

Throw Away People

I once (not long ago) took up a battle against Bank of America, to keep my brother from losing his home. His wife had him sign for a second mortgage and then took the money and split. He helped move me to California to live with him and his boys so I could fight that battle for him. I took up that battle and won it for him and as soon as I won, he turned right around and made me homeless. And kept all my belongings (sadly, a common victimization of all made homeless).

Before he made me homeless, however, I secured his home for him, reduced his mortgage payments by sixty percent . . . got the bank to write off a big chunk . . . and, as soon as I won, he threw me to the streets, proving the old adage that no good deed goes unpunished.

My children and I were never 'truly' homeless, as we lived between two sets of sofa's, in two homes, on either side of town, for four very long, very hard months. Then, only after we suffered enough, the family stepped in and helped secure a home. Not the local family, the family from back-east. It was a framing experience for who I am today. Framing. That's the nicest thing I can say about it. (I still shake my fist at God about it, now and again.)

Yesterday, through facebook, I received an S.O.S. call from a local disabled vet who is going to be made homeless in seven days by the county – because he has no electricity. To 'not have' electricity in his sub-division violates code. I knew his emotional state was not good, so I arrived there about an hour after he contacted me, and I was one of the first people

he contacted when he got the letter.

While he waited, he called the county – the woman who authored the eviction notice, and asked her, “Are you trying to make me blow my brains out? Because that’s really the only alternative I see here.”

Because he mentioned suicide in that phone call, a few moments after I arrived, two Sheriff’s deputies appeared at his door-step. I was so offended by their cardboard cop routine. The disabled vet, in answer to their question, “are you depressed?” explained about the notice. Explained about the family home, paid for, no debt on property taxes or anything. He explained that all of his belongings will be lost and he will go to the streets. And about his dying room-mate, who would also end up on the streets.

“But are you depressed?” asked the cardboard cop, again.

“Wouldn’t you be?” replied the tired-looking veteran of the US Marine Corp.

“But are you ok?” asked the other cardboard cop.

“No! I’m NOT OK at all!” he said, but then as soon as he said it, he realized that these men were not going to help him and getting tranquilized and put in a psych ward was not going to help him. We exchanged much as our eyes locked between the two uniforms.

I interrupted and said "He's fine."

The one cop got angry and scolded me for not letting the veteran speak. It infuriated me.

"Dude, have you ever been homeless? Have you?"

I awoke his inner bully (I guess) because he insisted I step away from the other two, with him, where he and I proceeded to argue. He tried to lecture me on how they are uniquely trained to handle this shit, and he was very insulted when I said "Use your head! He's just been told he's trash! For a \$6,000 bill owed PG&E, the town he was born into, the town he grew up in, the town he buried his parents in, the town he gave birth to a child in, that town just told him that he is trash. That he is a throw-away person. And why? Because the big fat corporate entity, PG&E, won't give him electricity. The corporation is causing his homelessness and forgive my hostility, Sir, but you are the corporations' stooges. And all you want, right now, from him, is for him to tell you he won't harm himself and he's not depressed. Dude, you can't have someone tell you that you are trash and not be depressed. It's depressing!"

"Ma'am, I think you should just quit talking now."

"Well, that feeling is mutual, Sir."

He is sixty years old and disabled. He has another disabled man living with him, who is on oxygen, collects disability (also) and is near death. The house is filled with stuff, but nothing of value to anyone but the men living there. This vet

can make his own case (he can verbalize) regarding how he has been systematically victimized by PG&E and the county, but his hands are gnarled and his knees cause him chronic pain.

The young officer of the county sheriff's department was furious at me and I was being belligerent because I couldn't formulate, at the time, what I was really dismayed about.

I was really dismayed that they just wanted a 'yes or no' answer to two questions. Are you depressed? Do you feel like you could harm yourself or others? The men standing there in their crisp brown uniforms, leathered up as if ready for a really German BDSM film, the ones who could actually DO something for this man, didn't ask the humanitarian question. They didn't want to know how to help him, they wanted to know if they should cart him off to the psychiatric wing for observation, that's all.

