

'12 WAYS TO OVERCOME PERSONAL HOMELESSNESS'

By Julian Phillips

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Are you homeless? Do you know someone who is homeless? You're not alone if you are. Public estimates of homelessness in America today place the number of those without a place to live at around 750,000, but that figure could be quite a lot higher. As anyone who visits any of America's great cities today knows, the streets and freeway underpasses, the alleys and parks, are often the only place some people can find to lay their heads to rest at night. And it's much more than just a place to sleep the homeless need. As someone who has been homeless myself, I have personally experienced the deprivation, the struggle for simple things like a toilet or edible food, the alienation and sense of displacement, the extreme difficulty of arranging employment, and the broken spirit and hurt that just goes with the territory. Or lack of territory. You want to break the cycle, but you don't know how. You want to make a change for the better, but all the good things in life seem far out of reach. You want a place to live, a warm bed, a bathroom, a phone, just like everyone else. But once you turn that corner and find yourself living on the streets, the way back is dark and gloomy and calls for hard work and a positive attitude. Can it be done? Can you do it? For yourself if you are homeless, or for someone you have met or who you know in this awful situation, here is a treatment of the subject with 12 key points and strategies that can be used now to begin the effort to find yourself a sunnier day. My qualifications include years as a journalist and newspaper editor in California, a college education, work as a volunteer with various organizations for the homeless, and my own first-hand experience as a homeless person, now years behind me. My hope is that this presentation will be of some real and practical use, to alleviate suffering, and put a smile back on the faces some of the least in our society.

Our first part is called, '**Strengthen yourself emotionally and make up your mind to change your circumstances**'. Easier said than done. Because your situation as a homeless person may be the result of myriad negative circumstances, the place to start your climb towards a home is with your attitude and your consciousness. Short of winning the lottery, the person who will solve your problem can only be yourself. No one is going to appear on a white horse to save you, despite what you may have been told, and that includes me. If you are going to overcome this situation, it will be you who does it, it will be you who climbs the ladder, rung-by-rung, it will be you who gets a job and keeps it, and it will be you who moves into an apartment or room of your own some day. There will be help, and always remember, society in general WANTS you to have a home. But like anything else, we save ourselves in this life, if only because we are not

saved until the person who needs to be rescued is satisfied that this is what has taken place. If this sounds like a pep-talk, that's pretty much all it is, but consider why you can succeed by finding the inner strength you need and turning a corner in that strange place called your 'mind', such that you have made a clear choice NOT to be without a home if at all possible.

For one thing, if you are without a home, you are probably weak in your self-esteem, maybe depressed, injured or disabled, basically at a low-point. You may be bitter, you may have been abused, you may have made poor choices. In addition, your present circumstance may seem hopeless. Your task may seem impossible. Your circumstances may seem like a nightmare. You may be without friends or family, without a car, without any money, even without decent clothing. All of this conspires in a real way to beat you down, inside. And the change you need and want starts on the inside, because once again, only you can end your homelessness because it is yourself who is homeless.

So the key point of our first lesson is to find that strength. You may need rest or refreshment, or a chance to recover from some cruel happenstance. Resting is as easy as finding a quiet place, getting away from distractions and noise, and yes, sleeping. Sleep can heal, but sloth, or sleeping all day to escape reality, is the same as defeat. Your physical health will be bolstered by avoiding alcohol and drugs, and being moderate in things that are obviously bad for you, such as cigarettes. If you are ill or disabled, however you cope with your condition is the same way you will overcome it. Here you are in life faced with a difficult challenge; ask yourself—should I surrender to it, give up, live on the streets for the rest of my life and be miserable with none of the things I want and need and deserve? Or am I willing to fight? Not a physical fight with a physical enemy who is attacking you, but a fight like Ernest Hemmingway's famous story, 'The Old Man and the Sea'. The sea is life, and here you are floating around like a piece of drift-wood. But you are much, much more than that, and you may have power within you, that spark, the life-force, that you were meant to find by virtue of even this very same challenge.

Besides which, everyone, even you, wants a home. You want a nice bed, you want a table and chair, you want a bathroom, you want a telephone, and other nice things. Even if you have convinced yourself otherwise, you were meant to live in a house, you want it, you want nice things and all that goes with it. That desire is the power that will motivate you. It can be turned to bitter regret and disappointment because you cannot have what you want, or it can be turned into the engine that drives the car that will take you home. And home is where you want to be.

The next idea I will put forth here, is called '**Assessing Your Resources**'. This is a little more practical and can involve your skills in a directed way towards your goals. Whatever your situation, unless you are truly disabled beyond the ability to feed and dress yourself, or you are confined to a bed, or completely immobile and non-functional, we all have at least a few powers and capacities as human beings. Can you talk, can you see and hear, can you walk, can you read, can you bring food to your own mouth, can you dress yourself, can you drive a car, can you perform basic tasks? If so, welcome to the human race. So, your first resource is yourself. If you can get a pad of paper and a pen for a few pennies, you can write down what you are in your own thoughts, and what you are capable of that is of value to others, and also anything you own or have access to. Realize

the reason you are doing this: your status as a person without a home, calls for you to 'take-stock' and be fully conscious of exactly what you can or cannot do about the situation. Any skills you have at this point in your life are precious towards your goal. If you are good with plants, this could mean a job in landscaping. If you are able to read books, this can mean you will be able to study a new skill that will result in a job. If you have a car, and maybe you're sleeping in it, as many do, that is also yours to employ by your own hand in the pursuit of a solution. A tent or back-pack, or even a jacket, are other resources. A water-bottle can mean the difference between dehydration and the quenching of your thirst with essential fluids. If you have any money at all, make a note of it, and exactly how you plan to spend it. Do you have friends with a floor or couch you can sleep on? What about relatives? Who are they, and what is your relationship with them like? Do you have goods like furniture or equipment in storage, or at someone else's home? How much is it worth? Could it be sold, even for a little bit of money? What kind of education do you have? Any military service? Even a cat or a dog who walks the streets with you is a resource, because everyone needs company. What about a bus pass? Do you know any people with legal businesses of their own? Can you speak a second language besides English? Are you good at math? Are you a hard worker? Or maybe you are simply a kind and loving person who is a good listener?

