

# A Story from the 1960's - Sadly Still True

by J. Grimes

After traveling to NYC as a "rich" man (a false notion of my youth) to study acting, I soon found myself without one red cent to my name. As it usually requires money to eat, I was forced to dine at soup kitchens at various locations throughout the city. One which sticks in my mind in particular is one that was run by a church a few streets over from Brooklyn Bridge. I remember it for two reasons: the one I am about to relate in this article and the terrible "race riot" that broke out there a couple of months later.

The soup kitchens of NYC were not nice places like those we have in Elkton today. They were disgusting places, to be avoided at all cost, unless starvation forced you to seek them out – meaning the people who went there didn't want to socialize, chat, and take advantage of some free grub. We all knew, every day at lunch, our companions would be pickpockets and petty thieves, plus some who were there because it was the only place they could be.

One old man, an alcoholic I'd say by the smell of him, with grey hair past his shoulders and a beard that looked like it hadn't been trimmed in years always stood out. It was obvious to anyone who had the misfortune to talk to this chap for more than five minutes that he had an ear fetish. At

## Senior Moments . . .

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bag with my dangerous weapons: leatherman tool, two inch pen knife, metal file, and nail clipper. I wish I had had the wherewithal to photograph the mess.

I have never been raped, but I've been violated. And this was a real violation. I was told to "Hurry up and pack up and get out of here." I said, "This will take an hour to pack up," which didn't please the deputies at all. My stuff was never so taken apart and strewn all over ever, even before the walk started.

Returning to the highway, I walked the three miles over again and found a place to sleep. The place I found was great. It was cool, dark, bug and rodent free, and away from the highway. I slept terrible, which never happens with a "good" place. I prayed a lot during the Cass County incident, and continued to pray every time I awoke during the night. I was feeling terrible, and truly needed the

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least, I assume that's what everyone thought because he was always and constantly going on about ears this, and ears that. If we didn't see the old man around the kitchen for a week or so we knew he'd been put in the psyche ward at Bellevue Hospital again for bothering people about their ears on the street.

One time, when he seemed lucid enough to actually carry on a conversation a man sitting next to him asked him why he was constantly going on about ears all the time. His reply was both swift and quite shocking. He said, "You never had your ear ripped off the side of your head, then looked down to see your own bloody ear lying in your hand, did ya. That never happened to you, did it?" To which the other man said, "Well no, it never happened to you either, did it?" Then the older man stood up, yelling, "That's where you're wrong, mate!" pulling back his long hair to show anyone who might have been looking in the general direction the hideous spot where his ear used to be.

I was to find out later that afternoon, that before the stock market crash of 1929 this fellow had been a success-

ful businessman of some sort who had made the sorry mistake of "putting all his eggs in one basket," as they say. So, buying on a dime, he found himself penniless overnight and living the sorry hand-to-mouth existence of a street person.

One night he was sleeping on a bench in Central Park when he woke with the most terrible pain he'd ever experienced along the side of his face. Then he realized a grinning boy in his late teens or early twenties was looking down at him. This youth then placed something in his hand and ran away laughing, jumping in a Studs Bearcat with a bunch of other boys and speeding away. Upon taking a look at what the young fellow had placed in his hand he discovered it was his own bloody ear.

From the details I got it's not hard to deduce what happened. A bunch of rich college kids figured he was just a "bum" sleeping on a park bench and ripped his ear off as a lark. This may seem hard to fathom for anyone who's never had to live on the street, but anyone who has ever been homeless will tell you it's open season on street people. As the cops have an

doing O.K.? Can I get you some water?" I politely declined and thanked her, knowing there was a water source just up the road. God is alive and well, no matter what goes on in our lives. On His terms, His time table, things work out. I'm grateful for the three Cass County incidents that happened the next day which wiped out the one from the day before. May we put security in its proper place. Security in the Lord is true security. May we not be fooled into the false security we think is the real one. I slept good that night.

Till the next time...

In Christ's love, Don

Miles to date: 15,245  
Money picked up along road: \$1,192.51  
Unsolicited money given by motorists: \$3,464.29  
Of 1,231 nights:  
549 nights homeless  
682 nights cared for by humanity ☺

unspoken policy that if you don't have an address you don't exist, just about anything can – and does – happen to those who fall through the cracks.

This story should not only illustrate the inhumanity of some people but also serve as a moral lesson to how fickle fate is and how one's destiny can change in an instant of time. I would leave you to ponder now, just how civilized "civilization" really is at this stage of human evolution. St. Paul said we share creation with the animal kingdom but our soul with God. If this is so we must always strive to restrain our animal nature while we strive to cultivate that spark in us that comes from God.

[Editor's note: Mr. Grimes is a regular member of the community which gathers weekly at the Elkton Community Kitchen.

Over the past six years, advocates and homeless shelter workers from around the country have seen an alarming increase in reports of homeless men, women and even children being killed, beaten, and harassed. The National Coalition for the Homeless continues annually to publish: *A Report of Hate Crimes and Violence Against People Who Are Homeless in the United States*. It is available on their web site:

<http://www.nationalhomeless.org/>

*It's really a wonder that I haven't dropped all my ideals because they seem so absurd and impossible to carry out. Yet, I keep them, because in spite of everything I still believe that people are really good at heart. I simply can't build up my hopes on a foundation consisting of confusion, misery, and death. I see the world gradually being turned into a wilderness, I hear the ever-approaching thunder, which will destroy us too, I can feel the sufferings of millions and yet, if I look up into the heavens, I think that it will all come right, that this cruelty too will end, and that peace and tranquility will return again.*

- from the Diary of Anne Frank