

The other day my son came home to Eureka for a visit. He had grown up in Humboldt, but moved away to attend college and pursue his career. He is a pilot, so he's visited hundreds of cities and dozens of countries the past decade. When we were driving near downtown Eureka, he commented, "Looks like the land of the walking dead." What do you mean? I asked. "The Tweakers: they are everywhere and I don't remember it being that bad when I was growing up here." Familiarity may breed contempt; it also can breed a blind eye. Until ^{recently} ~~recently~~ ^{we} turned a blind eye. Recently I've had occasion to speak with people who live in, work in and a few who are planning to leave from, Humboldt County. They say that the number of people who look like hard-core drug users are on the increase. Even old time pot growers around the county seem to think that something wicked has come this ^{way} ~~way~~: a harsher, more violent breed of drug growers and peddlers.

Today, we are talking about the need to shift from a resource based to a tourist based economy. But, we are also painfully aware that tourists are unlikely to visit when the panhandlers are everywhere, and large numbers of vagrants dot our landscape. Why can't we clean up our cities? I think it's because we haven't begun to tackle our burgeoning drug problem. Would it help to motivate us if I make the ~~outlandish~~ claim that the mortal dangers of drug abuse are much more threatening than terrorism.

For example: in 2008, 1,786 people died from heroin overdoses in the states. By 2012, the number of those deaths jumped to 3,635. And 9,869 people died from prescription opioids, ^{also} in ~~in~~ ^{2012.} 2012. If these numbers are even close: ~~then~~ consider this. When the terrorists attacked on 9/11 of 2001 the number of people killed in New York and Washington was around ~~3,000~~. Soon after, we declared war on the terrorists and have been fighting battles against the perpetrators ever since at huge expense of money and lives. But every year, the number of overdoses on heroin and opioids hovers somewhere near 13,000 persons. Since 9/11 that's' over 150,000 people dead from drug overdose. So while we run off to fight foreign battles against terrorists, it seems a more pernicious enemy strikes closer to home.

What should we do?

First, we have to care; Whoever we are and wherever we are, America faces a crisis and in my view Humboldt County is close to ground zero.

2. Mental health facilities need to increase their capacity,

3. Drug use should not be glamorized or normalized: in my view, Tweakers are a lot like zombies because they are neither living nor dead. Afraid to live life to its fullest, they choose to live in a perpetual stupor.

4. The human factor needs to be considered. Isolation, ~~shame~~, incarceration and punishment have had little effect in the so-called war on drugs. Something better has to be found. I think it can be found ^{in the moral and spiritual values that helped build our Western world.} ~~in the moral and spiritual values that helped build our Western world.~~: faith, family, honesty and hard work.

This has been Dan Price for community Comment