

Inside this issue:

A Prayer for Meegan	2
Stories from the Warehouse	4
Gordon Caton	6
A Warning to Those Fighting Poverty	7

DECAMPMENT

By Daniel Jackson

May 1st marked the end of legal daytime camping in Victoria's parks for people experiencing homelessness. The City of Victoria had temporarily allowed 24/7 camping in an effort to reduce the risk of COVID-19 transmission created by forcing people to pack up and move around every morning. This aligned with the guidance of the BC Public Health Officer and many other public health agencies which have recognized that continuously displacing individuals increases the risk of COVID-19 transmission, in addition to other negative health effects.

City Council voted to return to the previous regime on May 1st, which allows people experiencing homelessness to camp in certain areas of most parks only between 8PM and 7AM.

The City announced that it would not immediately enforce this provision against those who had received no offer of indoor shelter. This appears to apply only to individuals who were already sheltering outdoors when this plan was announced. We have contact with individuals who have recently lost their housing who are facing full enforcement. Likewise, those who do not accept a shelter offer, regardless of the reason, are required to pack up every morning. Bylaw Services has also significantly increased ticketing against those who do not immediately comply.

This has not been an easy process. Many individuals have used the brief reprieve from daytime enforcement to create small communities and some basic level of survival amenities – neighbours, tools, and covered areas to shelter from the elements. Compacting this all into a backpack is often impossible, so individuals are forced to give up their possessions, and often separate from their friends and supports.

The next challenge will be holding the provincial government

(See Decampment page 3)

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A PRAYER FOR MEEGAN

By Ruth Spooner

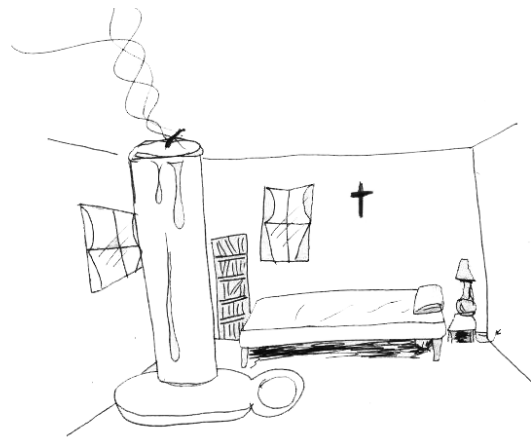
What makes a house a home? Let's make a list of probable guesses that all sum up to the privilege of liberal property owners: Privacy, a lock on the front door. Heat and hot water, fresh air and natural light. A garden. Blankets, curtains and dishes. Which is your favourite room in the house? Lots of people love the kitchen; cooking for family and eating together at the dining room table, sharing food, warmth and high spirits. I like my study the best.

What makes this space my home is not the property itself but the fact that I am able to practice my art without being judged. I can be myself at home. I feel safe here. I reserve a special corner in my home for spiritual re-arming. No one prohibits me from lighting a candle during my prayers. I can burn a little incense of cedar and rose. I have a few sacred objects: a book of poems, some small stones, two feathers. In my own home, I can practice whatever moves me in my own way.

It's high time the housed demand that the rights and freedoms we enjoy be protected for everyone. Housing advocates report that Single Room Occupancies remind them of jail cells and the homeless say that they are being warehoused, their property lost or destroyed. The promises of the government fall through yet again. Members of the public can and should intervene when the demand is for a home and not for an institutional sentence without end. Housing providers are not above the law just because they have a helping mandate. They answer to the public for permission, both spiritual and material. This is a call for true homes—a place to refresh the soul. True homes are made of love, tolerance and respect, not surveillance cameras and iron gates.

Even the sparrow finds a home
and the swallow a nest for herself
where she may lay her young
at your altars, O Lord of Hosts,
my King and my God.

