



AMERICAN STREET PHILOSOPHERS

anecdotes from surviving

**to understand and respond
to the value of people
in the wealth of money**

AmericanStreetPhilosophes.org

**Steve Wilson
and Friends**





Steve Wilson and Friends

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anecdotes from surviving

to understand and respond
to the value of people
in the wealth of money

AMERICAN STREET PHILOSOPHERS

is a visiting, an understanding, an appreciating and ultimately a resolve for our dilemma.

“Rather than dismiss, relocate, complain
...the plight of poverty is a metaphor
for what our culture is becoming.”

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“...sobering and inspiring.”

This, and more, from

AMERICAN STREET PHILOSOPHERS
is expanded in
www.americanstreetphilosophers.org.
and the ongoing book series:

- I. THE SUCCESS OF FAILURE
(a Kirkus Best Books of the year 2016)
- II. WE'VE BEEN THINKING...AND IT WORKS
- III. KEEP ON, KEEPING ON....
- IV. THEM IS US
- V. THE 'ELSEWHERE' OF RISING EQUALITY

In Partnership with Bainbridge Island Museum of Art
For inquiries contact: Greg Robinson, Chief Curator







“On the street you find out.”

5 AM: homeless sheltering in Seattle
overnight, illegally in Alaska viaduct
BNSF waterfront railway tunnel,
a piece of Warren Buffett billionaire
Berkshire Hathaway holdings.



It's morning in overcast Seattle. The concrete and asphalt of Seventh at Cherry and I-5 ramps are above, below, before, behind, and on both sides of me.

Six sides of concrete and asphalt.

"This is not a residential neighborhood."

Victoria is housekeeping her 3' x 5' 'cardboard condo' home and storage. She continues... "...I can show you, if you want to go.

It is dangerous, really dangerous. The path is narrow between concrete barrier and speeding traffic."

Close by is City Hall more government federal, county, city, local district, departments, compartments offices, banks accomplishment, demolition.

Sirens and squeal trouble and frustrations orchestrate the random roar of city in motion.



Later I talk with Victoria's neighbor, Charles. His space tidies with an order that invokes the magical. His eclectic possessions includes a display of old *National Geographic* magazines. One with the lead story and cover photograph by me. We discover, then reminisce about a mutual friend with ties to Seattle's African-American community and the old *LIFE* magazine. Charles knew him in Seattle as 'Gordy'. I knew him in New York as Gordon Parks, revered photojournalist, author, composer and film director. "Yes, there is a story, a long story, a very, very long story...sometime we'll talk." Charles reaches for his broom. Storying is set aside. "So much traffic, so much grit and dust, I sweep this section of road every few hours so we don't breathe it."







While enjoying a chopped cabbage,
lettuce, celery and olive salad
in Tom and Dorothy's kitchen,
"...with a bit of horseradish?"
I query Tom about children in poverty.

"...once and future poverty?"

Yes. A future that looks
with eyes of apprehension
at uncertainty.
A home?
A bed?
Shoes and extra fries?
Life in the 'hood'?
A friendly hand for the long walk?
...and those ten servings of vegetables?

"I'm not sure I can put it into words,
that sense of one's humanity
in connection with someone else;
to be of use to people
with no need to protect
oneself against others.

"...kids...adjust...it's troublesome
the momentum of the low income life style.
It's hard to know
how the parental legacy will play out.
Having children is a hopeful response of the organism.

"You wonder. What's going to happen
to kids raised on the street, in cars and camps?
With minimal shelter?
What's their response to that parental legacy,
their no fixed abode?
Why shouldn't their response be,
'Get an infinite amount of stuff...'
Fairness!! Why?"

Where and how will be their contentment?







Occupy Opportunity

On corners flying signs
summarizing life.

In alleys leaving yellow puddles,
eating dumpster food.

On the street at night half alert
sleeping between cardboard,
clothes and whatever
pack, bag, shopping cart
maybe car or van,
...little money and no home.

Necessity pays attention,
sums experience,
wounds, breaks, destroys...
or creates
STREET PHILOSOPHERS.

Ingredients are simple,
understandable, enforced.
Recipe your choice.
Come, share the collection
and the collecting:
Nutrition, Shelter,
Welcome...







KIRKUS REVIEW:

AMERICAN STREET PHILOSOPHERS

Steve Wilson and Friends

THE SUCCESS OF FAILURE

A moving pictorial study of the meaning of home and an implicit critique of society's conception of the good life. Wilson, a photographer and documentarian, shot and talked to people in homeless settlements in Oregon and Washington, sussing out the hard-won insights of these "American street philosophers." Despite the tenuousness of their camps of cardboard boxes, sleeping bags, and the odd tent hunkered beneath bridges and overpasses that constitute their only shelter against lowering skies, their poetic musings keep

returning to a crucial theme: the importance of community.