Whatever is within your reach and that you value, take stock, write it down, and get familiar with what you are facing and what you have to work with. It's also important to be familiar with community resources such as social service agencies, food banks, soup kitchens, shelters, and so on. But these are available not to extend your stay on the streets, but to supply you with sustenance while you work to END your stay on the streets.

You may find that your resources are pitifully few, but take heart. At least you know what they are. Don't be negative about yourself and sarcastically include invisible friends, experiences on alien space-ships that may or may not be real, or a wart on the end of your nose. It's easy to make jokes, but you are smart enough to know what is real and what is not real at all times. The choice to face what is real may be painful, especially when you are facing challenges. Being realistic also means not including the potential skills to be an astronaut, probably, or a sexy body that drives men mad, or a heroin addiction that is destroying you. Being realistic means estimating what you are, what you can do, today, what you own or have access to, and what is available, to change your circumstances. Because you can use all of these things, as tools and supplies, providence, to move forward toward your goal. This includes your personality and skills. And most importantly that life-force and desire for a home.

We'll call this one, '**A phone, a toilet, and a bed**'. When I was homeless myself around 1980, as I recall probably the worst thing about it was having no easily available toilet. I could find food, I had a van to sleep in at night, but when Nature Calls and there's just no place to go, it's really awful. Obviously it's against the law in most places to relieve yourself outdoors, and it's also embarrassing. I suppose most people in that situation look for a gas station, a portable toilet, a convenience store, or other more-or-less public toilets, when in the city. But this problem shows just what the homeless must face. Society and the government only allow bodily functions to be relieved in ways that

you simply can't afford. But sleep is also a bodily function, and so is eating, bathing, resting, and so on. It's the body that is protected by a home, and the simple need for shelter is the most basic human necessity. So let's talk about what to do in America when this fundamental need is interrupted.

It's not really useful to talk about alternatives to common forms of shelter. A tent might work for a while, you can sleep in your car, and some people find places in the alley, in a card-board box, and so on. If you have little or no money, what can you do? The immediate answer is to find the least expensive, most-ordinary form of shelter you can, do whatever menial labor is available for small amounts of money, and live in less-than-ideal but more-or-less normal circumstances until you can advance. Many motels and hotels in large cities will give you a room for as little as \$20 a day, or perhaps a bit more. Although you will have to get your hands on that \$20 through work in some legal way, staying at a hotel like this is infinitely preferable to living under a bridge. Why? Because you will feel human, you will be able to look for work and return to the same place at night, there may be a phone available, you can shower and use a regular toilet, and other benefits. How hard is it to come up with \$20 every day? I know, it can be very difficult, and for some impossible. But this sort of accommodation can be a goal, if nothing else. We'll talk about work and making money later.

Other people who find themselves without a home will end up sleeping at the home of a friend on a semi-regular basis. If you do this, remember, you are a guest and guests grow tedious after a while. A friend may have a garage, and if this is legal, you can bunk there. You can also sometimes rent a room, even from a new friend, for about the same or less than you would pay for a hotel room. For both of these temporary remedies, never lose sight of the goal, which is a place of your own of some kind that you can sustain. Sleeping in the office of a business you are working for, or where the management is friendly, is also a very dubious arrangement, which should be avoided.

Vans, campers, trucks, and trailers will work for a while, and you're fortunate if you have one of these. But trying to make a home in a storage facility or shed, or in an old train-car, or something like this, can only be considered extremely unlikely to produce positive results. You have to grasp the idea that the path back to normalcy will involve ordinary accommodations, rather than unusual, or unusually inventive extremes. So even though you may have to collect aluminum cans, or recycle plastic, or sell oranges by the side of the road to make the money for your hotel room, to escape the cycle of homelessness, you start with the basics of the civilized world, not by jumping off the high cliff of unreasonable ideas like making your home in a trash can. You may only have enough money to stay in a hotel for a few nights out of the month, or to rent a room, etc. But making this your goal will set you up for other things that can be a vast improvement, such as a regular and better job, regular grooming and bathing, and so on. So, look for obvious and normal answers first. Normalizing your life is the goal, because being without a home is not normal. In some towns you can get assistance for hotel stays, and there are also shelters where you can spend the night. Toilet and bathroom privileges, and the use of a phone to call about jobs, are indispensable in your effort to earn yourself a home. Don't deny yourself these things, by doubting that you can do even that much, or by inventing solutions that are really never going to work. One night off the streets can repair the psychological damage of a month sleeping in the alley or your car, so get busy

and earn a few bucks the usual way, like the rest of humanity, to pay for a clean bed, and you'll be glad you did.

This part is related to the last section, and we'll now talk about **'Employment and Income'**. To be honest, as a writer and journalist, with problems of my own, I have never been a rich man or wealthy. So I can only offer what is common knowledge. The right way to look at your life in American society today, if you don't happen to have a lot of money, is that it is a system of earned privileges. To put it simply, if you get a job serving people hamburgers all day, you earn enough exchange units (money) to buy privileges for yourself, which can be anything from food, to entertainment, and yes, a home. America has a vast selection of extravagant privileges, but we're not talking about earning money to buy a Lear jet. Instead, you want to comprehend your lot in life as an opportunity to earn basic privileges, with the goal of advancing yourself as you go along. So, the simple answer is---get a job. But it's not so simple. If you are on the streets, you may have no bank account, no way to cash checks, no mailing address to send them to, no way to groom yourself properly for a steady job, inappropriate attire for a job, no transportation to get back and forth to a regular job, and so on. This is really the classic conundrum of the homeless. Because when you're really down and out, the job that could save you, is also out of reach.

