

"Journal Days - Voices of the Working Homeless"

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Thursday 27 November:

I have been "Homeless" now, for 105 days, and in the "Shelter" for 74 days.

"Thanks (for nothing) giving". The Holidays "begin. BANG! 3:00pm at bed Nr. D18. Who the Hell really cares? Really! - Here I sit, dressed. Over-cast out-side. The plans to go home, Gaston, the Fort, dashed. Done. Beard trimmed. Shaved. Here I sit. It's been "a day". It was a night of deep sleep. From (I think) 11:00pm to 9:00am. I hear I slept through the *2:00am* "bed-check". Good for sleep. Bad for not being aware. "Aware" is necessary at all times in here, especially lately when there are "Over-nighters", those who have no "assigned" shelter or bed, coming and going. Some of them are "regulars", they come into the shelter at night, under the guise of being Homeless and needing a place to sleep, and all the while, what they truly want, is to get into the shelter for a while, just long enough to either search the place for anything we, the residents, may have left on a bed or locker so they can grab it and run out the door... not to be seen again... until their next "visit". Others come in looking for particular "targets", somebody against whom they have a grudge, somebody they may have had a run-in with "out in the streets" and are coming to "settle a score". "Aware" is what keeps a person alive and un-damaged. I slept through all of this. But, I

slept! I'll accept that for it's own merit. - The one we know as "Muscle Guy" or "Tony Muscle" knocked on 20's door today to check on him. A few of us stayed here through the day. Some went to dinner at the Bowery Mission. Some partook of the "Holiday Meals" here. Some have gone to friends or family. I don't understand: friends and family... who let these guys stay in a shelter? They KNOW these guys are Homeless and in a shelter and offer them nothing better. And yet, these guys keep their connections with these people. I don't understand. Invite them to a holiday dinner and send them back out to a shelter. There's a lot that's wrong there. But, who am I? Nobody. - But "Tony Muscle" is a truly wonderful fellow of about, maybe, a young 50 years, shorter than I (which isn't saying anything particular at my height), dark-skin Black guy with a disposition that is absolutely wonderful. Mostly rather cheerful, talks good sense, and is, obviously, compassionate. Certainly non-threatening at all, not even in the very least. One of the nice people... "people" on this floor... in this "ward". - Ah, but this day. This morning, I showered and such and certainly didn't rush to my 10:00am appointments with Ms. Enyi. I signed her "list" at about 10:20am or so, sat in that alcove off the hall that they call "the lounge" and waited. At about 10:40am she called my name... "Kessluh!" she barks from half the way down the hall. "I have good news for you. Your case worker has returned. You sign on her list over here." As she blithered, Ms. Simpson called me into the office. She is short, heavy-set, and speaks with such a mumble that she's almost unintelligible. I was sweet. I was charming. I did the "ego-stroke". We begin almost from the beginning... again, with my history of coming into the shelter, my "goals" the policies of the shelter and all the rest. But now, my weekly appointments are Tuesdays. I can go to services if I so choose! Even to Rockaway... if I so choose. Let's see if I so choose. I'm just wondering what sort of social worker this Ms. Simpson is. No matter. I don't trust her either way. I don't trust ANY of them at all! - 4:31pm I've had my turkey sandwiches which I threw together, opening a package of the cold-cuts I'd kept in my locker over-night, onto the rolls I kept in my locker over-night, with some mustard that I'd kept in my locker over-night. And I slapped it all together so that I wouldn't be seen eating in the room, and ate them between checking that nobody was coming down the hall. That was my "Thanksgiving turkey dinner". Now, I'm having a peanut butter and honey sandwich. Geo just left to go to be with either some friends or family for the holiday. Rey's been gone all day. He's off to have dinner with his family. Brindou left early this morning. Kendall will be leaving soon. He too, will be having holiday dinner with family. All said, the entire floor is dead silent. Well. Here I am, as always, as usual, alone. Imagine? Thanksgiving... alone in a shelter for Homeless men. Alone, in the shelter, on Thanksgiving, eating peanut butter and honey on a roll. Thankful? Me? Oh yeah. Very. Uh huh. Right. OK. I've never been much of one for "holidays" and that sort of thing. Holidays of my child-hood were atrocities, the old man usually getting drunk, beating the Hell and Life out of Mum and then careening down the road to go be with his "Mommie". And then, as years passed, holidays were

so ruined through-out child-hood that I dodged them at every chance I had, declining invitations, feigning illness or, when possible, working. But THIS, being HERE? It's not that I'm not happy to have a place of shelter, nor is it that I don't appreciate the fact that I DO have something to eat. But being HERE and knowing that there are people "out there" who know I'm here, people who repeatedly have called themselves my "friend" to my face... and here I am... in a shelter... Homeless, eating cold-cuts and sitting on a plastic-covered mattress, on a metal bed... in a shelter. Yes, it DOES get to me... only a little, but it does. - Other-wise, I've washed some socks and my under-shorts. I'm still dressed in shirt and jeans (but bare-foot). It's becoming evening already. Too late to head anywhere. With trains running the Sunday schedule, I couldn't make Rockaway in under 2 hours. As I pointed out to Geo: 2 hours there, 2 hours back with no stop in between? Round-trip, I'd be back at 8:30pm, just in time to sign for the bed. Why bother? What I think I WILL do is nap. Sleep is something I haven't gotten much (or enough) of lately. Sleep whilst the place is calm or forever lose your peace. - Somehow I don't really want to sleep. But I don't want to stay awake either. This is the closest I've been to my own life-style in months: quiet, alone, inside, on a holiday. - What is a "holiday" anyway? A lot of nothing, really. An excuse to do nothing. A reason to spend money that one either doesn't have or can ill-afford to spend to impress people who don't care and don't matter at best. And so? That's what I'm doing... I think I'll wash my jeans... - 9:24pm And so I did; hand-washed my jeans in the basin in the wash-room across the hall, and now they're on the locker. Also washed 2 pairs of socks and my under-shorts. Accomplishments for the day. - Well, I'm signed-in for the night, have taken my Advils early. - Midnight... Rey came back in first this evening so I sat up talking with him until 11:55pm! I like talking with him. He's one of the very rare and few voices of any reason and intelligence in this place. So, in summary of this "Thanksgiving Day": It was a very quiet day. It was a very good day. Gave me down-time. No sense being concerned about tomorrow. It will take care of itself when it gets here.