"If the universe aims at richness / then the uniqueness of individuals is prime," notes Tom, a former philosophy teacher, but he also believes that the "evolution of friendship / is greater, more important / than anything I could own or collect." It's a poignant reminder that the loss of connection to other people, even more than the loss of a house, is the central tragedy of homelessness.

The second half of the debut book therefore explores Dignity Village, a settlement situated in a

Portland parking lot where some homeless people have regained permanent shelter in the form of 42 tiny houses built from cast off and recycled building materials and supported by donations and residents' sweat equity. It's a slightly preachy place — "solar and wind powered," with composting toilets and organic gardens — and its ethos is one of austere self-sufficiency.

Writes resident Paul C., "Welfare begets welfare.../ strips dignity, self-esteem, self-worth, self-reliance," while Ed G. counsels an almost Buddhist renunciation of

the material world as the path to freedom: "The more you have the more you want / and you stay unhappy because / there's always more to want." But autonomy is as much a group as an individual enterprise to judge by Wilson's appealing photos of Dignity Villagers cooperatively building houses, staging barbecues, and painting their brightly colored sheds with cat murals to beautify the neighborhood. Even more captivating are his portraits of people which bring to life these often invisible Americans in all their vibrant humanity.

American Street Philosophers



The
Success
of Failure
CREATE HAPPINESS

Steve Wilson and Friends



physical aspects

SOCIAL ASPECTS

social ownership

self-management

residents want to protect

a place to be



For me, this project began

thirty-five years ago, inversely and vicariously; by which I mean I was a spectating participant at housing's top, not bottom. We had funding to make *Credit Card: Earth*, a documentary on Man's use of the planet...too much 'Nature' was becoming 'natural resources'. We could 'make a statement'. We interviewed dozens. Kristy Comstock, the nine-year old daughter of the mayor of Palo Alto, summarized and clarified:

"We have a house is as much bigger than we need,

but we like it, and that's the problem."

I opened the film with that quote. Skip forward thirty years.

I am doing a magazine series on small residential architecture: house boats, tree houses, gypsy wagons, etc. Jeff and Samara, my Oregon building and brewing local knowledge suggest I go to Portland's Rebuilding Center.

"They know eco-conscious small home owner-builders using recycled material." I go. They know. And that afternoon I'm a couple hundred yards west of Portland International Airport.

On an acre of asphalt parking lot, squeezed between the city's dusty composting facility, a jail, United Van Lines' warehouses and Sunderland Avenue...a confusion of tarped 2 × 4 and plywood 10' × 12' "boxes" cuddle inside a chain link fence.

A sign says, Dignity Village.



Jon Boy's quik Village fcts:

1.3 Acres West of PDX

"The Village happened
at the right time:
the Portland City Council,
the location,
potential inhabitants -
all energized to happen,
to succeed.

"First, tents on plywood on top of pallets.

"...rats...rats...rats.

You couldn't imagine the rats.

Rats **everywhere...**

It was impossible.

The pile of dead rats was
three feet in diameter and a foot high,

but we overcame.

"On this $125' \times 294'$
piece of asphalt
we built 42 homes
with recycled building materials,
about twenty bucks a square foot.
Each on its $20' \times 20'$ lot.
Each no taller than 13'6"
which means 'portable'
and 18 'cat-accessible inches'
above the asphalt
which means no rats...



"I want you to be you.
Have you figured out what that is?"

"United by Spirit, Bonded by Name"

Benson Technical High School

Friday morning Amy and Tim took the Tech-Geo class to Dignity Village so they could understand how the structure they are building will be used and to also visit the occupants of the Village. The students also got to meet Melissa who will be living in the structure they are building.



From the 'upper-class homeless'
of Portland's Dignity Village
come "sobering and inspiring" solutions.

**“Though not as eloquent as we think we are,
we don’t blame mirrors for our ugly faces.”**

**“I don’t think of myself as the kind of person
who must end a discussion with pepper spray.”**

Stories

in rain-blotched, coffee-stained
journeys in diaries, and poems on pads:
hopes and hurts, dreams and disappointments,
insecurities and honesty...
summaries and understandings
by and about street people,
often with “more grace than pain.”

