

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,

Homelessness is not new in our town. My first knowledge of the problem was back in the nineteen thirties. The depression had hit and unemployment was rampant. Nationwide, able bodied men left their homes, looking for work. Their means of transportation were the rail roads which they would illegally ride, hiding in and under box cars, hopping on and off at their leisure. These transients were called 'Hobos' in those days. They weren't doing this because of the adventure or free handouts; they were looking for work, any type, any place at any wage. They would drop off in a likely looking town and go from door to door asking to split firewood, clean the yard or anything else the home owner might have in the line of chores. The wage paid was not necessarily in the form of cash but also for food or clothing. The majority of these men was honest and could be trusted. Naturally there were those among them that were not but they seemed to be in the minority. Those were desperate times with no welfare assistance with very few organizations available to offer any type of help. Eureka was located at the end of the rail line. Once the hobo found that he could not survive here, he had to hop an outgoing freight back to the Bay area. For the days that he was in town, he camped in the railroad yards. The camp, called the "Hobo Jungle" was sizeable and consisted of lean twos and shacks made of every conceivable material. Tents were not readily available back then. With the end of the depression and the start of World War Two, unemployment ended and the homeless problem subsided. Public Welfare was introduced and the needy were provided for. They accepted assistance but did not demand it as they do now-a-days. Now everyone wants 'free stuff' with no strings attached. Strange how a needy person will bite the hand that offers to feed him out of friendship and love for fellow man. That takes me back to the end of World War Two when I was part of the occupation forces stationed in Japan. In Tokyo there were countless thousands that had been left homeless due to heavy bombing that took place during the War. They slept in doorways and under trees or any other place where they could lay their heads. Many were the nights that I walked alone to visit friends at one of our detachments. I had to be careful not to step on the sleeping bodies that lined the sidewalks but never did I fear for my safety. I sure would not attempt that in Eureka these nights. Several Sundays ago, I was accosted by a pan handler in the vestibule of one of Eureka's most popular restaurants, next day in the post office parking lot and again in another popular restaurant parking lot here in town.

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