-Psalm 84:3



SOCIAL WORK STUDENT

I am very excited to begin my first summer practicum at TAPS, as part of my Bachelor of Social Work at UVic. My past work has largely been in labour organization and student advocacy, with some work in mental health. This is my first experience with TAPS, and for my practicum I will be working in the Volunteer Disability Advocacy Project. I look forward to deepening my understanding of disability advocacy and provincial social assistance programs, as well as learning more about the anti-poverty work that TAPS does. I am grateful to TAPS for providing me with this placement! ~Izzy Adachi

(Cont'd from Decampment, page 1)

accountable for its promise that those who were moved to the arena or other temporary shelter facilities will not be evicted back into homelessness, and will instead be offered real housing in due course. BC Housing is constructing a significant amount of housing in our region, but it is not clear what will happen to the people in the arena when it closes again in June. Our understanding is that, even with all of the new facilities at full capacity, there were still more individuals without homes than there were shelter spaces, because the need for shelter was assessed in February 2021. We are concerned that, with the loss of the arena beds, individuals who were promised a “pathway to housing” will be returned to the street, without the communities and belongings that they were forced to give up in exchange for this pathway.

We are also very concerned about a new city council motion which proposes to completely ban camping in Beacon Hill Park, specifically, for several years. People choose to camp in Beacon Hill because it provides significantly more privacy and safety than other parks, while still being close to necessary services. With camping already banned in all “environmentally sensitive areas,” this proposed ban appears to us to be a simple attempt to force people further into the shadows, and therefore further from the safety of community members and service providers. While COVID-19 might finally be waning, we remain in the grip of an extremely deadly drug poisoning crisis. Forcibly clearing Beacon Hill makes it easier for citizens and Council to turn away from those most at risk. ■



Taproot artists: Joan Stiebel & Robert Inglis

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STORIES FROM THE WAREHOUSE

By Bruce Livingstone

Diversifying responsibility now: Thetis Lake, View Royal, Central Saanich, Vic West, Tiny Homes in North Park and temporarily (again) the Arena. Sheltering the unhoused is not all falling to Burnside-Gorge anymore, just as they've depleted their stock of abandoned motels. CBC says "only 8 tents left in Beacon Hill Park." I talked to two recently sheltered for insight into what the decampment and new housing means for them. Mayor and some on Council are musing on a motion to put Beacon Hill Park on the growing restricted from sheltering list, currently at 23, another asterisk rolling back the hard-fought and court-ordered [Adams (2009)] homeless right to shelter in Victoria, They tighten the screws by overturning Charter rights one park at a time.

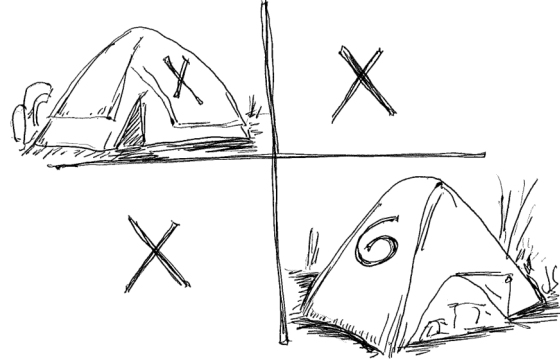
"M" became homeless when evicted from a cockroach-ridden CRD rental in January. After notice, she didn't pay the last month's rent and doesn't bring a "good tenant" reference to the shelter. After a short stay at Sandy Merriman she moved from one park to Women's Transition House to another park to Arena to a third park, settling in Beacon Hill, where she felt safer than she had since becoming homeless. Feeling lured by promises of future housing, fearful of missing out, she signed the 2-page contract for whatever 225 Russell would be when finished, foregoing privacy, safety and Residential Tenancy Act rights. She often has to flee the shelter for hours at a time when the overpowering authority of bleach excoriates her damaged lungs, weak after surgery. Residents have asked for space to hold house meetings. Congregate settings were the very words Dr. Henry used in her Health Orders to describe what we all have to shun to flatten the curve. She moved into Russell under conditions to be avoided like the plague, third wave still rising, suitable only for those who need to be warehoused for political reasons until the pandemic is over. For M it is home, for now. The completion date remains unknown.