Voices of the Upper Class Homeless

Notes: Pic Name has Paul from Coppinville
Homelessness is a rapidly growing
We are not unlike any national
state or municipality to have

Community Social Events Meets Carrots Sports
TDA approved to address night bloodless
street, homeless, tension, poverty
depression, anger, promoting self
rapid growth of homelessness self-esteem, optimism
relieve facts

Indigenous
A strong ancestral sense is crucial for our Indigenous Treasure
Collaborative participation unlike any successful organization
What do I want
The Village

As the Mother is quoted as saying a "self help price housing"
the village every individual's strengths and to them in
these discussions -

Learning on my own's Smith's not pursuing it
Get out of the village at large once I've
Before employing an outside mediator
should be available for that instead of wait
and ate through the up & down times

Such as Dr. Heather Macken herself
and successful X-Member
previously a three board committee

Undoubtedly, this theory can be applied to any
political, social or economic organization where the
success of the village is the success of the human element

Observations

RAIN WALK

Letter of Certification

Real Homeless Specific

Neuro-Age

Neuro-Age

Neuro-Age

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Philosophy

If you don't live by
your own expectations you
will default to those's
path of dysfunctionality

Use a community not
the state to advance to a vision
Homeless solution to
Homelessness save the homeless

Optimism
Self-Reliance & Empowerment

Distributive
What makes it work
Don't forget the
Chicken Soup for the

Feeling Fine
Change yourself not others

Based Reintegrate into mainstream society
elections (split)

Low Res of Dispute Resolution
dignity of council post decision

continues to be debated due
to the lack of monitoring current

See Participatory Action Research with
Dignity Village by Dr. Heather Macken

5. Need have an equalizing ground
F. Continuance of the jailhouse mentality

and a distracting from the
discusses

discusses

discusses

Dean talks
from a folded sheet of paper:

“It all started harmlessly enough,
at the age of four or five, I suppose.
The age when there’s nothing sinister
about a total stranger
dropping artificial vegetables
into your out-stretched pillow-case
while you coyly hide your identity.

“It’s ‘All Hallows Eve’
...and YES, I’m talking about Candy Corn.
Just talking about it makes me weak.

“It’s nobody’s fault.

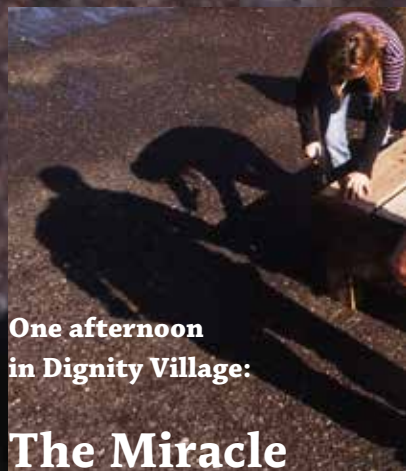
Parents didn’t know the danger
of the little triangles,
cleverly colored yellow, orange and white.
So real.
But better!

“In moderation
I was able to walk away.
Then I found myself
shamelessly trading
my best “fun size” candy bars –
Just to get a taste of the corn, Man.

“Friends, over the years. they knew!
They smelled the corn on my breath!
But you just can’t talk sense
to a user of the cob.”

“My name is Dean.
...and I eat Candy Corn.
“...it’s gonna be okay.”





**One afternoon
in Dignity Village:**

The Miracle of Rusty Nails

Wordless thoughts
shuffle across wet asphalt,
body vacant, bent, defeated.
Life lost her.

With reason, or no reason,
what does it matter?
Bottom is bottom.

A stack of recycle lumber
infested with rusty nails —
“more metal than wood,” Jay grumbled;
slipping the claw of his hammer under a nail
...he gave her hand to the hammer.



All afternoon she pulled and twisted,
“making real lumber
for making real houses...”

“...real lumber,
real houses...”

Now evening comes
...with a smile.

Rusty nails
in 2 × 4s and 2 × 6s
gifting the pleasures
of self-esteem.

...I call it “The Miracle of Rusty Nails.”



Poverty and poetry
so much history together,
step and stumble,
scholarship with homelessness
though all is not 4.0 — a cement mattress,
a dumpster breakfast and pee in a bucket.

Rocky's Poverty-Poetry Moment

Sometimes the homeless...Listen-up you 4.0s

Poverty-poetry words share life,
examine understandings
and summarize the essence.

Rocky wrestled community college algebra to the mat:
the sums of cubics and linears, binomials, quadratics.
...to the mat with 'knowns and unknowns,
unknown knowns and known unknowns,'
"Was that Cheney or Rumsfeld?
Whichever, war crimes were committed,
whole families were killed."