So what we would talk about here are some simple aspects. First, don't be picky and by all means, take any kind of job you can get that is legal. If someone will let you sweep a sidewalk for a few bucks, or clean a building, or move lumber or trash, or wash cars, or bus tables, and things like this, you are not in a position to turn these jobs down. These are tough jobs, but if you are reasonably healthy, you can do it. If you are disabled, other routes are available and you won't be able to work anyway. But if you can work, make up your mind to do it. Honest labor is good for the soul. The other key point here is to be a good employee, obey the rules, show up on time, and work hard. If at all possible, dress for work appropriately, and never show up for a job if you are filthy, or appear drugged, or look dangerous. Some people will get these types of low-wage jobs, even without a regular home. This is about as tough as it gets, but if you have to go to work at a car wash, while living in your car, it's still better than no job or income at all. The idea again is always that you move up and up and up, so the job like this that you may not enjoy can be considered only temporary.

Collecting aluminum cans, begging or pan-handling, dealing drugs, prostitution, and other ways to make money which are unacceptable to society or simply inefficient, is really defeating yourself. There is a reason that the vast majority of people do things the same way—because it works. I know for a fact that the ranks of the homeless include college educated people, virtuoso musicians and artists, former professionals, and highly intelligent people. So humility in seeking employment is a good standard for what you have to do. In searching for a job, the large daily newspaper in your area will cost you 50 cents, and will have extensive classified and help-wanted ads. If you go by foot, or use a pay-phone to call, or take a bus to the interview, it's still possible to get the job. Janitorial jobs are easy to get, food service jobs, sometimes a security or parking-lot attendant job, jobs such as landscaping or outdoor clean-up, and so on, are very common. Present yourself as worth your pay, and almost any person of normal health and presence of mind can get these jobs.

In the work environment, you are no longer a homeless person (which is just a label anyway). You are an equal stake-holder in the modern work-force, entitled to every consideration that other workers with homes would get. But you have to keep in mind, that your situation may present certain unappealing difficulties. Can the boss call you at home? You have to say no, but you can call him from a pay-phone at a pre-arranged time. A social security number, a bank account, a drivers license, and so on, can be acquired, and every effort should be made to get into the mainstream of normal work requirements. But whatever you lack, let your boss know in private that it is a difficult time for you, and most employers will give you the benefit of the doubt until you can pull things together. Keep your mind on the job, don't get up-set if you don't enjoy it, and learn the simple pleasure that can be found in a good day's work. This type of job is a stepping-stone for you, and if nothing else, you will enjoy what you can buy with the money you earn. Do it for yourself, do it for your future. A job is just a job, and other pleasures from life will present themselves as you become more stable.

Let's talk about '**Public Resources**'. In America today, for many reasons but in part because the homeless have no well-funded advocates in the halls of Congress or with other decision-makers, services for the very poor and those without homes have been reduced. Falling through the cracks is easier than ever, but there are many public and non-profit resources you can take advantage of. If you're going to be poor, you may as well do it right, and learning how to get whatever benefits are available is something that can hold you over. It's true that these programs are complex and difficult to apply for, with many restrictions and requirements. But when times are really tough, a few bucks in food stamps can be a life-saver, so don't be shy about getting in line for your share. If you are an American citizen, it is for people just like you, that these programs are in place. There's no shame in accepting help when you really need it.

The best place to start to learn what is available in your area in terms of direct aid is either at the local library, or at the local social services office. Any library will usually feature brochures and other material on all sorts of aid. Aid is divided and organized by the agencies that provide it; so you will have federal programs, state programs, and local programs. The same is true of the social services offices that you will find in cities like Los Angeles and Chicago; there will be the federal Social Security Administration, and then the local Social Services, usually run by counties. State governments will administer things like unemployment insurance, Medicare, hospitals, clinics, and so on. If you can sit in the public library for a few hours and learn about these programs it will be a potential benefit. Some, but not all, of what's still available includes Food Stamps, aid for new mothers, Medicare, unemployment benefits, disability benefits, traditional social security for those over age 65, college or vocational educational grants, small business loans, public housing aid, veterans benefits, welfare-to-work programs, and more. Local or county services can include counseling for addiction or social problems like domestic violence, legal advice or aid, clinics for problems like AIDS or general medicine, job-search groups, child care or children's issues, public transportation, mental health, and many others. But for each of these services you will find a long line and a long wait. You will also discover that the application and approval process will involve filling out a lot of forms.

The point of all this is for you to get the help you need, you need to help yourself. Welfare should not become a life-style, but in many cases it is needed. Get what you need, and always keep your sights for self-sufficiency and a pleasant and happy life as high as you can for yourself personally. In this way, the free help that is available will not become a crutch that you can never let go of. When applying for aid, papers, documents, proof of income, proof of citizenship, birth-certificates, and many other details, may be required. Again, the chronically homeless face the Catch-22 that these legal papers may simply not be available. They may have been destroyed, lost, or never acquired in the first place. What to do? The best plan is to work with an intake counselor employed by the government agencies involved to see what can be done in your case. In-take workers may have access to records that you don't, even if you've been on the streets for years. Always be honest in your dealings with such agencies, and realize that if you plan to cheat to get help you will probably be caught and your situation will be much worse.

Don't give up on public resources and aid. It can make a huge difference, especially when children are involved. Fill out the papers, stand in line, arrange to pick up what is offered, be patient, work through the system, and you may find your situation improved considerably.

Here's a word on the subject of '**Low-wage jobs and the hope of a better future**'. A job for a homeless person is the lifeline to needed shelter. But with so many obstacles, and things like depression and bitterness, a job flipping hamburgers or sweeping floors can seem more like defeat than victory. It's also true that in modern times, it's almost impossible to live on a minimum wage income, even with working many long hours. So, how can you feel good about the low-wage job you need? Let me offer some ideas and insights about this situation that can cheer you up when you're out there looking for work and all you can find is a service-industry job.

