

Home is where the CART is!

Recently Colleen and I made our first ever trip, to Los Angeles where our oldest son and daughter-in-law live. We flew out of the frigid cold into 65 plus degree weather for a week long stay. Some time I will let you in on our flight experience, surrounded on all sides by 13 members of one family, with half of them under the age of three. Lets just say it was not the picture perfect flight of relaxation I had envisioned. I am sure there where dogs all along the way from Minneapolis to L.A. whose ears where perking up from the high pitch squeals of small children as they rebelled from the discomforts of a pressurized airplane environment.

This short article is not about our experiences of being in a beautiful landscape, surrounded by mountains, nor about our experience of highway traffic in an area where close to 10 million people seem to want to go to the same place at one time. I will not visit with you about the balloon that was deflated when I arrived in HOLLYWOOD only to find out that it is just another area, with lots of people and lots of buildings and what you see on TV goes on mostly behind big doors, in big Quonset type buildings, behind security gates not open to most folks.

I also won't address the realization that I came to that first of all no matter where you go, there you are; and people are people no matter what part of the continent they live on.

What I do want to touch on is something that haunted me while I drove and walked around the area, be it Hollywood or Burbank or Van Nuys or Santa Monica or Sherman Oaks. Everywhere we went, and I can honestly say everywhere, we encountered poorly dressed and very dirty looking individuals who where homeless and living out of the shopping cart they where pushing around. Carts full of blanket rolls, plastic sheeting, collected plastic bottles and other recyclables, and other miscellaneous odds and ends (trash to us).

We traveled to the beach at Santa Monica and walked along the sand as the Pacific Ocean hurled its' salty waves against our legs, bared by rolling our pant legs up around our knees. All along the sparsely populated beach (65 degrees is deathly cold to Californians!) I could see a scattering of individuals sleeping in the sand, wrapped with the scraps of plastic they had salvaged from some dumpster, with their life possessions placed in a pile close to them or stacked tightly in the shopping cart home parked beside them.

As we walked along the pier, where numerous merchandise carts are lined up to sell their trinkets, I watched as a man, probably my age, a child of God the same as me, went from metal garbage container to metal garbage container, searching through bags of trash until he finally found his treasure of the morning, a discarded McDonalds bag with scrapes of lettuce still inside. He quickly enjoyed his lunch and continued on his hunt for more discarded treasures.

I enquired to my son as to the number of homeless that we saw, and he looked at me with sad eyes and quietly said, "They are everywhere, what can we do? After a while you begin not to notice them." From here we went out for supper and stuffed ourselves to a feast of Sushi, at a cost of over \$25 a plate. I too, tried not to see the homeless along the way. What is wrong with this picture?

I am now back in good ole North Dakota, the frozen part of Heaven. I sleep in a warm bed inside a spacious home that provides a peaceful environment. I dine on fine meals prepared by a loving wife who REALLY KNOWS HOW TO COOK! I grow fat on stuff that Atkins would never dare eat, and complain about eating too much. And I am HAUNTED by the memory of the faces of the individuals that are burnt into my heart and soul. The individuals, who for whatever reason, and I am sure there are MANY different life situations that have had a cause and affect on these brothers and sisters of mine, live out in the streets, collecting trash and food from dumpsters, sleep in alleyways, parking lots, and roadsides and call their shopping cart home.

We as a society have to somehow resist the tendency to harden our hearts and become callous. To no longer SEE the plight of others. To no longer reach out to others, simply because there are too many. Somehow we must see Christ in each other and do whatever we can to let them know we care, one at a time if need be.

I don't have the answer, do you?

+peace – tom & colleen (aka -tnc)

(written in 2004)