Pride quickens excitement:
"I got 'A', 4.0 and when the instructor asked,
'What did we learn in his class?'
Most wrote about equations/solutions. I wrote,

"Heart and desire overcome age and homelessness."

“It’s not harmless
to not reason.”

Early foggy morning
Ed G volunteers

A Solo Conversation

“People just cripple their way through life,
...over inflate self-importance,
feel the need
to hide from themselves,
fail to adapt
and hate us in the poor community
because we can adapt.

“Wear out your shoes
and then comes the truth.

“A rather long time ago
Darwin said, ‘adapt or die.’

“The more you have the more you want
and you stay unhappy because
there’s always more to want.
Hobble hobble...hobble hobble.

“Cripple, cripple
go around in a circle
baby-thrower.

“People have their problems
religion integrates them into society.

“Help is randomized.

“Party too hard
Lose the job
Drain the wallet
Panic
Booze and drug crutches
spiral down into homelessness.

“Belief systems
come and go:
in good times — work,
in bad times, ‘No, not you.’

“Belief systems’
verbal weapons
tear into people
crippling their way through life’s
eventual crash and burns.

“Life does not inevitably bite you in the ass.”





and How and Where
and Who and Why
and What and When?



“Tomorrow?”



“If tomorrow is...”

Martice and the Recycle

Not trash.

No waste.

No official, ecological authorized **'Away.'**

...Just the inconvenience
of convenient
redemption:

cans

and

bottles

for

CASH.



“I just want to be me.”

Dean, in hand-written words:

“I lost all.

All.

“I experienced the bottom.

My everyday picture
was homeless, questionable future.

“I had to become flat out honest with myself
...and with others.

I had to earn forgiveness for myself
...and others.

I had to learn the simplicity of life
...to discover, respect and enjoy the kid in me,
...to find beauty in every form,
...to find a passion and earn life.



“The honesty became liberating.
Knowing the consequences came to me,
I had the freedom
to be as irresponsible as I wanted.
I could be anybody I wanted to be.
I could use my middle name.
I could invent a name.
I could be anonymous.

“I was not content with myself.
I wanted to like me for what I was,
with all my faults and perceived faults
and the mistakes that are part of growing up.

“I found out I just wanted to be me.
I want to use my own name
but I’m tired —
Tired of maintaining my morals and manners
with those without.
It’s taxing me.

“When did caring become a liability?

“I’m tired —
Tired of giving the benefit of the doubt,
then doubting the benefit.

“When did a loving heart become a disability?”

“I see me becoming my self.”



“Success?”

“Money doesn’t always measure success.
Insignificant things can sometimes have wonderful value.
Who can’t comprehend free-cycle or a gift of fresh organic produce?.
In today’s world of ‘copy,’ unique is...well, unique.

**“Success is being able
to make spontaneous,
anonymous gifts.”**



American Street Philosophers



KEEP ON,
KEEPING ON...

Steve Wilson and Friends



“A lot of poverty?
A lot of struggle?
A lot of attitude?

“...more pregnancies,
...more children.
Welfare.

What’s the underlying social message?

