

# Prideful panhandler existing in nation's capital

**United Press International**  
WASHINGTON — Noble Eaton lingers over his morning drink and draws leisurely on a cigarette before departing for work.

He walks at a sluggish pace, asking government workers, executives and service employees the same question:

"Can you spare a dollar? A little change?"

He strives for a sincere, polite tone, then mutters obscenities at those who turn him down.

But Eaton insists he prefers panhandling to shelters.

"If you're on that street and you can't make a dollar, you're not a man anymore," he says. "If all you can think about is run-

ning to a shelter, you ain't nowhere. You done gave up.

"If you're sick, then you belong in a shelter. But if you're street people, you can make it on the street. There is no reason you can't ask for a quarter or a dollar."

Eaton has lived on the streets of Washington for more than 20 years. He sleeps in the city's condemned buildings, often migrating to the roof to avoid conflict with the police. During the summer, he sleeps outdoors, with a slab of cardboard and sheets of newspaper for bedding.

Eaton can't remember his age or the last time he worked. He

says he would like to get a job in an auto shop, repairing transmissions, but views it as a remote possibility. His taut, weather-beaten complexion, shoulder-length gray hair and full beard would make any employer flinch.

"How am I going to look for a job, scroungy and dirty as I am? Who is going to hire me? I'll walk on the job, and they'll say, 'Get the hell out of here!'"

He often speaks with disdain of his sponsors — the 9 a.m.-to-5 p.m. set.

"I might be hungry. I might be destitute. But I feel like I've

got something they ain't got. They have to go to work, and I don't have to do a damn thing I don't want to.

"Now if somebody asked me to do something, I'll do it. But they can't demand it, and I ain't worried about no paycheck either."

Eaton puts his hands in his tattered jacket and stares straight ahead with glazed eyes.

"Sometimes I walk out and think my thoughts out. I say, 'Noble, what the hell are you doing to yourself? What the hell is the matter with you?'"

"I can't get attached to anybody. I can't get a reason in my life. I want a reason. I want

something real, man, something to work for. What do I have to work for? The next bottle?"

Eaton began drinking heavily when he entered the service.

"I would stop drinking if I had a position where I can prove myself. I can read blue prints, run machinery — the whole works. If I can get that, the booze is gone."

Eaton drinks three to five pints of alcohol a day. He rarely eats a complete meal.

"I don't eat very often. When I do eat, I enjoy every bit of it. People give me money to eat. You know what I do with it? I drink."

When Eaton decides to eat, he goes to a fast food restaurant

where the workers know his first name. The attendant

the night's leftovers for his dant's concern with social difference.

"They want to keep me on the street with nothing. I don't like who is doing it, society or anything. I do the best I can. I'm a pretty good bum. It come a professional. Society made me a professional — until I get a break."

Eaton pauses and then up his philosophy.

"Make it now and the hell tomorrow. You don't know you're going to wake up tomorrow. And who is going to you?"

## Government looking for solutions

# Number of homeless growing

**United Press International**  
An ever-growing army of homeless people has sent gov-

ernment and private agencies scrambling for solutions.

The answers range from the beneficent to the bizarre and seem to have one thing in common, they usually don't work.

In St. Louis, an enthusiastic philanthropist suggested the homeless be given the abandoned buildings in Times

Beach, Mo., where the government is buying the town because of dioxin contamination and flood damage.

A collective howl prompted the same man to drop the idea and later propose instead a homeless trailer park.

One homeless family was handed a one-way bus ticket by welfare officials in Fresno County, Calif., and told to go to Tucson, Ariz. The gesture raised a storm of protest in Tucson, where officials belligerently complained the desert city was becoming a mecca for the indigent.

There is no question as to the magnitude of the problem.

A United Press International survey supports the contention that there may be as many as 2 million homeless people in the United States. In New York City alone five times more people live in shelters than there were in shelters in the Depression year of 1933.

A similar survey just released by Psychology Today magazine agreed with the 2 million figure and said one-third to one-half of the homeless may be former mental patients.

But there can be no underestimating the complexity of the problem.

"If somebody asked me to do something, I'll do it," Nobel Eaton, a homeless person in Washington D.C. says. "But they can't demand it, and I ain't worried about no paycheck either."

"I can't get attached to anybody. I can't get a reason in my life. I want a reason. I want something real, man, something to work for."

Still, labor statistics show the unemployment ranks shrinking. If so, why are the numbers of homeless increasing? And why do so many efforts to ease the crisis of permanent housing seem a day late and a dollar short?

Tom Williams, 45, a Volunteer of America employee in Sacramento, Calif., offers one answer.

"I came from out of state and I haven't had steady employment for 10 months, except a few days here and there," he said.

"It's mainly a job problem. They've been looking so long and couldn't find anything that they just don't look anymore. What they do find is for two or three days at a time. They'll earn \$3.25 an hour and you can't find shelter for that."

Williams, who worked in the construction industry for seven years in Texas, should know. He used to be homeless himself.

Homeless people "are unemployed and they can't afford housing," Williams said.

"The shelter serves a purpose. It would be nice if more offered — but it does keep rain off everybody's head and cold off their backs."

Research Atlanta, a non-profit organization that studies community problems, found that less people to be mentally ill, particularly those released from mental hospitals; drug abusers, especially alcoholics; individuals unemployed due to short-term economic conditions or lack of job needed by a modern economy; ex-convicts, and victims of personal adversity such as illness or accident.

The Psychology Today survey found that in 1955 there were 550,000 patients in state mental hospitals compared to 125,000 today and many of those released during the two decades are homeless.

And the Atlanta study concluded that the stereotype of Skid Row wino or bum role describes the homeless, a creasing numbers of young people, and the mentally disabled and economically placed enter the population.

To add to the problem, ranks of the nation's indigent are getting younger — including perhaps as many as 20,000 people under 18 in New York.

"Their needs are massive: medical, dental, legal, educational, psychological," said Bernard Poggiolo, head of the Youth Services Unit out of the midtown bus terminal in New York.

"Frankly, they need something," he said. "This problem didn't develop overnight but getting worse. Sometimes very disheartening."



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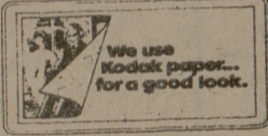
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