For myself, I am a 45-year old father, husband and writer. I was homeless in 1980, and I also suffered from certain kinds of depression and mental illness, as well as abuse. From that time until today, I have worked at jobs such as bagging groceries, night-watch security, janitorial, telemarketing, factory-work, clerk and cashier, stock-boy, newspaper delivery, and other minimum wage positions. And I was glad to have them. My more successful times of employment have included jobs writing videos and films, work as a newspaper reporter and magazine or newspaper editor, work writing and producing videos, writing children's books and animated cartoons, freelance work for magazines and websites, work as a research assistant, and even work writing feature screenplays. Obviously, I enjoy writing and creating media, I enjoy higher rates of pay, and I enjoy being appreciated for my work. The point here is that the low-wage jobs are back-up, a means to an end, not a dead-end you will be stuck in forever. Invent a future for yourself you really want and would enjoy, and hold it in your heart like a warm flame to comfort you when the low-wage job seems unbearable.

America is a land of opportunity, even today with so many economic pressures. Ask yourself: what do I want out of life? What would be an ideal job or source of income? Everyone would love to be fabulously wealthy, but what is it you really enjoy, what would you do with that wealth if you had it? If you are a musician, would you enjoy

creating music, making recordings, and selling them or attracting a following of loyal fans? For only small amounts of money to buy some basic computer equipment, things like this are possible in today's world for almost anyone. Maybe you would like to study Nature, and learn about the wilds in the mountains, or animals. A low-wage job that provides you with even very basic needs can also allow you to study fantastic books on these subjects at the library to your heart's content. Depending on where you live, you may find time and a means to go hiking, or camping. Or, you want to fall in love with the right man or woman, have kids and enjoy raising a family. The low-wage job doesn't mean romance will never find you, and getting married will mean two incomes instead of one, and the comfort of a partner in life. Who would marry a homeless person without any kind of job at all? You want to make films? Work a year and earn enough for some basic and inexpensive video equipment, dig up a used computer you can do editing on, and you are suddenly equal to Steven Spielberg. Many very successful artists have started out in just this way. Maybe you want to be an athlete, a great runner or weight-lifter. You can jog all the way to your low-wage job, jog home again and lift weights in the privacy of your hotel room. The possibilities for a happy life for even a low-wage worker are only limited by your portrait of what is possible for you to enjoy.

The idea here is that you can learn that 'less is more', find contentment in myriad pleasant diversions, and see your low-wage job as a temporary stage on the road to better things. The ladder of success may include more education, such as you might need to get a real estate broker's license. Or you may take classes to learn to be a nurse's assistant. Or classes to get credentials so you can teach kids, or work at a day-care center. Ambition is a healthy thing, and there's never any shame in seeking a better life for yourself.

If you are homeless, you may have lost hope. Your mind and emotions may be a mess, you feel everything is against you, you feel lost and worthless to even yourself. A job flipping hamburgers or delivering newspapers can seem like a prison sentence, especially for creative and intelligent people. Set yourself the task of visualizing your own happy future, with the low-wage job as a mere stepping-stone. You can also learn to profit spiritually from simple hard work. The truth is that the one who serves hamburgers, serves Mankind. The waitress and the clerk, the janitor, the security guard, are servants to society, and it is no small thing to contribute to your community in these ways. The richest man in the world also expects a hamburger once in a while, and there you are to hand it to him. So remember as you make up your mind to escape homelessness by seeking a low-wage job, that simple joys and pleasures are all around, and your future can be whatever you decide to make it. Then when you are the wealthy man ordering a hamburger, you'll think differently about the guy behind the counter.

This section is called, '**Why You Have To Avoid Crime**'. If you don't already know the answer to this question, then there's probably not much I can say to convince you that crime is not a way out of poverty or homelessness. But it is of critical importance to your well-being that you are well-aware of the simple and easy-to-understand laws of the land. Sometimes homeless people become so desperate that they figure they would rather be in jail than on the streets. Some people call this 'three hot's and a cot', or three hot meals a day and a bed to rest on. The fact that you are in jail, deprived of the freedom and simple mobility you need to even begin to escape homelessness, might seem of lesser importance when you're really hungry. You should

also consider that when you rob a store, hold some one up on the street for money, steal things you intend to sell, or other crimes, you are now no longer simply poor---you are a criminal. The state will regard you as a criminal with a criminal record, and in your heart, you will have no choice but to agree. This can mean loss of privileges such as the right to vote, a driver's license, and so on. Future employers will ask if you have ever been convicted of a crime. And in many parts of the country, so-called Three-Strikes laws will send you into major, long-term institutional confinement for conviction of just three serious crimes, even if you are only stealing a bicycle for your third-strike. It is true, that in many parts of the world, governments and cities create laws that make it a crime to be poor, because the things you need to obey all laws cost more money than you may have. But at the same time, you know inside that you are a good person and not a criminal. So there can be no excuse for crossing that line, and falling into crime. Especially when you consider all it will cost you in your quest for a home and a job.

What kind of crimes are most common among the homeless? Petty theft, violence, prostitution, drug dealing, and possibly disorderly conduct are the areas you should be careful about. Any of these things are very ordinary and easy mistakes to make, so don't think of yourself as an evil monster if you have fallen in this way. It's worse for you to really feel you are a 'bad person', or 'evil', than it is to forgive yourself, admit you made mistakes, and correct your behavior. And it's easier, too. Something like petty theft, stealing a candy bar, or stealing ten dollars from an open cash box, or stealing a pizza, may seem easy. But in the eyes of the law, even seemingly small offenses are taken quite seriously, and if you're caught and prosecuted, the results are the same. And stealing a slice of pizza can count as a strike in a Three-Strikes state—landing you in long-term confinement. You're hungry and you're broke, sure. But in America today it is literally true that we have more inexpensive food here than probably anywhere else in the world. A person of normal health can probably survive on a hamburger a day that would cost about 50 cents, which you could earn in a normal way. And of course free food is available if you seek it out. So the judge in your petty theft case is not going to be very sympathetic. By making up your mind that this is a boundary you will not cross, you save yourself enormous levels of heartache.