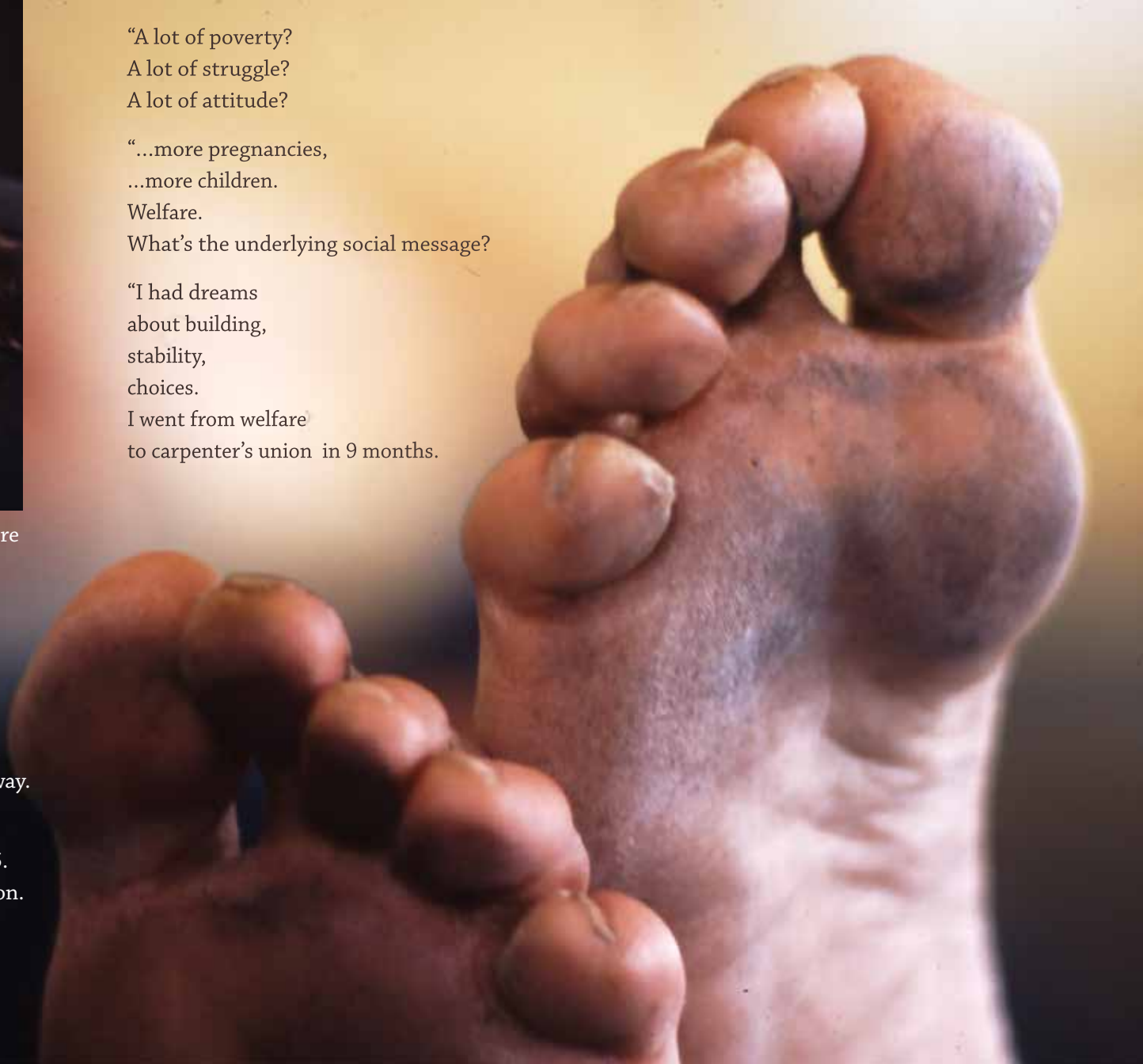
“I had dreams
about building,
stability,
choices.
I went from welfare
to carpenter’s union in 9 months.

Michelle shares then and there
here and now.

“I saw a lot.”

“I ran away from home
when I was 13
to a string of Catholic homes,
each a short stay, then run away.
Always run away.

“A group home when I was 15.
Promiscuous...Pregnant...a son.
Abusive step-parents.
I don’t know how to put it.





“Just being:
Working in construction and building
while having an intimate relationship with nature
contributes to my turmoil.
I feel the turmoil and carry the conflict: trees/lumber...

“...lumber/trees.
On deforested hills
a trickle becomes a stream becomes a gully
and trees alongside the road are left
to hide the horrific truth!

**“Greed with a bull shit sweetener!
Is that how to sustain a civilization?”**

**Saturday, February 18, 2012 at 2 PM
in The Commons, Dignity Village.**

Remembrance of Steve O's Life

"Steve O"

(Stephen L. Jarvis)

Born: 28 Nov. 1956

Portland, Oregon

Died: 3 Feb. 2012

**Dignity Village,
Portland, Oregon**





...drawings in pads,
words in books
and words on wood,
Notes of thoughts
on rocks and beads,
creative whatevers
...and a laptop.

September 2014
Dave S father's garage
2nd floor workshop.
Dave's new living/
working space
overflowing with
creative whatevers,
organizational attempts...





**“Laura’s
STREET BOOKS
bicycle library
home base**



“3rd person
singular present of BE.”
(Oxford American Dictionary)

...And the meaning of *is*:
“what’s what and where’s it at,
here and now.”
(*Roget’s International Thesaurus*)

Tonya’s tutorial for
itinerant literary learning:

This Book Thesaurus

“In the dumpster
I found a paperback called Thesaurus.
It had all these cool words:
nouns, adverbs, adjectives and verbs —
but no story.

“Cool words but no story.

“I did a story with my words,
then changed my little words to big Thesaurus words.
It makes a story for Thesaurus.

“My story is ‘WTF?’”

don't be afraid of the 'F' word



What The Fuck?

Existing alongside contrasting cognition of the com-manage...

Discretionary adaptions

that are contingent to environmental congruity

need to be contemplatively construed

to try and insinuate consequential amity

or conviction to conciliate conjuncture.

