

The other morning after a heavy night of rain, I found a scruffy young man sleeping under the cover of our church porch. I told him he could not sleep there, and encouraged him to let me take him down to the Rescue Mission or Betty Chinn Center. He refused because he had a dog and said he'd never give up his canine. I said, "Well, your choice, but you can't sleep here." "Why not?"

"Because we have no showers, no beds, no one to supervise." I repeated, "There are many places in town that would take you in: let me take you to them." He refused... Before he left, I asked him where he was from. He was from somewhere in the mid-West. I asked him why he came to our area: his one syllable answer: "Pot."

Ok, I've heard we grow a lot of it in our area. Did you come to smoke it, buy it, trade it? What?

"I came to trim."

.... As he left, I began to think about many who tell me what a boon pot is to our economy, bringing in a supposed billion plus dollars. I wonder if it's worth it if we figure in all the downside costs of the pot industry. I could dwell at length on the environmental damage, the violence and the emotional imbalances that accompany cannabis use, especially among teens, but time is short. Back to the hapless young trimmer: he was hardly the first person I have heard of who was attracted to ~~the~~ pot-trimming in Humboldt. They come to trim, and soon land on someone's porch: no job, nor roof overhead.

I find it interesting that the papers these days are littered with articles on marijuana ordinances: what to do with medical marijuana in the present, and legal marijuana in the future. It's a perpetual theme that is accompanied by another familiar drone that I have heard every single winter since moving here 23 years ago: Shelter crisis! Shelter crisis declared, or is it? I quote from the front page of yesterday's Times Standard: "The Eureka City Council disagreed, accused each other of acting foolishly and heard lengthy public comment surrounding a proposed result to declare a shelter crisis at Tuesday's council meeting." End quote.

Does anyone think like I do about the connection between the homeless problem and the drug problem? At the risk of sounding terribly simplistic, I'll venture this: We do not have a housing shortage that causes homelessness: we have a serious drug and alcohol epidemic that disables people's minds, robs their bodies of health and strength, and their will of resolve. *The result:*

*homeless hordes in our county and throughout the land*

~~The homeless crisis cannot be solved by throwing money at it: we're throwing plenty of money at the problem already.~~

I am not suggesting that because drug and alcohol abuse is the root of the problem that we condemn those on the street and leave them to their own devices. Rather, I am suggesting that we need to dig at the *root* problem, which is increased substance abuse that leads inexorably to moral and social dysfunction. If we attack the real problem at its roots, we're more likely to find a solution, than if we ~~merely~~ prune frantically at the troublesome homeless branches every *winter,* ~~year,~~ only to discover once again: "My gosh, they keep growing back!"

This has been Dan Price for Community Comment