WRITE FOR TAPROOT

Taproot welcomes articles, stories, and poetry from readers. Share your opinions, experiences, outrage, ideas and creativity. You can submit your writing by e-mail to volunteers@tapsbc.ca, or by mail to 828 View Street, Victoria, V8W 1K2. Or drop your submission off in person at our office. If possible, include a phone number, e-mail address, or street address where we can reach you.

"S" sits like Buddha in a tiny home at the Park's edge at Thetis Lake in View Royal. Blasting desecrates the old parkside campground in favour of arising subdivision as he meditates within. Who needs birdsong when you have COVID brain fog and the constructive busyness of a city sprawling to grok? March 2020 BC parks and rest areas were closed as emergency health measures. "Not homeless, just landless," he drove his van down from preferred North Island forest to Courtenay in 15 minute sprints, only as his energy allowed, seeking refuge and medical assistance to survive severe COVID.

At Topaz for the May 2020 decampment, its residents' tents laid out in a Cartesian grid, he watched BC Housing contractors in hazmat suits spray-paint a circle around each tent. Each camper was also given a painted word, "In" or "Out". He was a loser in this game of Tic-Tac-Toe, tagged "Out", off the list. Back in his van, struggling with long-haul COVID, he meandered to Beacon Hill Park where he spent the winter partially regaining health. By the time workers were spray-painting tents with "X"s for the May 2021 decampment he had by persistence procured mixed-income housing. It's clean and new, someone else's dream, but survivable, a place to continue recovery. His new home is a waiting room.



One common denominator for M and S was the open, generous, vulnerable, sharing community they found at Meegan/Beacon Hill Park. Like-treated more than like-minded, they came together in spirit for protection from stigma, isolation, dangers and entitlement. Paradise is lost and found daily. Warehoused for now, "Zen what?" ■

SUMMER LAW STUDENT

Hello Taproot readers! I am a Punjabi woman who grew up on Treaty 7 lands, on the traditional territory of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Tsuut'ina and Îyâxe Nakoda Nations, in Calgary, Alberta. I'm a dancer, ocean swimmer and forest meditator. I am also a student in the Joint Indigenous Legal Orders/Common Law (JD/JID) program at the University of Victoria and am joining the TAPS team this summer as a legal advocate. My dedication to decolonization, human rights and disability justice work brought me to TAPS and I'm looking forward to serving people living on lək'wəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ territory over the next few months! ~Navjot Jassar (she/her)

BECOME A TAPS MEMBER!

Want to support TAPS? Become a member! You will get the Taproot mailed or e-mailed to you.

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GORDON CATON

We are all very sad at the passing of long-time TAPS volunteer Gordon Caton. Gord, who volunteered with TAPS from the early 1990s until this year, was the person who kept our cupboards stocked with coffee, our kitchen area clean and our plants alive. He came to all our big TAPS events like the summer barbecue, the holiday dinner, our fundraising events and our AGM, and he always came early so he could help out. Anyone who has attended any of these events in the past 25 years will have met Gord. Gord was a gentle soul who genuinely wanted to help others. All TAPS' staff and volunteers remember Gord with great fondness. We will miss him. Our sincere condolences to his family.

All of us at TAPS

For you Gord, my long-time volunteer friend at TAPS,

I am struggling for words to express the sadness I feel that you have left this world for hopefully somewhere better! We became friends right from the start. We both love TAPS and I know how good you felt to help them in their weekly dishwashing. TAPS on Fort Street never had a kitchen, which made for interesting "by the water cooler" conversations.

Gord, you touched my heart. I looked forward to seeing you, or just hearing your voice when you called. The last time I saw you was when I came back to TAPS following the COVID office closure. I greeted you with a smile, but stupid COVID rules meant we had to stay at a distance.

The day we had the conversation about you needing a music stand was the day I made you beam. I told you I had a music stand and that it's all yours. Your face lit up as never before. I enjoyed listening to your stories of how you play music and how it is so much easier with a stand. I miss you already, and I do not know how I will get over this loss, as you are so part of TAPS.

Cheers to TAPS for making such a welcoming place for people like Gord and myself. Thank you, with tears of love and joy. RIP my friend, it was a pleasure to share some space.