Violence falls into the same category. The streets are rough, and many people, especially gangs, have weapons and are willing to use them. Self-defense is not always easily determined as a reason to attack a person. Your best plan is to simply avoid all such situations, including contact or association with people who have or use weapons such as knives or guns. This is why crime becomes a terrible cycle downward. Non-violence is the only sane philosophy you can adopt during your time on the streets, if for no other reason than that as a homeless person you are the first to be accused of a crime, the first to be thrown in jail, and the last to be excused because of various mitigating circumstances. If a policeman orders you to stop, and you reach in your coat for a pen to write him a note because you are deaf, he may still shoot you dead, assuming you were reaching for a weapon. The same thing might not happen to a rich businessman whose car has broken down. For all other circumstances, if you are prone to attack other people, or act out your anxiety in ways that involve hurting people, then whatever happens to you is your own fault. No society will tolerate you, and you will eventually end up controlled and confined, if only to protect normal people from your lack of self-awareness and

normal compassion for others. Most people learn these things in Kindergarten. Keep your hands to yourself and everyone will be glad.

Prostitution and drug-dealing also seem like an easy way out of the trap of poverty. Besides making money, they seem pleasurable and appealing. But once again, the negative aspects are not always revealed until it's too late. Disease among sex-industry workers is rampant. You can be mis-treated, beaten or even killed by your customers. Some sex-workers from over-seas are even enslaved to cruel and brutal pimps. You have to deal with the criminal world every day, and you're still breaking the law and you can end up in jail with a criminal record. Drug-dealers are usually associated with vicious and violent gangs. Penalties are very stiff for dealing drugs, and you will also probably become an addict yourself. With both of these crimes, the answer for the homeless person with any sense is that it's just not worth it. What good is it to you to make a few hundred bucks dealing drugs on the streets if you have to risk your life and get shot or knifed by a member of a rival gang? Any so-called 'business' where you are breaking the law is not a business at all, and a big part of the business of life is learning where society's boundaries are in terms of earning privileges.

On the subject of 'disorderly conduct' laws, such as laws that prohibit sleeping on the streets, or camping in the park, or being drunk in public, it may seem true that these rules are sometimes illogical in terms of the simple survival needs of the poor. Many times businesses and shop keepers in cities will work for laws that make homelessness or begging a crime, just so their own customers will not be bothered with people asking for money. And no one wants a homeless man sleeping on his door-step when he comes home, or when he opens his business for the day. Whether you agree with these rules or not is not the question, and once again you will either obey them, or get caught and in some way controlled for whatever violations you are deemed guilty of.

The point of all this is that as a homeless person, whether you are aware of it or not, it is critical for your own good that you make a conscious and determined choice to avoid all crime. This goes without saying. You are in a diminished and vulnerable role in society. You are weak, you have basic needs that are un-met, and your judgment may not be so good. With all of this, take my advice and make up your mind now to remain a law-abiding citizen. Even if you become wealthy in the future, this will still be a solid choice.

Okay. Do we have a home yet? No? Let's talk now about '**Grooming**'. This topic is so obvious and so simple I will be brief. Two simple facts cannot be denied. First, human beings are animals or creatures, specifically, mammals. As such, we have oils and fluids we secrete, we have hair that gets dirty, we need to eliminate our bowels and urine, and we have toe-nails, skin, and all the rest. So, without regular care, we can get smelly or filthy-looking, etc. The other simple fact that cannot be denied is that other human beings, our neighbors, in general find it unpleasant to deal with or be around people who do not groom properly to some extent. The obvious problem for the homeless person is that taking care of these things is difficult without access to showers, toilets, bath, clean clothes, grooming supplies, etc. If you are homeless, and you neglect grooming, Undeniable Fact Number Two comes into play and you will be shunned, avoided, and you won't get a job. What to do? First, like other hard facts about homelessness, realize

that you are not helpless, and that you can take care of this simple fact-of-life relatively easily, and also that it is important. If you are mentally ill and have lost the ability to be concerned with grooming, that is another question. But take a hard look at the real world and realize---you will never escape homelessness and joblessness if you are a smelly, stinky, ugly-looking mess when dealing with other people, especially looking for a job. Get a grip on this. If you want a job, your employer will quickly let you go if you smell bad. Sorry, just the facts. Now, when I was homeless myself, I found I could take semi-regular showers at the local YMCA. Charges, membership or requirements may be minimal at places like this. You can also go into a gas-station rest-room, or a convenience store rest-room, or a public facility of some kind, and without up-setting anyone, you can take a 'sponge-bath' using the water from the sink. Most of these places even have soap, and maybe paper-towels. Get your hands on a plastic comb or hair-brush for 50 cents, and don't neglect a cheap tooth-brush. Even if you only do this every couple of days, the difference is tremendous and you will once again feel like a human being. By all means, if you are going on a job interview, even if you have no home, take this simple step or you will probably not get the job. If your clothes are filthy and grungy or dirty after weeks on the road, everyone knows that nice, fresh, clean clothes are almost always available at the Goodwill or other thrift store, for just pennies. Some churches and non-profit groups will even give away clean clothes for free. What about a hair-cut? With some skill and patience and a pair of sharp scissors (also from a thrift store), you can trim away the really bad-looking hair yourself, or have a friend do it, until you can afford \$10 for a decent cut at a real barber-shop or salon. Long hair is not too bad if you keep it clean, pulled back in a pony-tail, etc. If you show up for a job as a parking-lot attendant dressed in dirty combat fatigues, open-toed sandals, with a day-glow orange rock-and-roll T-shirt and a dusty cowboy-hat with feathers, the employer may have a slight issue with it. So think about what's appropriate, and don't be so arrogant as to think you don't need to conform. The point here is clear: this is a simple issue, it's difficult sometimes but not impossible to take care of, and it makes all the difference in the world. You want a home, you want to get off the streets, deal with it. Sure, you're a rebel. But even rebels smell after two weeks on the road. Take a bath and dress right for job interviews and you'll be glad you did.