They should have offered him SOMETHING in the line of help, some validation that he was being victimized, something that they could personally do for this situation. And if they can't do that, then they need to shelf the faux concern. "We're just here to make sure he's ok". If you want him to be ok, do this. Tell the county to take back the eviction notice. Get PG&E involved because if they would just give him back his fucking electric, the man would be fine! They are evicting him for not having electricity, while his mate lies dying in the back room.

The house is paid for. The property taxes are paid. This man is not a criminal. He is being harassed because he grows his own cannabis and his unenlightened subdivision neighbors don't like it that he has a few pot plants growing in his back yard

every fall.

He has been paying \$400 to \$600 a month for fuel for a generator just to get internet and to keep his refrigerator and stove going. He's lived this way for six years and interestingly enough, his health took a big dive a year after PG&E landed their \$6K extra assessment on him. A year after that, he was declared completely disabled and was authorized by the State to receive in home care service (he can't drive).

Two things. One, I think there is evidence of cause-and-effect between PG&E victimizing him, and his disabled health. Two, how does he get in home care workers to take care of him in a home with no electricity? Amazing.

I assured the Sheriff's that I wasn't going to let him 'off' himself and that they could take their leather and weapons and be on their way. Frankly, they didn't care what I said, but my friend? He told them what they wanted to hear so they would leave.

He did not get behind in his electric bills for growing pot, or for cooking meth, or for anything of the things I might have done to get my electric put back on. Six years ago, PG&E randomly sent him a bill for \$6K, with an explanation that the meter reading guy hadn't been reading the meter correctly for the past several years, and so there is catch-up to play. Mr. disabled vet had no job and no money and no way to come up with \$6K. So, PG&E just added interest year after year until it got to \$10K and then they cut him off.

Sometime in this period, he received a one-time settlement check of \$3,200 for back social security owed him and he

turned it all over to PG&E! They magnanimously turned on the lights for six months, and then shut him off again. In six years, he's had electricity in his house for six months.

It is a fact that twenty-six vets commit suicide every day in this country, and the vast majority do it because they are refused help from the medical establishment, from the law. By the way they are treated, these people are being told – systematically – that they are, in fact, 'throw away people' – of no value to this world.

You really have to be made homeless, violently and completely, to understand how it makes suicide the only sane choice. Seriously. People with healthy egos, with healthy attitudes, with many gifts and with much love in their hearts – put in that situation, will say 'ok, fuck this – I am not playing out this drama. I am not going to experience sleeping on the streets and begging with a cup. No thank you. I am exiting stage left. You can take my house, you can take my shit, but you can't make me stand around and watch you do it to me.'

The county's office was absolutely right to take heed in his words, when this man accused them of trying to get him to blow his own brains out. They were right to worry. Sending two sheriff's who basically, stand there, thumbs hooked in belt-loops, dark glasses that ensure you can't see their eyes, rocking back and forth on their heels as if they are anxious to do something – anything – club someone, chase someone, f*ck someone up, looking all official and in command, letting you know that they won't go away until they hear what they want to hear. So, my friend gave them that to make them go away. But the danger hasn't gone away.

The danger is still real – because I know this old vet and he is a proud man. He spent his life cutting trees down, climbing big-ass trees, taking on daunting tasks that many men wouldn't do. He is a devoted fan of mother earth, but also, a skilled hunter and outdoorsman. He isn't going to dance to their tune. He will become another veteran statistic, rather than accept the title of 'throw away person'.

Who is at blame for this situation? I wonder. Everyone probably has a share. The disabled vet for not calling me in sooner. Me, for knowing that he had a PG&E problem and falsely assuming it had something to do with indoor grow light bills (not the issue – at all!), but those are sins of reaction. The county gets an F in sensitivity and caring, because they are just enforcing the law. PG&E started this whole thing and PG&E has never done anything to resolve it with him – though I know he has tried . . . a man who is living on \$900 a month doesn't give \$3,200 to PG&E without expecting resolution. Permanent resolution.

And you all know that PG&E wrote off that loss many, many years ago, right?

I have a call with my disabled vet friend this morning to begin to draw up the history. I will play documentarian and get the story down, and then start making calls . . . PG&E, the County, the V.A., the newspapers . . . Let us hope that in this case, my pen will prove mightier than the system.