Might! Fatefully effectuate requital or

conceive fortuitous ambiguity.

Incensement led by addlepatented conventions

will perpetually be chance.

If we counter change this auspicious conundrum

with infallible tutelage

then will unascertained mentality enhance?

Might! It is then imperative to humanity's contention

for enraptured pertinent existence.

We must ascend to be ascertainable.

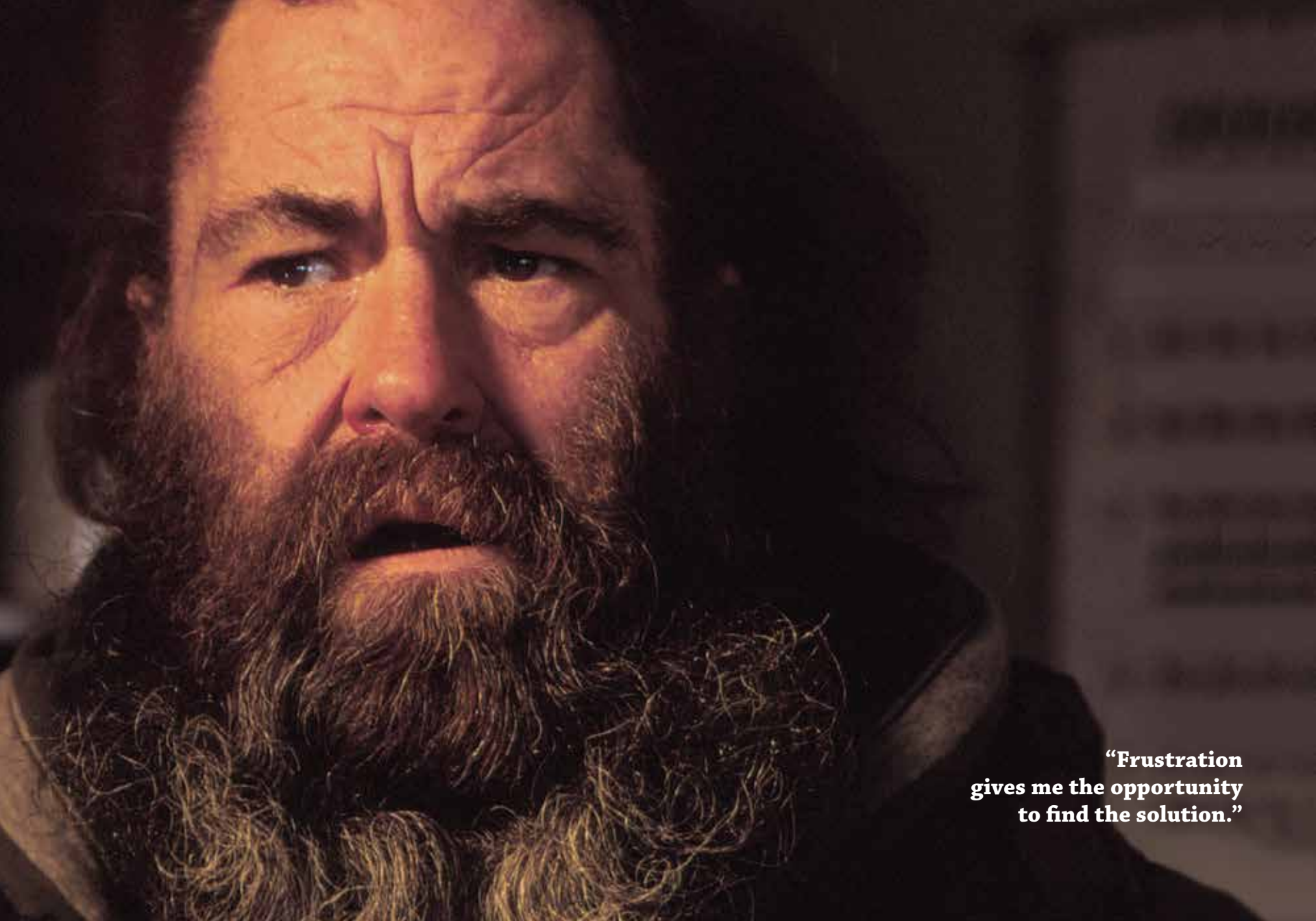
...observance to convivial edification.

We must discombobulate the ascendancy of 'precedent.'





**"I don't talk,
unless I say something."**



**“Frustration
gives me the opportunity
to find the solution.”**



“Letting go’ of the past — kinda frees my future.”



“Clarity decides.”