This next part is maybe the toughest topic I'll deal with in this presentation, so we'll call this part, '**Beyond Mental Illness**'. If you're mentally ill and you know it, clap your hands, right? Let me just say, this is a tough area of human experience, and I have a great deal of sympathy with those who through abuse, or medical problems, are faced with the very real and painful situation of dealing with life in the capacity of a mind that simply has mal-functioned. But, there is hope, more hope and understanding and real scientific knowledge today than at any point in human history. If I told you that as a young man, I faced my own psychosis, schizophrenia and depression, would you believe me? Do you find that shocking? The homeless face an array of circumstantial facts that make depression and gloom, poor judgment and a warped view of reality much more likely. Alienation from society, the feeling of being left out at the Big Party of Life, the cold looks and hurtful comments, the deprivation, lack of sleep, fatigue, all these things,

are not good for your frame of mind on the streets. Drugs and alcohol just make matters worse. So, of course, it's not uncommon at all to find the ranks of America's homeless population including a high percentage of the mentally ill. I am not a psychologist, but as someone who has faced these things, let me offer some realistic ways of coping, and getting over it.

For one thing, if you feel you have a problem, and you are aware enough of reality to recognize it, ask yourself, just how crazy am I? The first step to recovery from mental illness is to realize you have a problem. This may or may not call for a professional, medical diagnosis. Do you hear voices? Do you find you are bitter and full of fear? Does the world seem like an impossible, dark, confusing and frightening place where everything is against you? Do you misinterpret reality to the degree that you feel aliens are sending you secret messages? Are you so sad all the time that you can hardly function? Does your anger overwhelm you to the point that you can't contain it? Are you afraid of simple things that no one else fears?

So, okay, take a look, maybe it's not that bad. The point here is that you should know that many people can be mentally ill to the degree that they simply cannot care for themselves at all, and if that is you, I have to admit I can't help you here. But if you have enough of your wits to make a realistic self-evaluation, you may find that life has simply taken its toll and your mind is a mess. But you're still able to talk and speak with others in a reasonable way, you can still feed yourself, you can still read, you can still perform simple tasks, you can still control yourself to the degree that you remain harmless to others, maybe you can even work and hold a job. Understand from the outset that you are responsible for your actions no matter how sick you are. Non-violence is an essential understanding in your recovery. Grasp it and hold onto it. Make a real effort to stay positive, because it's a fact of life that the mind can easily collapse into extremely negative feelings and views if you don't grab hold of some simple positive truths. This is not easy. A lot of people use 'positive affirmations', which is simply a matter of finding positive thoughts and things you can say out-loud to yourself. An example would be, 'Life is good in my neighborhood and I am doing all I should.' Or a classic like, 'Every day in every way I am getting better and better.' You can even make these up for yourself, or find a good book on positive affirmations, of which there are many (again at the public library). I can attest to the fact that positive affirmations can have a tremendous positive effect. It's a simple thing you can do in a real way to help yourself today.

Prayer and spirituality are also very helpful, and you may find great comfort in a church group of some kind. But remember that Almighty God can sometimes be overwhelming if our minds are weak, and if you find your spirituality is getting out of control with wild ideas and negativity, you need to back away and look for something less demanding. Don't worry, God will be glad you did. Sadly, even God cannot help in some situations, because there is no 'magic bullet' or simple solution, and miracles are rare at best. But 'perdition', described by the ancients as a state of evil humanity in which you are dangerous, opposed to all that is good and healthy, raging at the Universe and its Source, un-cooperative with all attempts to help you, resistant to positive change even in simple things, maybe violent, or seeking mysterious ideas and answers that reek of wicked non-reality---this is not necessary for you or anyone. 'Perdition' is both mental illness and 'soul sickness'---and you should never doubt that such a fate awaits people who choose it. So—don't choose it. What could be easier?

No one chooses to be sick or mentally ill, and if you find this is true of your journey as a homeless person, the other important decision you need to make is to get solid, professional help. In most communities in America today, the mentally ill who are wise enough to realize they need help can usually find public clinics, doctors, and programs that will be of real assistance. Remember, that in today's world, serious medications are available that are genuine remedies for the biological facts about your brain that are causing you pain or distress. This was not true in ages past for the mentally ill of yesterday, so you can be grateful for that. The truth that many medical professionals know, is that mental illness is something you can cope with, something you can learn to deal with in a realistic way, something you can recover from, and something that many people with professional lives and families and homes of their own deal with every day. Medication can significantly reduce the symptoms of psychosis and even schizophrenia and provide you the comfort you need just to get on with life. Often even the poor can get appropriate medications for free or at low-cost, because another important truth is that society in general would greatly prefer that you or I or anyone else are not seriously mentally ill at all, but are offered needed help in order to make community in general more productive and pleasant for everyone.

I don't know or pretend to know the answers to the difficulties of human consciousness. I have my own approach, which is to stay positive, seeking peace and healing, and accept my suffering and anxiety as a simple fact of life. I don't want to discuss psychology. I want to talk about how to deal with anxiety and delusion on the streets. First lesson is non-violence. Grasp it, it's an essential survival philosophy and it works. Second lesson, recognize you have a problem and get appropriate help and medication. Third lesson, stay positive. The world around us is full of love and gifts and simple pleasures for almost anyone. Other lessons will come, and if you're fortunate you will learn that time can heal many of the wounds of abuse, bio-chemical trouble, poor choices, and poor reasoning. If you're on the streets, and you think you're nuts, the world can seem awfully frightening. Realize within yourself that you can get beyond it. It is possible. Many others including myself have done it. Sure, you're a rebel and you've been to the mountain-top and met the One who lives there and he told you secrets. Unfortunately, that journey may have cost you more in your personal life than you maybe thought it would. Moving beyond mental illness for the street-person or the homeless person, means saying good-bye to those things, delusions we may be fond of or Great Truths that leave us high and dry, and getting real about real life. Until you do, your life will be difficult.

