

# R-E-S-P-E-C-T

06/22/2011

By dborys

No links today, or pictures, or plugs for my upcoming book *Painted Black* (okay, just that one). Today I just want to share a few thoughts on the homeless as inspired by a conversation I had yesterday.

It started when someone expressed being tired of all the homeless people. Some guy had decided an empty lot next door was a great place to get drunk off his ass and shout abuse at people day after day. I'd get pretty tired of that myself. What a pain.

But it's not the guy being homeless that is a problem. What I'd get tired of is a drunk guy who's being a loud asshole. If he sat in the lot every day reading a book and waving at everyone who walked by, he would still be homeless but would I be complaining about him? Probably not. If my neighbor with a mortgage and a good job sat on his front porch every night getting drunk off his ass and shouting abuse at people who walk by, would I be bitching about him? Damn right I would.

I'm not the kind of person who likes to stand on a soap box. Sure I've volunteered with several organizations that help the homeless. But I don't go around protesting public policies that make life difficult for them, or petitioning strangers to approve more transitional housing. The truth is I'm not very good at being an advocate for the homeless. I feel awkward even debating the subject with friends and family.

I agree that homeless people can be annoying and scary. That guy who stands at the intersection with a sign asking for money. The woman who sits on the bus ranting and raving to invisible beings. But the guy at the intersection is annoying because he's at an intersection asking for something I may not want to give. The woman on the bus is scary because she's obviously off her meds and her behavior unpredictable.

The truth is non-homeless people can be annoying and scary too. I've seen people from The Lion's Club stand at an intersection soliciting donations for their organization. I personally am just as annoyed by someone asking me to sign a petition and thrusting a clipboard in my face when I walk out of a supermarket. My ex-husband was a great provider who brought home a good paycheck and bought me lots of things any woman would love to have. But he was scary as hell every time he got drunk and cornered me in the hallway with his threats and his abuse.

Alcoholism and schizophrenia and other mental illnesses afflict everyone. The only difference is that it's often more difficult to regulate your medicine and get consistent treatment if you don't have a place to live or a loved one who cares enough to help keep you on track.

Homeless people with problems are just more visible than the non-homeless ones. Most substance abusers terrorize people behind the privacy of their own front door. They're usually showered and well dressed and dosed with pain killers washed down with a beer when they leave for work the next morning.

When you work with the homeless on a closer level, you find that most of them aren't annoying or scary. That makes it easier for me to say "Sorry, not today," to the kid with a cup and a cardboard sign. It's the same thing I say to the guy with a clipboard outside Target. And if I smile when I say it, chances are both the homeless kid and the guy who wants to stop the tunnel project are both going to simply turn to the next person passing by.

Is there a chance the homeless drunk might hurt me? Yes, there is. Is there a chance my drunk neighbor might hurt me? Yes, there is. Because they are people, people. People can be dysfunctional—ALL people.

I've been raised to believe that most people are good. That if you treat them with respect, they'll treat you with respect. Not everyone, not always—because people are flawed and some people, quite frankly, are assholes.

I guarantee you, if you treat the homeless with respect, they'll treat you with respect. Not everyone, not always—because they are *people*, just like everyone else. Just like you.

## What the Hell?

Chicago, freeze dried bodies, kids sleeping on the streets. That's what this blog is about. What's what my novel is about. Dark urban graffiti, hard rock music and doing what you gotta do to survive. Small glimpses of the novel mix with snapshots from real life. You tell me which posts are real and which are fiction. If you can.

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### About dborys



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*Robyn*

June 22nd, 2011 at 09:55 | [edit](#)

Very thought provoking and you are spot on when you talk about the behavior being the problem and not the person’s residential status. Good bloggin’!

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