up, and interviewed by the "clothesperson" before getting their new clothes, in first come, first serve, take-what-you-like fashion. And so the output of the clothing manufacturers here and in Taiwan, South Korea, Mexico, and a host of other countries finally passes into the hands of Streetniks. The clothes are useful again. But not for long.

The remainder of the journey of the suit that Willie gets, once worn with pride and care, is the saddest period of its life. After its owner outgrew it, either physically or fashionably, he carefully took it to the church when they had the Clothes for the Needy Drive. It had been handled with care until Willie got it. Like the Commandant at Dachau to his charges, Willie is likewise expected to apply the Final Solution to all his clothes. The suit stops here. As do all the clothes Willie and his fellow Streetniks receive.

There are no washing machines. There is no soap for washing. Streetniks are not allowed to bring them back to the agency that gave them away. Indeed, they are expected to abuse all the clothing and then discard it, much of it cleaned just before distribution. The suit and shirt and the pants and the gloves and the stocking cap will be worn for a while, quickly become filthy, and then be thrown away, often for someone else to pick up and dispose of properly. The men's room in the federal building, alleys, bathrooms, street corners, just about any place downtown in any large city is littered with discarded clothing. After years of puzzling over where all our apparel finally winds up—somewhat like the search for the elephants' graveyard—I found it in the garbage cans of Nashville. *Hic jacet* jacket.

At Holy Name Catholic Church I suddenly realized that all the homeless were not actually homeless if you count pickup trucks with campers as homes. As I was loitering around the steps waiting to go into the parish hall, I saw that the folks who were getting out of the pickup-camper—two

Dispersal

by Peter Forbes

No good at leaving, though I always try:
Upheaval leaves me clinging to a spar;
How soon my protestations turn to wry
Admissions that departing leaves a scar,
A calloused bark no yearning can rescind,
Or roll time backwards till a chestnut bares
Its glistening birth-leaves to the drying wind,
Or candles overload the branching stairs.
Beneath the hob-nailed armour, beauty lies,
Unimaginably perfect, resting there,
Awaiting that which only others can supply:
Rich soil, fresh light, uncomplicated air.
While I can pocket nothing but a stone,
Its ripe potential burnished but unsown.

white men and a white woman—were coming to eat also. Then I remembered that I had seen (but not registered) other Streetniks and cars. On Saturday as I was standing on the corner of Sixth and Demonbreau, by the Mission, I noticed a nice looking car parked in the lot across the street. Two black men stepped out of it and went into the Mission. In a few minutes they came out with another black man, got in the car and drove away. Later I saw all three of them in the chow line at the Salvation Army. So there are cars—and trucks—available to some of the Streetniks if not actually owned by them. I rather suspect that some of the street crowd is made up of locals, without work and responsibilities, who come and go with the Streetniks. They pass the time, eat, get whatever is being handed out free that day (and there is a lot of that), and generally enjoy themselves. With cars they can be wherever the action is.

After the men and the woman went in the parish hall I toured the parking lot. There were six cars that appeared to belong to the folks inside; four were later driven off by groups of the satisfied luncheon crowd.

The hall was ready for us. All of the tables, except for the four in the very back, had from two to six people already seated. There were three rows of tables running from front to back of the hall. They were big tables with white disposable paper tablecloths, each seating eight persons. Coffee was in a large urn on a table to the side of the door with the usual "fixings" scattered alongside. A stainless steel countertop separated the hall from the kitchen. On this the "volunteers" were placing the big pans of food that would soon be passed out. The first worker in line was stacking a huge pile of serving trays. These were of the old-fashioned kind that had different shape and size cavities, which the servers filled with solid and semiliquid food.

I got a cup of coffee and sat down. The coffee was of an unusual color. I chose a table with a lady at one corner and two very bearded men at the other end. I sat across from the lady who appeared to be copying from a book into a notebook. I took a sip of the strangely tinted coffee and exclaimed to my tablemates, "What kind of coffee is this?"