Living the Agreement – or Not

Gather together,
encouraging people
to speak for themselves.
Honest and open.

Listen with respect, honest and open,
follow through with kindness, caring, fidelity.

Share the stories.
Walk the talk.

Discuss the temptations.

Discover what I can do with myself.

Collected from diversity
talents join together a random ‘family’
creating community
— mostly.

Upholding bylaws,
enforcing rules,
often contentious,
but Village prevails
over the errant individual
— mostly.

**“What good do we do
throwing anybody
back on the street?”**

How accurate is our listening?
...our core sense of humanity?
How successful our self-governance
in selecting members?

“Brains are all different...

how they work with their histories.

When our gate opens and closes **ideas come and go.**

When you help things happen, comes kindness.

Being kind brings happiness.

Happiness brings unity...

Equality is the work of freedom.”





“Diversity is the truth of community.”



Dignity Village



Dignity Villagers

Rocky, Rick, Ruthie, Melissa and Martice,
Tonya, Tom, Laura, Ben, Ptery and extremely Dave,
...quite a lot of stuff to ponder and meditate upon.

To wrap, we need focus:

First, what wonderful faces! Definitely up close to the human condition without gloss, glamour, ornamentation, or pretense. What we look like when we're really up against it. Not just a sudden setback, but in a big way and for the long haul...through our own fault or through the workings of a system that can be incredibly unfair, uncaring, even cruel. And, often, how tough and resilient we are in coping even at the bleakest level.

Second, how quite a number of these folks recognize the extent their own flaws have helped to bring about our own grim condition.

Third, comprehensive, damning, and accurate indictment of inequality, inequity and our society's 'values' informs and educates American Street Philosophers.

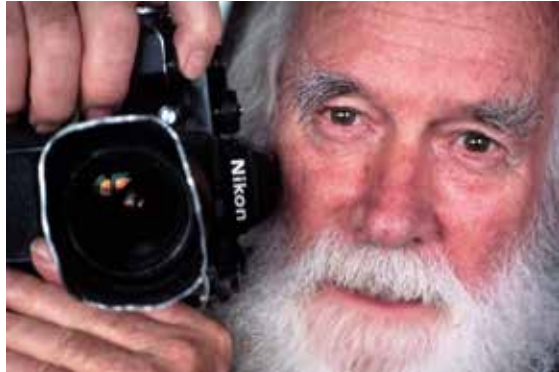
**“Why is our society plagued by wishful thinking,
by short-sightedness and by insatiable greed?”**

“Wear out your shoes:
responsibility, equality, education,
caring, sharing, courage;

then comes:
compassion, humanity,
kindness, understanding
and creative attitude communities.”

AMERICAN STREET PHILOSOPHERS





Steve Wilson
Portland, Oregon 2007

IN APPRECIATION

We hopped a boxcar on the southbound freight...going miles, doing curiosity. More adventure than transportation. Back home, a week later, I overheard, “They’re not bums and hobos they’re gentlemen-of-the-road.” He was seven. Now he’s a g’v’ment man with title, lab and a couple university degrees—curious, thoughtful and caring.

Thanks to street philosophers, ‘upper-class homeless’, Dignity Villagers welcoming tomorrow’s outsourced, downsized, foreclosed, evicted newbies. For welcoming first nighters thankful for dumpster left-overs, for smiles gifted with that first spontaneous *help-money*. Appreciation and thanks for hanging on and for sharing your little and not much.

...the “just hanging on” **standing in food lines,
working the dumpsters,
wives peeing behind bushes,
kids sleeping under bridges.**

the “little and not much” **energized to build their own villages
in our own cities
with their own hands.**



Sunrise at Dignity Village

**“...do not feel obligated to believe
that the same God who has endowed us
with sense, reason, and intellect
has intended us to forgo their use.”**