Among America's homeless population, a very high percentage are women with children. So I am calling this lesson, '**Children, Partners and Dependents**'. Elsewhere in the wild world, children with no support can run free in the streets, and are victimized by many criminal plots, such as labor-slavery, the illicit sex industry, kidnapping, and other types of exploitation. Sometimes in places like Central America, homeless children are routinely rounded up and shipped off to jail for no other reason than that they are homeless and without money. Obviously, this is un-just and cruel. But here in America, the situation is different and more complex. Despite America's loftier values and resources, many men who father children are frequently un-willing or un-able to support them. They abandon their wives, who are stuck with the unbearable burden of raising

little ones with no support at all. As with other homeless people, an illness, the loss of a job, a missed rent payment, a family break-up, a legal problem or accusation, and other problems, can result in a woman with children turning to the streets, with her kids in tow. A woman can end up living in her car, or with friends, or at shelters, and I have even seen women with children who are homeless trying to live in a river-bed, and sending their little ones to school daily from their camp in that situation. The results are devastating, both for the women, but especially also in young lives where stability, basic needs, and social acceptance are critical for their development. So, what are the most important things to be aware of if you find yourself in this situation? Once again, a few simple and key points to observe as you navigate these waters will help you avoid more treacherous events that could make things even worse. First, everything else I've already said about overcoming homelessness would apply. Make up your mind you can change things. Take stock and look at your resources realistically. Normalize your situation as much as possible with normal accommodations such as cheap hotels or staying with friends. Make up your mind to get a job and realize this can happen for you and won't be that bad. Take advantage of public aid and resources, and go the distance with public agencies to get help. Avoid crime and criminal situations. Pay close attention to the needs of grooming. Take a solid look at mental health issues and get the help you need to move beyond it. But beyond this, now we have to look at the special needs of your kids. Clearly, the little ones come first. This is the great tradition of motherhood (and fatherhood, too) throughout history and around the world. If you're all hungry, and there's not enough to go around, the kids eat first. The same applies to forms of shelter, money, school, clothes, or any resource. You are stronger and more developed and you will survive on less, but the little ones depend on you for everything. Basic survival needs come first; food, water, shelter, clothing, comfort. At the same time, the little ones need to be protected from any violence or danger, including angry spouses. If you are in your car, the kids need to be in a car seat, or you'll definitely get a ticket and a fine. You can't keep them out of school indefinitely, and you can't avoid the necessity of basic medical care for bronchitis, colds and flu, diaper rash, croup, and other needs. The emergency room at your local hospital by law is required to provide medical care in threatening situations, so if you neglect to take your sick child to the hospital, you can be held accountable if they become seriously ill. There are many things such as this you need to know about, but being on the streets with children means that your situation is doubly dangerous and twice as urgent. It may not be your fault, but it is now your responsibility. In the situation where the father is also homeless, you can at least be grateful you will have help changing things. But if he is drunk or abusive or bringing in criminal elements, there is no shame in leaving him, filing for divorce, getting a restraining order, or whatever else is needed to protect the kids and give them the best possible shot at a decent and satisfying life. Nothing is worse than getting involved in a long court battle over your kids with an angry former spouse, and then ending up on the streets with a lawsuit hanging over you. Most states in America have Child Protective Services of some kind. But beware. These agencies can be authorized to separate you from your children if they feel it is clearly in the best interests of the young ones. To avoid this, you're simply going to have to work a little harder, follow all the rules a little more carefully, and recover from the problems that left you without a home more quickly. Aid for young mothers is available, including Food Stamps, cash aid for young women with toddlers, and even low-cost day-care such as

Head Start. What about a grand-mother, a sister, an aunt, or even a kindly lady from church? Can any of them take the kids for a while as you pull things together? Women's shelters that provide temporary housing only for women and children are also common. Never leave your kids with strangers, and of course any exploitation or endangerment on your part will result in legal action against you. In America, kids are sacred. Society has no stricter laws and rules than those regarding the very young. If you find yourself homeless, society will assume it is your own fault, and that perhaps the kids are better off in another situation. Nothing could be sadder and more worrisome for a parent. Families who are homeless sometimes find themselves moving from hotel to hotel, or living in a camper; but with both parents present, your status with society improves. At the same time, costs are greater and things are more complex. Face it. The situation of kids on the streets is intolerable. Every reasonable effort needs to be made on your part, including all of the above. And it's not easy, but take heart. Many organizations are out there, especially non-profit, faith-based and even state-run groups, who can and will help. Your job now is protector and provider, just as it was when the kids were born and you had a home. To turn things around, don't give up, don't blame yourself, avoid really foolish mistakes, seek and find the help you need, and keep faith with the little ones who depend on you. If this means you have to be separated, which may be only for a time, consider that it really is possible that this is best. Despite appearances and errors, the government really does want the kids to have a normal life. And remember, the love you bestow on them will never be forgotten or wasted.

In general, like many things you might attempt in life or any kind of goal, getting organized and making your effort to escape homelessness a routine, will greatly improve your chances of success and your efficiency. So, we'll call this part, **'Setting Daily Goals and Getting Organized'**. How can you really talk about getting organized, when a person is homeless, living on the streets, maybe without any money at all or living in horrible conditions? The answer is not that a homeless person trying to find a job and a place to live can be compared to an efficient businessman, or a professional in some capacity like a teacher or a doctor who must be highly organized, but rather that any goal is facilitated by breaking it down into its components, taking things in a step-by-step way, and being fully in control of all your powers to achieve what you are trying to do. This goes back to the idea of 'making up your mind to succeed'. Not all of this is pure will-power. You also need to apply yourself in a directed way to daily tasks that move you slowly, or maybe not so slowly, towards a home. If you don't take action, nothing will happen. So, what specific actions will you take? Let's look at a few simple, daily things you can and must do to overcome your situation if you are homeless. These are offered with the understanding that the homeless face myriad other difficulties, like finding food and water, moving from place to place, and so on. But you can literally stand by the side of the road with a cardboard sign begging for food or spare change for 20 years, so clearly you need to take action to change things, or things won't change.

So, there you are, waking up one morning to the hard cold fact that you are homeless. You spent the night in your favorite hiding spot beneath a freeway overpass, and you're tired, hungry, sad and lonely. How do you spend the day?

