

# Homelessness



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An Interview with the Homeless If one stops and takes stock of the streets, there will always be an instance wherein we see people, with misery etched on their faces, pushing shopping carts with clothes, bottles, newspapers, discarded things, and other implements in them. Sometimes, there would be a dog on a leash or at other more sorry cases, a child would not be too far away, watching as the parents rummage the dumpsters or plead food and money for the family. These are the homeless and I have always been interested in their plight. So for this activity, I would use an interview I've had with one of them to show some insights on this downtrodden group. His name is John Doe and I have seen him before near Wal-Mart about five blocks away.

I have read somewhere that the homeless tend to shy away from public contact. So I was a bit hesitant to approach John. I was, hence, quite surprised and thankful that he was accommodating to my pleasantries. And so, after introducing myself and declaring my intentions, I immediately asked him about his attitudes about other people, if it's true that they avoid contact or that if he asked for help. He replied that it was obvious: " You see us, yes? I am not exactly proud of my condition. Even if I am like this, I am ashamed to ask for help. Being homeless is bad enough but being refused help is worse. Dignity is all I have left." He added that the other homeless he knows have experienced being driven out by relatives and friends while there are those who have simply lost contact with them or that some have simply died. " Just gone, and we're alone. That's the fact." We chatted further and I found that he has a daughter living in San Diego. He was not keen on talking about her and from the most I could understand from bits of information he was willing to share was that she doesn't know about his

plight and he does not want to trouble her with the new family she's starting. There was this faraway look in his eyes that perhaps again saw the past regrets. So I asked about more mundane things such as how they eat, sleep and socialize with other homeless people. He told me it depends. Since he is constantly on the move, there is no opportunity for friendship or socialization. " It is sad that most of the time the only relationship I have with them is driven by competition." He was referring about food. Also, it appears that there is no social hierarchy among the homeless and that the closest to this would be the kind of territoriality that comes in foraging food and in asking for alms.

The short conversation I had with John told me several things. The most important of which was that these homeless are normal people – those who were once were our neighbors and friends - who have been unfortunate enough to lose their home because of bad financial decisions. I would be more interested to talk to more homeless and confirm the insights I have learned from John. I think that something must be done about this problem because after all these are Americans, no less than I am.