—Galileo Gallilei



**If *Nature* is God's conversation —
what is your reply?**



**"We is why;
We is how."**

**"It's not harmless
to not reason."**

*"It's not how tough the times are,
It's how you meet the challenge."*

**"We are a group of people
forced to learn 'community!'"**

**"We must discombobulate
The ascendancy of precedent."**

*"Life does not inevitably
bite you in the ass."*

**"The more you have
the more you want
and you stay unhappy
because there's always more to
want."**

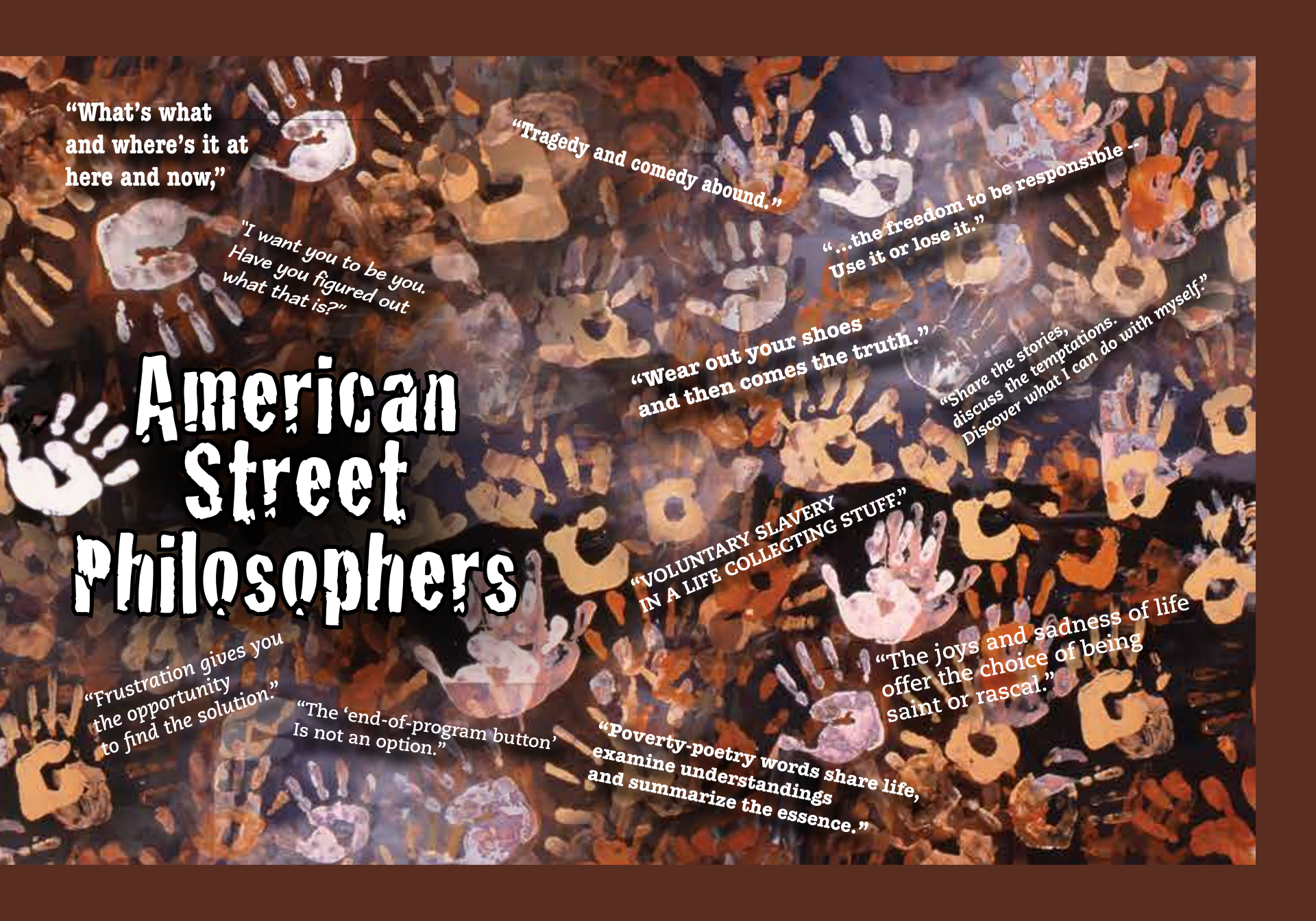
**NOW IS HERE
TOMORROW IS MAYBE**

**"The evolution of friendship
is greater, more important
than anythings I could own or collect."**

**"Thoughts need weeding
Like plants in a garden."**

**"...to be wild and still be calm
that's liberation."**

**"...to become light
and be so connected
you are everything,
that's paradise."**



"What's what
and where's it at
here and now,"

"I want you to be you.
Have you figured out
what that is?"

American Street Philosophers

"Frustration gives you
the opportunity
to find the solution."

"The 'end-of-program button'
Is not an option."

"Tragedy and comedy abound."

"...the freedom to be responsible --
Use it or lose it."

"Wear out your shoes
and then comes the truth."

"Share the stories,
discuss the temptations.
Discover what I can do with myself."

"VOLUNTARY SLAVERY
IN A LIFE COLLECTING STUFF"

"The joys and sadness of life
offer the choice of being
saint or rascal."

"Poverty-poetry words share life,
examine understandings
and summarize the essence."



SMILE,
trust
kindness...