Every day you can, you should find some way to provide yourself with at least a minimum of proper grooming. So, as I said before, you make your way to a public toilet somewhere, and take a 'sponge-bath, brush your teeth, comb your hair, use the facilities. This goes for kids you may be responsible for too.

You've made up your mind to end your homelessness. So now you know you need a job. Can you get a local newspaper and look in the classified want-ads? This is easy, you can do it for free at the library, and you will usually find a lot of job possibilities. This is something you can do every day.

As a result of this, you now can move away from being 'just a bum', into being a 'job-seeker', at least in your self-image. This is a step up. So, again, another daily task can be to call or contact potential employers, go to job interviews, until you are employed. Every day you are able, keep up this behavior, and a job will find you.

Another daily, routine task, is to make some attempt to secure normal housing. Check out hotel and motel prices, and find the lowest in your area. Talk to people or friends who may have rooms for rent. Take advantage of shelters and safe-houses, or offers of assistance. Seek them out and do what it takes. Be aware of rental rates for the kind of place you would really like. Applied effort will result in more comfortable circumstances.

Again, these are not methods of survival on the streets. These are methods of getting OFF the streets. Finding food, places to rest, staying out of trouble and so on are all still your responsibility. So of course a good deal of time will go into these needed things.

One method of getting off the streets you may have over-looked is what people in other areas of life call 'networking'. Show up clean and sober at church groups, non-profit volunteer groups, job seeker groups, groups that may have an interest in something you find enjoyable, like music, outdoor clean-up's, veterans groups or even political causes. 'Networking' does not really include going to night-clubs for a good time or things like cock-fights or street-racing. What you want here is to be involved in positive groups of any kind that will let you make friends and contacts who may be able to help you, with a job, a room for rent, resources, etc. So use your time to try to find groups where you fit in, and show up for meetings and activities.

If you are distressed and have a lot of anxiety, another thing you can do every day starting right now, is to use the technique of positive affirmation I mentioned. Other things, like breathing techniques, yoga, reading poetry, or simple exercise, will also improve your outlook and can really be effective. Many of these are easy to learn, take very little time or effort, and offer a sort of hand-hold on your own best interests which belong to only you. So make it a daily routine to tend to your emotions and feelings this way, to stay positive.

Other things: spend time each week making sure you have clean, fresh clothing. Spend time each week learning about and applying for public aid or assistance programs. Spend time each week with a cheap pad of paper and a pen, making plans to get out of homelessness and taking stock of resources. Spend time each week finding essential medical care if you have injuries or an illness (don't let these go). Spend time each week staying in contact with loved ones, friends, supporters or supportive relatives in some way (you can do this by phone or mail or sometimes get free Internet access at your local library to use public e-mail).

No doubt you will have your own approach and priorities. Don't get distracted with pointless efforts that may seem valuable, but are really dead ends. If you find yourself trying to hitch-hike, ask yourself: where am I going and how will anything be different elsewhere? Stay on task, stay goal-oriented, and eventually, just like me, you'll be a 'formerly homeless person', sitting in a nice apartment with something nice to eat, a warm bath and a clean bed. Making your daily activities and routines oriented to your task will be a big help.

As we end this series of lessons, I just want to mention what you can think about when regarding success, and how you will know when you are finally beyond homelessness. So I will call this part, **'Success means a place to live and being a part of it all'**. One thing to realize is that almost anyone can be in danger of homelessness. Even when we have a job, or a family and some kind of home, many Americans are only a few paychecks away from finding themselves on the streets. A rich man may go mad, and wander off to live on the streets for years. So, there are no guarantees. Also, success means different things to different people. If you must have a big house, a fancy car, lots of money and a sexy wife to consider yourself successful, you may have to wait a bit. Success can mean a few nights in a hotel, or a low-wage job. Success can mean maintaining meaningful and loving relationships as you recover from your hardships. For most people, among the working class, those basic essentials that include an apartment, an income, and loving relationships, are really never so far off. Self-reliance is something you can be proud of, but asking for help when you're really down is no shame. You are shamed when you do what is purposefully wrongful towards others, when you resist all attempts by decent people to help you, and when you commit crimes, but not necessarily when you simply fail to meet goals. Another way to measure success is your own willingness to scale back your expectations and demands from life, such that a studio apartment or one-room flat doesn't seem so bad at all, and such that low-wage jobs don't drive you to extremes of self-pity. In other words, you can simplify your life and still find great happiness. Society as a whole offers us endless pleasures and material possessions, but you're better than all that, right? In a way, the issues of homelessness are central to the issues of community as a whole. Being a part of the larger community is another way to measure success. You don't have to be the leader or policy-maker for the community you live in to be happy, but a great deal of sadness results when people exclude themselves from the human family, either by circumstance or choice. Often, the human family neglects some members to the degree that they no longer feel human, or loved and valued at all. This is a sad state of affairs, but by reaching a little higher, making the effort and getting a job and a place to live, the gap is bridged and the community will welcome you back. Why? Because we're all happier when the ranks of the homeless are smaller. Again, society WANTS you to succeed. So as you journey into a real home of some kind, seek out your role in the bigger picture with a sense of accomplishment. It's no small thing you have done, and you've learned a lot about yourself and the dangers of the wicked world. Remember, that pleasures, privileges and position can still be ahead. In the same way that you gathered your personal strength and forces to move beyond homelessness, you can also move beyond that low-wage job, beyond mental illness and personal problems, beyond hopelessness, and like everyone else, wait here on the shores

of Planet Earth for a finer day for all. What is success? It's a place to live! Welcome home!

This concludes our presentation of '12 Ways To Overcome Personal Homelessness', from Kuma's Kitchen and author Julian Phillips. This material is offered as guidance and advice for the person in a situation of homelessness. Share this with homeless friends or people you know working to solve homelessness in various organizations. All material is protected as intellectual property. Thank you for taking the time to review this writing, and by all means, be blessed in your application of its contents.

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