Hilary Marks

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With your support, individuals and families living in poverty in our region will have access to critical legal advocacy and educational services. TAPS' services are unique in their design and delivery, and offer knowledge, empowerment and, in many cases, a new sense of hope.

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Monthly donors receive the following benefits:

- Updates on TAPS programs
- Annual tax receipt for all your donations during the year
- Taproot delivered to your e-mail.

See the monthly donor form on page 8 of this newsletter.

A WARNING TO THOSE FIGHTING POVERTY

By Rough Blue

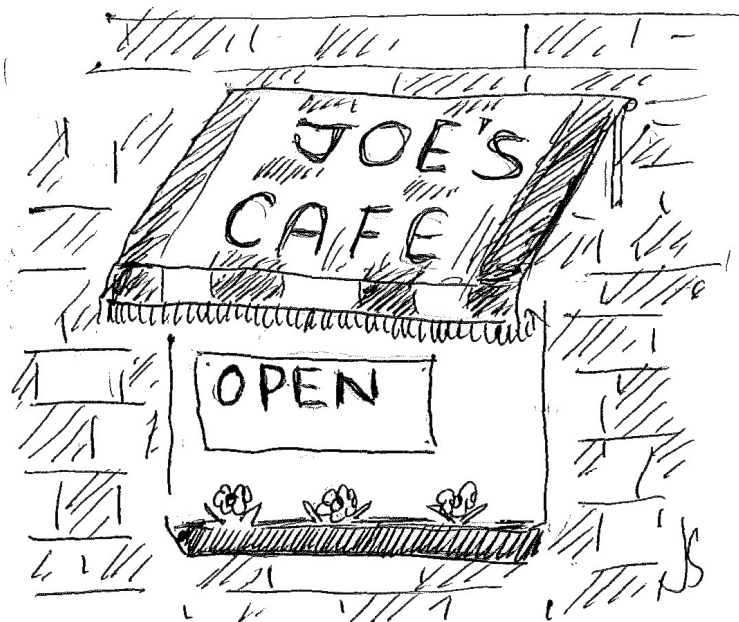
At the dusk of the pandemic, businesses, money lenders, and creditors will look to recover their losses after this period of economic low. At the dawn of the economic upswing, they'll bet on the population making more and putting more into circulation. And that should be the case in general. In general, but not in every case. And those who don't fall into the "general" category—specifically, those fighting poverty—are going to find the economic reopening a bitter struggle of a new kind. A bad pandemic after-effect.

That means, in fact, that these businesses and institutions will be coming after your money, whether or not you have more to give. Coming after your dough with a renewed vigor. I imagine evictions will increase.

Unfortunately, I think the government can be added to the list. Certainly, they are going to try to recover their losses and restock their coffers after the COVID stimulus payments. I imagine they feel they've just got to. Maybe we'll get a new GST. A new one to replace the temporary one. GST is still just temporary, right? (But, I'm off on a tangent—and joking. Like the temporary GST is a joke.)

The Canadian government is running a country and it must know it pays to look like it has a heart but is costly to keep one. And even though the government is made up of kind-hearted Canadians, I think that more of us are going to have a hard time getting what was promised, or what we counted on or were enticed with. And all this at a time when businesses are going to increase their efforts to take more.

I'm just saying that the end of the pandemic is going to bring a change, and it's not going to be butterflies and rainbows for all. Be wary. It may seem a little heartless when the slogan goes from "Be kind. Be calm. Be safe." back to "Gimme your \$\$\$!" ■



TAX SERVICE

TAPS continues to help people file their income tax returns. This year, due to COVID restrictions, we are offering the service by drop off only. If you need your taxes done, just swing by our office at 828 View Street and pick up a tax package.

ABOUT TAPS

TAPS was established and registered as a society in 1989. We provide legal information and representation on issues relating to income assistance, provincial and federal disability benefits, residential tenancy, and employment standards to people in the Greater Victoria area. We also provide public legal education in these areas and on broader poverty issues.

You can reach us between 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM, Monday to Friday, by phone at 250-361-3521 or in person at 828 View Street. The office is closed daily for lunch between noon and 1:00 pm.

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